

NEC ANTIWAR REPORT by Lew, September 22, 1967

The size and scope of the international, national, and local preparations for October 21 indicate that the demonstration can be as successful and politically important as April 15. As interest mounts during the remaining weeks it is important that the antiwar movement campaign energetically to maximize the numbers and ideological breadth of the participation.

The October 21 demonstration can be a visible display of the organized antiwar movement's strength, the growth of that strength, and a reflection of the developing mass antiwar sentiment. A massive outpouring in Washington will advance the antiwar movement, promote others to activity, and inspire activists in other countries. Its political importance as an anti-imperialist act involving masses of people on a world scale cannot be overestimated.

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Since April 15, the U.S. government's search for a victory in Vietnam has led to further escalation of the war. More troops have been ordered into the war. The bombing intensity has been increased. Haiphong proper and areas on the China border have been hit as bombing restrictions are gradually dropped. Altogether these actions constitute a desperate escalation that greatly increases the danger of a war on China and a third world war.

At the same time the U.S. has gained no appreciable military or political advantage. On the contrary, every indication points to a deepening impasse for the U.S. It is not uncommon now to see news articles on near daily defeats for the marines near the demilitarized zone. The loudly heralded 'free elections' in Vietnam have backfired, as critics have exposed their fraudulent character. Reports show a growing opposition among some of the 'defeated' candidates, in alliance with the militant Buddhists and students, to protest the elections. This alliance could have significant repercussions.

Such defeats have an unsettling effect on the American population. The official administration rationale for the war does not easily explain defeats. When they occur, public suspicion of the government and opposition to the war increase. Similarly, an American defeat has a morale-boosting effect on revolutionaries and revolutionary struggle around the world.

The escalation has created a deeper polarization of opinion on the war. This polarization is indicated in the various opinion polls which now show more support for withdrawal of troops than for Johnson's policy. It is reflected in the organization of diametrically opposed demonstrations on October 21 -- one organized by reactionary groups in many cities in support of the war, and "law and order," and another in Washington in support of the GIs and the withdrawal of troops.

Several recent developments have illustrated the new depth of antiwar sentiment in the country. Most embarrassingly for the administration, several leading social workers in Vietnam from the International Voluntary Services resigned last week on the grounds that the war was an "overwhelming atrocity." These men, part of an organization lavishly praised by the administration, have been in Vietnam nearly as long as the U.S. has had "advisors" there.

Also of interest was the formation recently of a business men's antiwar organization, the Business Executives Move for Vietnam Peace. With 300 members from 44 states, the organization is symptomatic of a widening breach in the ruling circles.

Most noteworthy is the scheduling of the first national conference of the Trade Union Division of SANE in Chicago on November 11 and 12. This conference has been called by Frank Rosenblum of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Patrick Gorman of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, and Emil Mazey of the United Auto Workers. Although it is now limited only to trade union officials, the conference itself marks a significant new step toward organized trade union opposition to the war, and an important opening for the antiwar movement. Also important was Walter Reuther's call for a halt of the bombing, an action which differentiates him from Meany and the official AFL-CIO position.

This developing popular sentiment has been the backdrop to the growth of the organized antiwar coalition. Whereas the trade union participation has not appreciably increased, many of the moderate groups such as National SANE which refused to participate in April 15 have indicated that they are interested in participating this time, and have attended meetings of the National Mobilization Committee. Others who have previously given minimal support, such as Women Strike for Peace, are now involved in the preparations.

The black organizations, particularly SNCC, are more involved this demonstration than previously. SNCC has recently chosen John Wilson of NY-SNCC to be a co-chairman of the NMC, and the NMC has asked him to be co-director of the October 21 action. CORE has also participated in the deliberations of the coalition.

The favorable response to the October 21 call has been recorded in the Student Mobilization Committee's weekly progress reports. Those reports indicate that more groups, from a greater number of areas, are doing more work for October 21 than was done for April 15. There will be a series of demonstrations around the world on the 21st. The NMC is considering the idea of having a telephone hookup between London, Paris, Rome and Washington at the rally on the 21st.

The favorable decision by the California Supreme court, which places the antiwar referendum on the San Francisco ballot, will be an added builder of October 21 and the activities of the antiwar movement. As a morale booster, the San Francisco effort will bring added numbers to Washington, and will also give the October 21 demonstration something to point to as a future activity. In New York, the unfavorable city ruling on the referendum is being appealed in a manner similar to the San Francisco appeal.

The plans for October 21 include the following:

A folk rock concert at DC stadium on Friday night.

March, rally, and direct action on Saturday. The march will begin at 11:00 a.m., and the rally at 2:30 p.m. Two marches are planned across parallel bridges in Washington to the Pentagon where the rally will be held. The direct action, which begins at 4:00 p.m., will consist of a blocking of the doors of the Pentagon by those who desire to do so.

Other activities of an undefined character will occur on Sunday. But, Sunday will be a much smaller day of activity and should not be stressed in local areas. All these plans are still being negotiated with the police and are subject to change.

Since the death of A.J. Muste, the coalition has lacked a leader who could capably work to hold the coalition together and maintain the mutual respect of all concerned. With Sidney Peck's resignation from the post of national coordinator two months ago, this lack was felt even more severely. Of all the officers, only Robert Greenblatt was able to work full time. Jerry Rubin, director of October 21, was the other full-time official.

The group of individuals that tried to play the role of general coordination and direction proved to be sorely lacking in the abilities necessary for the job. They put forth the "radical" notion of a smaller, "more militant" direct action demonstration in Washington on the 21st. Initially, the radical pacifists saw this development as a favorable one, moving in the direction of their way of thinking, and therefore gave it the go-ahead.

The line followed by the full-time officers and the staff was, of course, far from being "more militant." It was in fact a retreat from the militant actions taken by the coalition heretofore. Instead of attempting to involve the greatest numbers in street action against the war as the road to a mass antiwar movement, they opted for small actions hinged on civil disobedience. Rather than organizing around the slogan of withdrawal, as the Washington May conference had

decided, they chose "from dissent to resistance." Instead of organizing the march so the most could participate, they chose to organize at least a two day action, which could not appeal to people who had to travel any distance.

While the coalition decisively rejected this line, the full-time officers and staff went ahead anyway in the publicity and in organizing efforts. Their political line, and the publicity they gave it, combined with bureaucratic actions repelled those who were just becoming involved in the antiwar protest activities, and prompted a vigorous response from responsible, serious elements in the NMC. While those who have proved themselves incapable of leading the coalition still remain in charge, a number of committees that represent the breadth of the coalition have been formed in the NMC which will make decisions on publicity, logistics, rally speakers, etc. A new, more balanced Mobilizer, for instance, has been authorized by the publicity committee.

The radical pacifists, (Dellinger, Becker, Morse, Lyttle, etc.) realizing that the coalition itself was at stake if the line followed by the active officers was followed, have attempted to mitigate the unhealthy situation that had developed. While the pacifists still want direct action to be a part of the 21st, they are not willing to throw away the coalition in order to achieve it. Thus, the direct action that will occur in Washington will be separated from the mass march itself, by decision of the National Mobilization Committee.

The Communist party has put itself in a difficult position in relation to the October 21st actions. Their decision to field a '68 third ticket at almost any cost had led them, because of their organizational weakness, to pull back from activity in the antiwar movement. The CP's participation in the NMC has thus been minimal since the Washington conference that called October 21. The CP finds itself in the position of opposing October 21 and the general single issue antiwar activity, yet not daring to pull out of the coalition. It is a difficult position, one that cuts them off from the radical youth, and which is potentially disastrous for their organization.

While the CP attitude toward the NMC is cautious, their attitude toward the Student Mobilization Committee has changed to one of hostility and threats of split. As was outlined at the YSA plenum, the SMC has gone through an evolution where it now finds itself in a position of authority among campus antiwar activists. This development has been highly displeasing to the CP, who would prefer to see the SMC develop into another National Coordinating Committee, which could be utilized for support to their third ticket perspective. The CP has taken the attitude of attempting to change the Student Mobilization Committee into an NCC, or else derail its growth.

Since the SMC's strength lies in its growing national base on campuses, it will be difficult for the CP, which has very little strength in local SMCs, to change the character of the SMC. (Here too, the CP is in a bind. While they do not like the direction the SMC is going, they will have difficulty changing it and a decision to leave it would cut them off from radicalizing youth.) Nonetheless, the CP youth strength is in New York, where they have utilized it to impede several SMC projects. For instance, in the national SMC working committee, a motion to hold a post-October 21 SMC conference has been put off by the CP, although an irrevocable decision on a conference has not been made.

A SMC continuations committee meeting is scheduled within two weeks after October 21. In the meantime, local areas should encourage the National SMC to call a post-October 21 conference. Local areas should also send regular reports to the SMC explaining their activities, particularly successes that are attained in building October 21, such as, the success SMC supporters had in getting the Wayne State student government and newspaper to endorse October 21.

The universities and high schools have only recently resumed classes, but already reports indicate a wide interest in the SMC and October 21. We must now make every effort to organize this interest into the SMC and to maximize the turnout in Washington.