

Initial Report to the NEC on Stop the Draft Week, by Lew J., 12-12-67

This initial report generalized primarily from the New York Stop the Draft Week experience. New York often sets the example for other areas of the country and certain lines of action and their effects have become clear here. A more rounded or qualified report may be required once reports from all the areas have been received.

Stop the Draft Week was the first activity of an emerging broadened student coalition. Tactical errors and political misjudgements were made, but on the whole the experience was a positive one. If the week is to be a positive experience for the entire movement, however, several lessons must be absorbed. Otherwise the actions can have the effect of exasperating already existing strains in the antiwar coalition, since the week of activity contained negative aspects.

We proposed to the New York Stop the Draft Week committee that the purpose of the demonstration should be to talk to the draftees about the war, the antiwar movement, and their rights as citizens, and that the main themes should be oppose the draft, demand the release of all draftees, and talk to those who were being drafted.

While our slogan, "free all draftees," and the idea of talking to the draftees were accepted, our central proposals were not. Instead, this predominantly youth coalition decided to try "to close the induction center." Their plans revolved around Oakland inspired "mobile tactics" to tie up Whitehall or, if that failed, to tie up traffic and otherwise disrupt the normal functioning of the city in the surrounding area.

By projecting the action in that way the demonstration proclaimed itself to be "illegal" and the city was given the justification to hamper the demonstration with thousands of cops. With an unrealizable goal the action was also destined to be unsuccessful in attaining its goal and thereby demoralizing. Finally, the press was given the opportunity to brand an antiwar action as a flop -- it didn't "close down Whitehall" -- and the cops were given a justification for their "precautions."

There are five elements in the current situation within the antiwar movement, which we should note in this evaluation: ]

First are the ultraleft organizations and individuals, represented by groups like YAWF and individuals like Jerry Rubin, Robert Greenblatt and others. The sole interest of the ultralefts is "galvinizing" the antiwar activists in street battles with the police. Their interest is not in maintaining and building the antiwar coalition, but rather in recruiting to their own ranks, and damn those who cannot see the "logic" of their position. ①

Second is the increasing number of inexperienced but militant youth, who have carried out militant actions on hundreds of campuses ②

since the time of the October 21 demonstration. The task of the organized antiwar movement is to provide leadership for these youth and involve them in activities that are designed to appeal to and activate even greater numbers of students and other sections of the population.

Third is the moderate wing of the antiwar coalition, represented by people such as Dr. Spock, Donna Allen (WSP), Abner Grunauer (NY SANE), and others. While this group is loyal to the organized antiwar coalition and ready to defend it, as Dr. Spock did during Stop the Draft Week, there is a growing uneasiness among them about the course of recent activities. This section must be convinced to exert its influence within the movement not only to help tie the youthful militants into the movement, but also to prevent right wing factionalists from trying to divide the movement. (3)

Fourth are the groups and individuals who seek to divide the movement for class collaborationist reasons. These right wing splitters, represented by the Socialist Party, Michael Harrington, Dave McReynolds, and the majority of the leaders of SANE, are on an offensive, writing articles in various journals, like the Nation and the Village Voice, seeking to divide the movement between the "resisters" and the "dissenters." (4)

The fifth element comes from outside the movement. This element represents the conscious and deliberate aim of ruling circles to prevent mass demonstrations from occurring. It stems from the approaching 1968 elections and the threat posed by a growing antiwar movement. Moreover, the government's attack carries over to a subtle, but determined campaign to split the movement. From Senator McCarthy to the New York Times, speeches and articles now appear which make appeals to "responsible" groups and individuals to reconsider their previous course. (5)

During Stop the Draft Week in New York the ultralefts were able, to a large degree, to put their stamp on the action. There was almost no consultation with the moderate wing of the antiwar movement and this gave the right wing splitters and the government further ammunition in their offensive against the entire movement, which began prior to October 21.

Our proposals, if carried, would have had a contrary effect. The ultralefts could have been isolated while the radical youth and moderate wing would have been united in an action that would have put the government and the right wing on the defensive in regard to the action.

Thus, the actions in New York tended to get off on the wrong axis. The breadth, size, and militancy, however, were totally positive sides. Never before in the history of the antiwar movement in New York has a youth united front of this character existed. Not only did it encompass the political groups, it included many

of the local SDS chapters and all the independent antiwar committees. Moreover, in spite of tactical errors, an exhausting schedule, and police harrassment hundreds of youth turned out daily to demonstrate. Out of this experience came the possibility for building a strengthened and broadened New York Student Mobilization Committee.

The central problem facing the antiwar movement in the coming months is to maintain the unity of the militant youth and the more cautious elements of the antiwar movement. This must be a unity in antiwar action that is designed to appeal to and eventually mobilize the class forces that can challenge the war-making ability of U.S. imperialism.

In maintaining this unity the antiwar movement must conduct a fight against both the ultralefts and the right wing splitters for the correct political line and actions. In the long run the fight with class collaborationism will be the larger and more important of the two debates, but the struggle with the ultralefts has the most immediacy now. Let's examine these disputes in the context of December 4-8.

In previous reports we noted that new opportunities for expansion are open to the Student Mobilization Committee (SMC). Besides outright growth in numbers of students identifying with the SMC, there now exist opportunities for drawing previously reticent groups, such as large layers of SDS and the various Resistance groups, into the SMC coalition and actions.

The Dec. 4-8 protests were, in part, an attempt by these various student groups to work together. Sharp political differences crystalized in the course of organizing the demonstration, which must now be debated out.

On the one hand is the sentiment articulated by the ultralefts that the antiwar movement is a finished product, that it now must operate as a squad to disrupt the "empire," "close the draft board," or "stop the war machine." It is said that the antiwar movement must move to "resistance" to bring the war to an end.

On the other hand, there is the perspective, articulated by us, that the antiwar movement's job is to mobilize the growing militancy into actions that are designed to rally the American people in mass proportions to a movement against the war. "Disruption" is precisely the wrong thing to do at this time. The antiwar movement's job is to be an organizer and proselytizer of the American masses. (Incidentally, tactics that can work on the campuses and which we support, such as driving away Dow and military recruiters, cannot be projected onto the movement as a whole. It is one thing to drive recruiters off campus, and another to challenge the state's ability to keep open its draft boards.)

In reality, this debate is a continuation of a fundamental debate in the antiwar movement. The confrontation is once again between

gimmicks and short cuts -- stemming from frustration and from a feeling of impotence over not being able to end the war -- and a perspective for mobilizing the forces that can effectively challenge the war-making ability of the U.S. rulers.

In many ways this fight is similar to the fight over "withdrawal" versus "negotiations." That is, it is a fight over political orientation and tactical norms. This time, however, there are many more allies supporting our position than at the inception of the fight for "withdrawal."

The new activists must be convinced through action and hard debate that their job is first to organize the students, their "constituency," which is overly ripe for systematic education and organization. Second, they must learn that their job is to connect with and provide leadership for the coalition as a whole, not disrupt that coalition. Third, they must learn that to substitute tactics -- to "beat the cops" mobile-ly or otherwise -- for a clear political understanding and perspective is the shortest cut to disaster and is the opposite of militancy.

While the fight with ultralefts for hegemony of the radical youth occurs, the simultaneous and interconnected debate with the "conservative" wing must occur.

In New York a one day conference, December 16, on "Drifts Toward Violence in the Antiwar Movement," has been called by Stewart Meacham, Tom Cornell, Bev Sterner, Brad Lyttle, and Norma Becker. While the initiators are not out to destroy the antiwar movement, they do represent a body of moderates that are concerned with recent actions and are fair game for those who do wish to split the movement.

This conference is symptomatic and shows what the tasks of the antiwar movement are. These groups and individuals must be convinced that to divide or attack the movement would be a serious error. Even from their own point of view, the effectiveness of their own particular projects, in large measure, stems from the effectiveness and political unity of the entire antiwar movement. More importantly, they must be convinced that the road to ending the war lies in mass united action of all tendencies, groups, and individuals opposed to the war; and not through class collaborationist electoral gimmicks or individual civil disobedience actions. The moderates especially must be made to see clearly that the violence stems from the bipartisan napalm bombers, not militant antiwar youth, even if sometimes misled by their own inexperience.

The job of the antiwar movement is to propose future actions that can unite the movement, including massive actions in the spring and summer.

The Parade Committee has planned an action that can facilitate the accomplishment of these tasks in New York. It has called a mass rally in front of City Hall, December 21, to protest the

suppression and hampering of antiwar demonstrations on November 14 and December 4-8. Through this action the militant youth and the rest of the coalition can be united in action, an action that takes the offensive against the city's tactic (undoubtedly approved in Washington) of busting up protest actions.

It is probable that most antiwar formations in the country will be discussing their December 4-8 experiences in the coming weeks. It is a necessary discussion and one that must be vigorously pursued. No matter what the particular focus may be, the underlying and fundamental debate will be over what perspective for the antiwar movement. It is a continuation of the debate that began during the preparations for October 21, and which now has reached full-blown proportions.

We will want to take the initiative in this discussion explaining several things particularly to the youth, but also to the whole movement. Among them are: (1) What is militancy? Militancy is not wearing a helmet to a demonstration, or blocking traffic, or talking of urban guerrilla actions. Militancy is building a movement that can end the war. It is actions such as talking to the GIs, teaching them the facts of the war and showing in words and actions that the antiwar movement has their best interests in mind. It is little understood that this action, a part of the general perspective of reaching out to other sections of the population, is without question the most militant action the antiwar movement can take. "Support our men, bring them home now," "Free all draftees," and "Join us, join us" should be the rallying cries of the antiwar movement. ①

(2) The absolute necessity of defensive formulations for actions and projects is little understood and the antiwar movement badly needs to learn this fundamental lesson. For instance, we can explain how the theme of "talking to the draftees" instead of "closing the draft board" would have brought out more people, been successful in accomplishing its goal, and put the government on the defensive. ②

(3) The defense of the movement's right to protest is an integral part of the fight to end the war. We must combat the outrageous idea that the antiwar movement is simply against the war and need not worry or fight for its civil liberties, which another group will take care of. It is suicidal for the antiwar movement to begin thinking that civil liberties are irrelevant to the fight against the war. ③

(4) The words "dissent" and "resistance" have been batted around to the point of meaninglessness. Moreover, they are used by many in such a manner as to drive wedges into the movement. We must point out that mass marches are not merely dissent -- such actions are profoundly radical, laying the basis for a movement that can end the war. In fact, the dissenter on the war question is Johnson, who has a minority on his side. Similarly, "resistance" must be called with it usually is -- futile acts that stem from a

sense of frustration. They are usually nothing more than glorified acts of civil disobedience that do the antiwar movement no good in winning the American people.

(5) There is a propensity among the youth wing to have prolonged and exclusive discussion on tactics, such as the "mobile tactic." The obvious questions that should be asked are, "What is the tactic for?" and "Towards what end is the tactic directed?" The discussions must be elevated to a political plane where the real differences exist. It is not uncommon for tactical discussions to cover up disparate political perspectives.

(6) Leadership and organization are frowned upon by many youth. Their importance, however, must be explained over and over. The New York actions were weakened by the lack of organization and the refusal of the leaders to lead. It must also be shown, by example if necessary, that leadership is just not simply showing the way to go. It often entails arguing down an entire meeting if the majority is wrong. It might mean being in the minority.

In these discussions it is important that we take pains to present our position clearly and concisely. Short, to-the-point presentations are usually more effective than a long, round-about one.

Just as the YSA recruited out of the fight for "withdrawal" we can expect to recruit from this debate. This is particularly true when already there are numbers of independent youth who agree with us. For instance, at one heated discussion during Stop the Draft Week the largest New York campus committee virtually followed the YSA floor leaders.

Finally, it is important that we keep in mind where the present discussion is headed. The debate over perspectives for the antiwar movement will reach a high point at the SMC national conference, January 27-29. A successful culmination of the debate will bring a strengthened SMC that can help organize a massive spring action. The youth that we are trying to convince now will be the same youth who will attend the SMC conference. A conference that strengthens the SMC will also strengthen the entire antiwar movement, for it is the student wing that still serves as the backbone for the entire movement.

Similarly, in attempting to maintain the unity of all wings of the movement we are aiming for massive, world-wide demonstrations in the spring of 1968. We hope these will be called by some authoritative body as soon as possible.