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THE (NATIONAL) GUARDIAN

"THE NEW LEFT: WHAT IT IS...  
WHERE IT'S GOING... WHAT MAKES  
IT MOVE" PAMPHLET

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# THE NEW LEFT

*What it is . . . . Where it's going . . . . What makes it move . . . .*

*by*

MICHAEL MUNK

A NATIONAL GUARDIAN PAMPHLET



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In presenting the material in the following pages, the National Guardian seeks neither to exaggerate the influence of the beginnings of a new movement, nor to damp the aspirations of radical Americans, young and old alike, who have through practical experience and intellectual endeavor come to the conclusion that there is no hope for the vast majority of the people of this country in the existing political machinery, subservient as it is to the interests of the power structure which dominates every facet of American life.

We are fully aware that there is debate and—thankfully a continuing dialogue in and out of the new movement as to its course, content and organization—or lack of it. We are aware also of the antagonisms that persist between the new generation coming to political maturity and action, and an older generation which has been tested in the difficult years since the end of World War II and still seeks a political base for action.

The Guardian was conceived in the enthusiasm of the Progressive Party campaign for Henry A. Wallace for President. It was a time when the standard of the New Deal—for better or worse—was held high, even as Harry Truman behind that standard launched the Cold War which marked the beginning of the end of an organized Left in America.

In our first issue dated Oct. 18, 1948, we set as our editorial point of view “a continuation and development of the progressive tradition set in our time by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and overwhelmingly supported by the American people in the last four Presidential elections.”

In the intervening 17 years we have seen a consistent distortion and a betrayal of progressive traditions by the very persons who campaigned in their name. We have witnessed in our own country a systematic witch-

hunt to stifle dissent so that the policy of profit and plunder might go forward without interruption or interference both at home and abroad.

We have experienced the increasing disenfranchisement of the American electorate to the point where the electoral process today is, for the most part a farce and a fraud, and can serve only as an endorsement of the predatory policies of the power structure, whether its representatives are in office or out.

If the ideals of the New Deal were valid for America at the time of the founding of the Guardian, the actions of the succeeding administrations, the changing character of the forces for peace and civil rights at home and the alignment of the majority of the world's people for socialism have rendered them inadequate for the world of 1965.

We said in our first issue that “the times call for a voice in our nation which without fear or reservation will bespeak the cause of peace, freedom and abundance.” That is still a valid call and a valid endeavor.

But it is not enough. We hold with the movers of the New Left in America that the need of the hour is the development of a movement, radical in content and in form, which must set about to shake the foundations of the power structure.

We are aware that such a development is in its beginning stages and that it faces mighty obstacles. But we have enough faith in the basic common sense of the people of this country to believe it can succeed.

Toward this end the Guardian reaffirms its dedication to the struggle for a radical alternative for this nation, and will seek to serve as a journalistic voice for all those dedicated to the same aim.

—THE GUARDIAN

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# The Background of the New Left

**T**HE QUOTATION marks have come off the New Left. After more than five years of incubation, this movement of up to 200,000 young Americans is begin-

ning to emerge as a conscious entity whose future course and composition are the subjects of searching internal discussion. It burst upon the national



Guardian photo by Robert Joyce

**STUDENTS FROM UC AT BERKELEY BEING INTERVIEWED AT GUARDIAN OFFICE**

*They are talking to Guardian writers Jack A. Smith (l.) and Michael Munk (r.)*



scene through a spate of worried presentations in the mass-circulation Establishment press immediately following its mobilization of 25,000 persons in Washington April 17 to protest the Vietnam war. But despite its mobilization power, it is still far from certain that the New Left will move toward developing the popular political strength to constitute an effective challenge to the existing order.

Nevertheless, what strength it has already mustered makes the New Left the most exciting and potentially powerful political phenomenon in U.S. radical history since the rapid growth of the Communist Party in the 1930s. For the mobilization of the New Left has changed the posture of U.S. radicalism from a defensive holding position to probing offensive action; and in so doing it has injected fresh perspectives and a new militancy into the pessimistic ranks of the U.S. Left. At the same time, it has challenged the "Old Left" to examine seriously some of its traditional positions and to search for ways to break out of its 15-year isolation.

**IN THE BROADEST** sense, the New Left is "new" because the number of persons who publicly share a radical perspective—the view that fundamental structural changes are necessary to transform the U.S. into an economically prosperous, culturally healthy and internationally peaceful society — is significantly larger than at any time since before the Korean war.

But more specifically, the movement is new because its growth in the 1960s is almost entirely due to the coming of political age of a new generation—born in the 1940s and making its own "discovery" of the vast gulf that separates the everyday reality of American society from the self-image that society seeks to transfer to its young. The preceding generation probably was also aware of this enormous disparity, but it had the misfortune to mature in the 1950s when the influ-

ence of the Cold War and McCarthyism was at its peak. Thus most Americans born in the '30s have been accurately labeled the "silent generation" whose alienated rebels, the "beatniks," posed no threat to the Establishment. The significant difference is that the New Left generation has decided to act on its "discovery" through radical political action.

To speak of a "generation," however, is to speak in the broadest terms. The organizational membership of the New Left (including youth groups oriented toward the Old Left political parties) is no more than 12,000, with perhaps an equal number on the active periphery. But its impact and influence on other members of its age group have led to estimates (Prof. Amitai Etzioni) that 4% (or 200,000) of all college students are committed in varying degrees to today's radicalism.

Since these students and former students comprise the vast majority of the New Left, it is significant that the growing ability of middle-class parents to send their children to college (an ability nurtured by the corporate economy's higher educational requirements) has pushed the college student population to almost 5.5 million from an age group almost 25% larger than the depression-born "silent generation." The growth of the New Left and the decline of the Old makes it reasonable to estimate that most American radicals today are young—certainly under 35.

**BUT WHILE** the New Left can be quantitatively described as "new" because of its numbers and age, its most important characteristic is qualitative: for except for its sharing of the broad radical perspective with the Left rooted in the 1930s, it has fundamental differences in its ideology (or the lack of it) and strategy and has rejected the organizations of the Old Left. In general, the new radicals hold that leftists born before 1930 and basically influenced by the Great De-





pression, defense of the Soviet Union and the interne-cine struggles of the '30s and '40s have failed to sustain their commitments as they were subjected to world events that shattered some of their fundamental attitudes, to the persecutions of the McCarthy era, and to the personal economic and social pressures of a corporate society. The New Left further considers that much of what remains of that older radical generation has failed to adapt itself to the changed environment of the 1960s in a forthright and radical manner, both because of its loss of moral authority and its almost negligible impact on the "silent generation." Whether fairly or

not, the New Left regards the organized Old Left as irrelevant to the radical needs of today.

It is to the decline of the Old Left that we must look for the roots of the New. The last youth organization that could be compared with the present movement was the Young Progressives of America, which had more than 10,000 active members in 1948 but was wiped out by the Korean War. The Communist Party's Labor Youth League was disbanded at the beginning of 1957.

The de-Stalinization initiated by the Soviet CP's 20th Congress and the shock of Hungary completed what the Korean War and McCarthyism could not do: the shaking of some of the fundamental tenets on which the Old Left was built. And it was in the ferment resulting from the disintegration of the Old Left that the roots of the New began to grow.

**THERE ARE** several ideological strains and currents in the New Left, and one of them remains Marxist and socialist. Many of its representatives were drawn to independent radicalism by the *Monthly Review* (founded in 1949), which demonstrated during the lean '50s that intellectually solid and frankly radical thinking could be combined with a friendly but often critical attitude toward existing socialist states. An even more immediate influence was the beginning in England of a post-Hungary turn by both students and older radicals toward humane socialism more relevant to the British scene. The search for fresh perspectives led to the founding of the *Universities and Left Review* and the *New Reasoner* in the spring and summer of 1957 (they were merged as the *New Left Review* at the end of 1959), whose original concern was a radical dialogue dedicated to proposing alternatives to the "quality of life" in Britain. Among their other characteristics were: rejection of dogma and re-examination of basic Marxist tenets, primary concern with social and cul-





tural environment and its effect on individuals and identification of the ideological bulwarks of capitalist society as reformist liberalism as well as reaction.

The first published use of the term "new left" (in quotes) seems to have been in the autumn, 1958, issue of the *New Reasoner* (the term was soon adopted by ULR) and reflected its editor's perception that "it is very slowly coming into being."

In the U.S., this New Left perspective was first reflected in the publication of *Studies on the Left* (whose name was inspired by the NLR) in Dec., 1959. Founded largely by graduate students at the University of Wis-

consin influenced by historian William Appleman Williams, *Studies* focused on scholarly research, but openly championed a new radicalism. One effect of the growth of the New Left in the 1960s is that *Studies* gradually shifted from this original role to a greater concentration on analysis of the new activist movements.

Other influences on the New Left in the 1950s included sociologist C. Wright Mills, whose *The Power Elite* (1956) and subsequent development of the notion of the "young class" or "intellectual class" as an agency for social change (published as "Letter to the New Left" in early 1961) made a strong impression. The existential wing of the New Left was profoundly influenced by the writings of Camus and Sartre and by radical pacifist theory, and reflects today the anti-ideological strain of commitment to individual action.

**PROBABLY** the single most important political event, in its impact on the New Left, was the 1954 Supreme Court's desegregation decision. Its influence on the left of the 1960s can be compared only with that of the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act of 1935 on the left of the 1930s. Just as the Wagner Act gave the Establishment's legal sanction to the development of the CIO labor movement, the desegregation decision gave its sanction to the civil rights movement.

There is a common element in the histories of these two social movements influencing two different radical generations. Both highlight the co-optive nature of the corporate system: that is, its ability to absorb protest movements by rewarding them with concession rather than permitting a political challenge to develop. A specific charge often made by the New Left against the Old is that the Communist Party's great contributor to the labor movement of the 1930s did not concentrate on radicalization of the workers but championed their short-range goals in return for or-



ganizational power. Thus the Old Left never developed a wide ideological following among the workers, and was routed when counter attacks began in earnest after 1945. The lesson that some on the New Left draw from this is that centralized organization is "manipulative," and that their main emphasis must be on radicalization of individuals, who will then make their own decisions on organization.

**WITHIN A YEAR** after the Supreme Court decision, new Negro leadership began to develop out of the Montgomery bus boycott, but perhaps the strongest link between the New Left and the civil rights movement was forged on Feb. 1, 1960. That day the first incident in what to become a nation-wide movement of direct action took place when eight Southern Negroes "sat in" at a lunch counter in North Carolina. A few months later the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was organized, an event widely regarded as the organizational birth of the New Left.

1960 is regarded as an auspicious year for the new radical movements for other reasons as well. Several tendencies seemed to exert their influence simultaneously; new radical perspectives began to emerge from the ideological ferment of the late '50s; a profound social movement was under way, with goals implying radical structural changes in American society; McCarthyism was falling into popular disfavor as liberals found a hero in President Kennedy; and a new generation, born after World War II and unscarred by the battles of the Old Left, was arriving in increasing numbers on college campuses. It was the interaction of these developments that produced conditions favorable to the growth of a New Left.

The year 1960 also saw Northern students picketing Woolworth stores in support of the Southern Negro sit-ins. The revulsion of the new generation against

McCarthyism was symbolized by the militant protests against HUAC in San Francisco, and its concern for individual humanity was demonstrated by the outcry against capital punishment in the case of Caryl Chessman in California. Abroad, the consolidation of the Cuban revolution, led by men whose ages averaged just over 30, presented an example of social revolution, while the U.S. response aroused many to the nature and tactics of imperialism. The partial political successes of student movements in South Korea, Japan and Turkey helped to instill confidence that young people's political action was not, as the silent generation believed, inevitably futile. The established peace movement's concern over nuclear testing was extended by the formation of the Student Peace Union and another New Left publication, *New University Thought*, was launched from the University of Chicago.

**AMONG THE EVENTS** that made an impact on the new generation over the next four years were the Bay of Pigs invasion, the CORE Freedom Rides and the murder of Lumumba (1961); the anti-nuclear test march on Washington organized by the SPU; the reorganization of the Students for a Democratic Society at Port Huron, Mich., the formation of the Progressive Labor Movement and the Northern Student Movement, the Cuban missile crisis and the Stuart Hughes Senate campaign in Massachusetts that was killed by the crisis (1962); Birmingham and Hazard, Ky.; the test-ban treaty; the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the formation of the Du Bois Clubs and the rise of Malcolm X (1963); the Mississippi summer project; Goldwater's nomination and the MFDP challenge; the concern over unemployment and automation that gave rise to SDS community-organizing projects, and the revolt of the Berkeley students (1964).

The four years of challenge and the New Left's re-



sponse resulted in both setbacks and victories, but the over-all trend was growth—not only in numbers but in the depth of its radicalism. By the beginning of 1965, a new stage of development was reached when the New Left began to turn inward and to analyze past progress and study future direction. It was at this point that a second major historical event confronted the New Left. President Johnson, supported by the liberal establishment, committed the U.S. to full-scale war in Vietnam after basing his election campaign on the issue that his opponent would take this path.

The New Left response was almost precisely the opposite of the Old Left's response to the Korean War. The development of the preceding years had conditioned the new radicals to respond with moral outrage and militancy, whereas in 1950 the Old Left had already been placed on the defensive and had withdrawn. The U.S. entry into the Vietnam war heightened the New Left's radical consciousness, as competing theories of radical tactics were given the opportunity of demonstration. The result was the massive series of teach-ins and demonstrations that swept college campuses during the spring and culminated in the April 17 March on Washington.

**FOR THE FIRST TIME**, the Establishment took worried note of the New Left, but the ill-informed magazine articles and the speeches by propagandists dispatched by the State Department to campuses reinforced the mutual distrust between the young radicals and the government. And as the March brought the New Left into the nation's consciousness, it also increased the tempo of debate within the movements about its actions and perspectives. For protest was

simply not enough: It was necessary to consider alternative tactics toward development of political power. With the passage of the Administration's voter registration bill, the civil rights movement faces much the same situation that the peace movement faced after the test-ban treaty.

The Vietnam war has already strengthened those groups within the New Left that believe the day of single-issue organizations is over, just as links between the civil rights movement and the peace movement have become symbolized in the slogan, "Freedom in both Selma and Saigon." The August Assembly of Unrepresented People was a first effort of the New Left toward a unified political approach to the major action issues. Community organizing projects on Vietnam have been formed in several areas, based on the awareness that students must have allies to carry political weight. The analytical journal *Studies on the Left* introduced discussion of the need to maintain a perspective toward a "radical community" or a base for a potential national radical organization.

The New Left today stands at an important point in its development, as it is challenged by historical events and its own growth to define more clearly what it is, where it is going and how it will get there. The discussion takes place against a background of different ideologies, stances, theories of organization and levels of political maturity. It is too early to predict the outcome, but it is clear that the momentum of the New Left has carried it to the point where decisions will have to be made. The immediate future of American radicalism rests on the effectiveness with which today's New Left responds to the challenge.



# Ideological Bases on the New Left

**A**MONG THE CENTRAL questions that a radical ideology must attempt to answer are: What are the fundamental changes needed to transform society, and what are the steps that radicals can take to help bring these about? In this respect, the ideologies of the New Left can be divided roughly between those whose answer to the first question is "socialism," and those who look toward unspecified conditions in which all citizens will "share in the decisions that affect their lives."

A functional definition of the New Left can thus be approached from two levels. First, in the broad generational sense of shared historical experiences, the term can include the present-day youth groups that openly declare their commitment to Marxism and socialism, as well as the groups that consciously reject the ideologies and parties of the Old Left and attempt to develop alternate perspectives and tactics of their own. But second, the term New Left can be applied in the ideological sense only to those groups and individuals who are committed not to Marxist ideology but rather to the development of new and what they consider as more relevant programs and tactics. In this context, all radical youth groups are part of the generational New Left, but only several (whose members greatly outnumber the rest) can, in the narrower sense, be included in the ideological New Left.

**AMONG YOUTH** organizations on the generational New Left, the Marxist and socialist groups fall into two categories: those who see socialism as a long-range goal to be won through a radicalized coalition of mass movements (the W. E. B. Du Bois Clubs of America and the few remaining "loyalist" chapters of the Young People's Socialist League) and those who are concerned with organizing revolutionary socialist parties as the only viable tactic (the Young Socialist Alliance, Youth Against War and Fascism, the Spartacists and possibly the May 2 Movement).

The non-socialist radicals of the New Left include the Students for a Democratic Society, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, the Northern Student Movement and unaffiliated community and campus groups. In addition, since members of organized groups compose only a small proportion of the New Left generation, tens of thousands of young people without formal ties to any existing group generally identify with the views and tactics of the non-socialist radicals.

**THE GAP BETWEEN** radical generations produced by the failure of the Old Left to recruit significant numbers of young people during the 1950s has resulted in an almost total lack of formal organization links among the Communist, Socialist and Socialist Workers parties and those youth groups that generally agree with their



perspectives. By far the largest of these are the Du Bois Clubs, which occupy a place on the New Left roughly parallel to the Communist Party's position on the Old. The Du Bois Clubs claim about 2,000 active members in more than 40 chapters across the country, or more than double their strength at their founding one year ago.

Perspectives of the Du Bois Clubs are derived from their Marxist socialist theoretical base, combined with the New Left's emphasis on direct action, although their membership includes wide variations in political education and different tactical tendencies. But most members agree that socialism can be achieved only through united action of the working class and popular organizations. They do not agree with some on the New Left that trade unions have "sold out" and believe that popular coalitions directed toward defeat of the ultra-right are the most promising first step toward radicalization of today's mass movements. While the Du Bois Clubs neither endorsed nor opposed Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 election, they participate in local politics when they foresee possible advances (the New York clubs, for example, endorsed William F. Ryan's mayoralty candidacy).

Thus the Du Bois Clubs insist that they are not part of the "far left," which they think isolates radicals by making excessively narrow demands and preventing the development of, for example, a mass base in opposition to the Vietnam war. While the Du Bois Clubs formally call for U.S. withdrawal, they favor participation in broad actions that raise minimum demands. But within the clubs, which are now reviewing their year's activity, there is debate on whether they should adopt a more militant anti-imperialist stand or continue to endorse the multi-level approach.

Unlike the community-organizing projects of the non-socialist groups, the Du Bois Club projects in ghettos and working-class neighborhoods attempt to

recruit young people directly into club membership. They have a much higher proportion of non-student members (as high as 40%) than other radical youth groups as they try to build a radical youth movement.

**THE OTHER "COALITION"** tendency on the New Left is represented by a small group of students oriented toward the Socialist Party. The party's official youth group, the YPSL, was suspended by the parent organization in September, 1964, for ideological deviations to the left of the SP's position. A small number of the "loyalist" YPSL chapters have been reorganized while those expelled have formed the American Socialist Organiza-





ing Committee in Chicago, which takes a militantly anti-liberal position. Politically, the loyalist SP youth groups represent an anti-Communist tendency that parallels their parent party's position in the Old Left spectrum. Its coalition approach, developed mainly by Michael Harrington and Bayard Rustin, emphasizes a "realignment" of the two-party system by ejecting racists from the Democratic Party.

The "far" New Left consists of the Young Socialist Alliance, unofficially associated with the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, and at least two groups that have split from the SWP on ideological grounds: Youth Against War and Fascism and the Spartacists. Their combined membership is less than 500. They militantly reject the coalition theory of social change and adopt the vanguard revolutionary approach. The SWP runs party candidates in many national and local elections.

**THE CONTINUITY** and links between the Old and New Left are reflected in the largely informal relations between such socialist youth groups and the Old Left parties. The only new political party organized during the rise of the New Left is the Progressive Labor Party, which reflected the split between the Chinese and Soviet Communist Parties. Although its organizational form is modeled on that of the CP, from which most of its leaders were expelled, its program is based on revolutionary class struggle in opposition to coalition. Many of its more than 1,000 members are members of the New Left generation, attracted by what they regard as its open and frank socialist program.

While all New Left organizations have made the Vietnam war the focus of their 1965 activities, one was organized specifically on this issue. The May 2 Movement, named for the date, in 1964, of its first demonstrations, describes itself as a radical, anti-imperialist student peace movement that regards the revolutionaries of the



third world as "brothers." While some of its leaders and members also belong to the PLP, many of its 17 chapters have cooperated in joint projects with SDS against the Vietnam war and there is now a tendency within the May 2 Movement to enter SDS. May 2 membership does not exceed 400, but Free Student, its newspaper, publishes more than 10,000 copies.

**WITHIN THE AMERICAN** radical community, however the term New Left often refers to something more specific than the combined membership and influence of the existing radical youth organizations. In this sense, the New Left is composed of those organizations and



individuals which have developed new ideological and tactical approaches to radical social change and which consciously reject the existing political parties of the Old Left. In addition, these have developed a style, vocabulary and even mystique that distinguishes them from the socialist youth groups.

The largest group and by far the most influential organization of this strictly defined New Left is the Students for a Democratic Society, which claims more than 4,000 activists in about 80 chapters and communities. While formally the student department of an Old Left organization, the SP-oriented League for Industrial Democracy, SDS has broken all but paper ties to its parent since its reorganization at Port Huron, Mich., in June, 1962. In the last year alone, which saw its sponsorship of the April 17 March on Washington mobilizing 25,000 persons, its membership rose from 1,200 in 27 chapters.

Since both main strains within the New Left are committed to direct action, perhaps the most important distinction between SDS and officially socialist groups is its abstention from an ideology that can be accommodated within the forms of the Old Left. In common with SNCC and the Negro ghetto-based Northern Student Movement (SDS is sometimes referred to as a northern counterpart to SNCC), SDS agrees that the economic and social system itself, rather than its failures in specific areas, is the fundamental block to social progress at home and peace abroad. But it identifies that system as a broader form of organization than capitalism per se, a system that frustrates individuals' attempts to participate in the basic decisions that affect their lives. When former SDS president Paul Potter told the March on Washington that "we must name that system" now frustrating the



will of the American and Vietnamese people to end the war, he was not referring to capitalism alone. Neither does the New Left provide a clear vision of a new society, a fact admitted by Potter shortly after the march. Without the Marxist perspective, then, SDS and SNCC have been challenged to produce an alternative ideology and theory of action.

**THE MAIN RESPONSE** of the New Left to this challenge has been the gradual development of concepts of "participatory democracy" and "counter-community," and tentative identification as the agency for social change for the poor, unemployed and non-unionized



masses in the rural South and the ghetto North. The theory of action, as practiced by hundreds of student organizers, is directed toward community organization formed around the immediate issues that affect people's lives: housing, police brutality and jobs in the urban ghettos; education, voting rights and a sense of individual worth in the South.

Such counter-community groups, known in the North as "community unions," are built on the principles of "participatory democracy" to counter the threat of co-optation of their most militant members by the local power structure. Basically, this means "let the people decide"—on what issues should be attacked, on what level and how deeply. Organizers attempt to avoid leadership positions in the community groups that could lead to what some call "manipulation" of the poor—i.e., the imposition of programs and tactics from above and from outside the social group. A tenet of participatory democracy is that persons who are drawn into activities where they are responsible for the major decisions will 1) become radicalized by confrontation at various points with the power structure as they realize that they have no fundamental power over basic decisions that affect their lives (the question continually emphasized by organizers is "Who decides?") and 2) that their awareness of these facts will lead to a commitment to radicalism that will not be destroyed by token concessions and co-optative offers from the power structure.

New Left organizers believe that political action, in forms decided by the people themselves, will naturally flow from such radical constituencies. An effort to provide national links between the 20 or more community unions now being organized was made at a conference of the groups in Newark in August, and the perspective is that of a national community movement that would

demonstrate the links among local day-to-day problems across the nation.

**WHERE THE NEW LEFT** becomes vaguest in its vision is the translation of the power of radical constituencies into social change. One tendency agrees with the necessity of the radical constituency entering into coalitions with reformist social movements—but only after it has developed sufficient political strength to do so on its own terms. On the other hand, the concepts of "counter-community" sometimes imply rejection of electoral and party politics on the basis of anarchistic





and ideological principles. Some within the SDS and SNCC ask: Do not electoral politics include the worst features of manipulative organization, and are they not decadent forms of social change relevant only to the manipulative system? The question implies the search for new forms of political organization and action.

The ideological New Left is in fact characterized by its tendency to ask questions, rather than provide answers. It includes far more young people who are engaged in searching than in preaching and thus far its loosely organized and decentralized structure, together with militant opposition to red baiting and exclusion, has been one of SDS's and SNCC's most widely praised characteristics. But the time is fast approaching when the accumulation of more than a year's experience in the slums and rural areas will demand systematic reevaluation, with rejection of concepts proved unworkable, and experimentation with new ones.

Already there are signs that the interminable debates within the new movements are moving to another level. Among the most significant are the questioning of whether the poor alone are a sufficient force for basic social change simply because they are most alienated (or, as in the rural South, the most "uncorrupted") by the existing system. The community-organizing projects centered on the specific issue of Vietnam, for example, have included middle-class neighborhoods. The need for a national radical movement is widely discussed, although the consensus among the New Left

activists appears to be that the time is not yet ripe. But amid the debate, the conviction is growing stronger that coalition with liberals, whose perspective the New Left identifies as the ideology of the system it is committed to change, is an obstacle to New Left goals.





## Perspectives on the New Left

**T**HE DEBATES swirling throughout the New Left reflect a growing awareness among young radicals that to continue the vitality of their movement, they must draw some tentative conclusions from the experiences of the last five years. Thus far, their greatest achievement has been to create an atmosphere of radical ferment and commitment to direct action that has permeated a still small but already significant minority of the New Left generation. But the time is fast approaching when future growth will be hindered rather than stimulated by the lack of consensus on an overall perspective of a new social system to replace the present one, and on the ways to effect that change.

The fact is that most New Left youths have been brought to their radical stance largely through a moral reaction to poverty, discrimination and unemployment at home and counterrevolutionary wars abroad. There exists a wide gap between the levels of political understanding of a relatively small group of New Left "veterans" and of the thousands of students recruited in the last year. And the new organizations have made few efforts toward internal political education.

This lack of political perspectives has been responsible in part for the failure of some community organizing projects. An analysis by a participant in one such project underlines this and other crucial problems of the New

Left. In the summer of 1964, a group of SDS members arrived in Hazard, Ky., to help organize unemployed coal miners into what Hamish Sinclair of the Committee for Miners hoped would become a radical group. The results were disastrous. The students felt that the existing miners organization was "manipulative" and attempted to form another group of the poor. They failed, and the miners asked all the organizers to leave.

Sinclair put the issue this way (in an interview in the summer *Studies on Left*): "Many of the students working in the South seem to regard the integration of Negroes first as a moral issue, outside the context of the economic facts that underpin the whole segregationist economy. The students who came to Hazard thought that the integration of the poor white into the economy of national affluence was only a moral issue too." Sinclair went on to ask: "Is there a better way to come to a position on the left than by this kind of moral indignation about the domination and corruption that oppresses the poor in America? But until they [students] can get over their inexperienced rejection of bureaucratization and their virginal fears of their own corruption, their protest will remain a personal one."

**THE RELEVANCE** of the generational gap to this problem is also analyzed by Sinclair. "I think," he said,



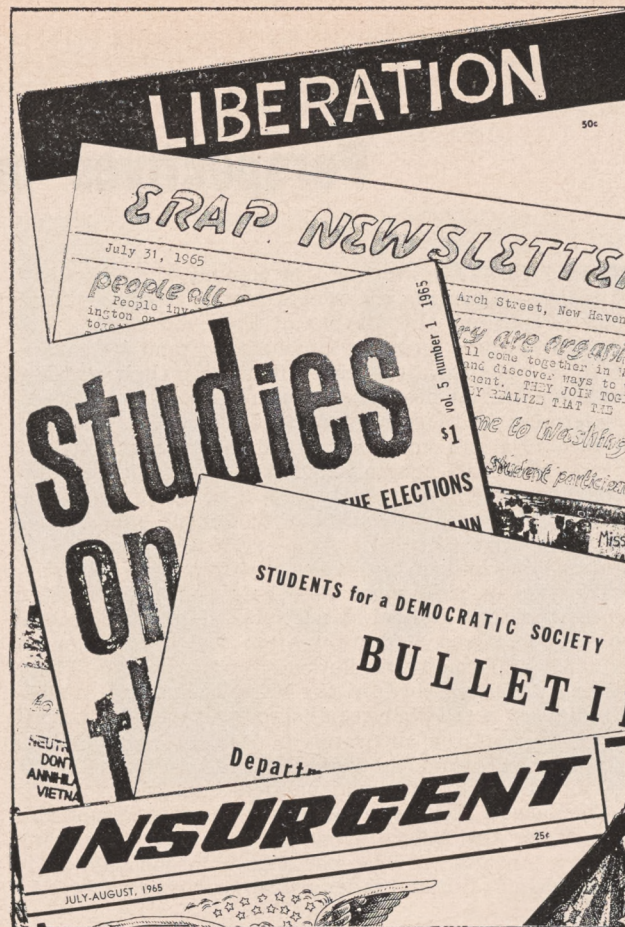
"that the problem is that students for very good reason—the irrelevance of much of the internal debate in the Old Left—have cut themselves off from the only source there is for the intellectual and practical discipline that they need to give their moral and emotional stances a real political context. The Old Left could do this if there was any thread of continuity, but there isn't—the Old Left is neither available nor attractive to the students."

Almost everyone on the New Left assumes that a new national movement of an undetermined nature will be established at some point, uniting the radical constituencies and offering an alternative to the political choices offered by the Establishment. The clearest analysis of the need for such a radical community has been put forward by a majority of the editors of *Studies on the Left*. Writing in their winter, 1965, issue, they assert that both the Old Left and the New require such a movement, although for different reasons.

The older radicals who are still active hope to "transform local consciousness and local politics by influencing the direction of protest activity" but "have no theory of how such a transformation might occur and no movement or community to sustain themselves or the individuals they recruit. They share in a continuing dilemma: How can root opposition to American institu-

#### SOME PUBLICATIONS OF THE NEW LEFT

*Views on strategy and tactics are aired*









tions and values be translated into meaningful activity when no radical center exists?"

For the New Left organizers in the rural South and Northern slums, the problem is that of connecting the full range of local demands that cannot be met without fundamental structural change with an awareness of the need for such a transformation of society. "Nor have ways been suggested to meaningfully connect ghetto activity to demands for a shorter work week, for an end to American intervention in Vietnam, the Congo or Cuba, or even for better schools outside the ghetto. Further, no means exist through which ghetto activists can be exposed to radical ideas . . . there is no place such developing recruits can go for systematic examination of alternative proposals for social organization except to the old-style sects."

**A FURTHER POINT** that is becoming increasingly important as the New Left veterans approach the age of 30 is simply the lack of an older radical movement. The social and economic pressures of families and careers may be expected to deactivate all but the most deeply committed students unless an adequately financed radical community is established.

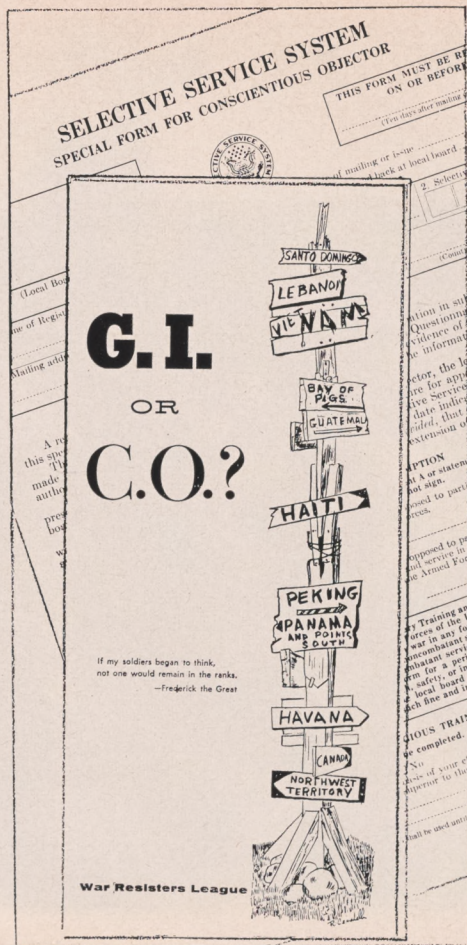
The role of older unaffiliated radicals, certainly the vast majority of the Old Left, has also been debated. SDS organizer Tom Hayden has said that "too many traditional radicals are still engulfed by the Communist-anti-Communist debate; adhere to overly bureaucratic conceptions of organizing, or are limited fundamentally by their job and family situations, to be considered mainstays of a new movement." On the other hand, most of Hayden's fellow editors reply: "Many former old leftists reject the approaches and especially

the bureaucratic forms of organization and the sterile debates over Stalinism verses social democracy of such Old Left sects as the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party. To some extent, of course, these people still think and act in the old ways, even though they reject the organizations of the Old Left and the context of Old Left politics. This is precisely why they share, in common with the new movements, a need for a radical center. Such people are now either without direction, except that which they give themselves, or follow vaguely the old styles and tactics."

The lack of a radical movement also affects established, militant organizations such as SNCC, which at one time showed signs of relying exclusively on poor rural Negroes in the South as the agency of social change. Thus far, according to the Studies editors, the moderate wings of the civil rights movement have been allowed to give a "political content to SNCC's groundwork" in the same sense as the moderate labor leaders of the 1930s represented the political content of the Communist Party organizing efforts. Thus financial and moral support comes to SNCC not on the basis of its radical perspective but largely through "general appeals to sentiment, or on private appeals based on strategic considerations." Unlike Martin Luther King Jr., who is committed to the integration of Negroes into the Democratic Party, "SNCC is part of no ideological community from which they can get support and with which they can work out and coordinate strategy."

**OPPOSITION TO THIS** "radical community" perspective has come from two main sections of the





New Left—its most strongly anti-organizational group, and a small group based on the New York at-large chapter of SDS, strongly influenced by the Old Left. Hayden, representing the more sophisticated New Left group, argues that the appeals for a radical community are “artificial attempts to order the chaos of the contemporary Left” because they “assume there is a sufficiently large radical movement in need of coordination.” While implicitly recognizing the need, Hayden argues that “there must be something to break **towards**: other people in the society who together can make up an alternative community to the Establishment. But such people are not available at the present time in sufficient numbers and strength and, unless they are, it is hollow to call for a ‘radical center.’”

The response to this in the debate has been that a perspective directed toward developing a genuinely radical coalition is the real issue, not whether an organization should be established today, next month or next year. In short, that if all community organizers consistently evaluated their work with the question: How does this specific act relate to the building of a radical community? this would in itself contribute greatly to ideological and tactical clarity and the development of a national movement.

Perhaps the sharpest attacks on the New Left have come from the Socialist Party section of the Old Left. Some of these criticisms are tired attempts to inject the old “Communist-anti-Communist” debate into the ranks of the New Left, but largely they have concentrated on its anti-Establishment approach as it diverges from the coalition theory of social change advanced by Michael Harrington and Bayard Rustin.

Both Rustin and Harrington argue that if labor



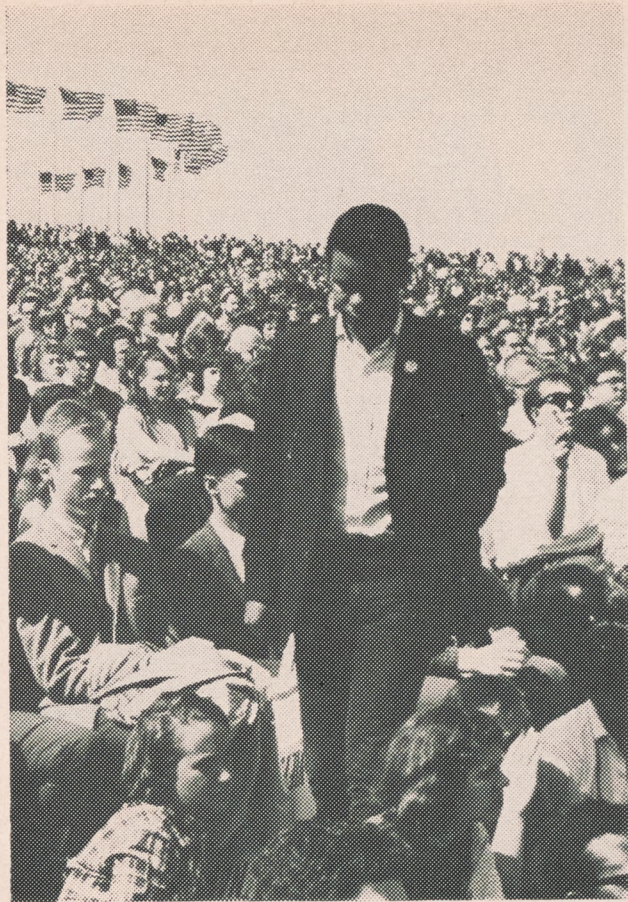
civil rights and other liberal movements could capture the Democratic Party and expel its Southern racist wing, American politics would be profoundly realigned and become the vehicle for radical social change. Harrington put this most clearly in his July 18 column in the New York Herald Tribune that supported William F. Ryan's mayoral candidacy. "Both nationally and locally," he wrote, "the Democratic Party is the rallying point of the mass sentiment for social change. It represents the political hopes of most Negroes, of the best of the labor movement, of those whose religious conviction moves them to positive action, of the liberals and even some of the radicals . . . If there is going to be real progress, it will have to come from the liberal forces **within** the Democratic Party. This is the reality of the political power struggle in the U.S."

In his much-discussed article in Commentary (February), Rustin predicted that the present Johnson coalition, into which the Goldwater candidacy had pushed "many disparate elements which do not belong there, Big Business being the major example . . . must come apart" and that the civil rights movement could form the "cutting edge" of the forces which could reorganize the Democratic Party.

**AS PART** of an extended debate on the New Left in recent issues of Liberation, Sid Lens wrote (August issue): "The Old Left tends to mellow and seek bridges to liberalism while a New Left comes to the fore to re-emphasize the need for independence from the Establishment." The Old Left's attacks on the New for a lack of political pragmatism and recognition that domestic progress depends on the liberals, "camouflage an underemphasis of America's crimes in the foreign field and an overemphasis on the evils of the 'other side,' an underplaying of the achievements of the uncommitted







world and an overplaying of the achievements of the so-called 'Great Society'—in a word, a distortion of political reality. If you would 'realign' with those—like Walter Reuther or the ADA who consider that the only road to reform is through the Establishment, by pressuring and persuading it—then you make the Establishment appear flexible and not quite as bad as it is. . . . If you want a broader left (or more properly, a broader liberalism) then you must lay down a vigorous barrage against those who are pre-empting the territory you are deserting, namely the New Left."

Another reaction to the "coalition" was expressed in *Studies on the Left* (summer). Editor James Weinstein wrote that if one believes that "the Administration is made up of men of good will, responsive to the people's interests and that they will end the war in Vietnam, or enact a voting rights bill or war on poverty in such a way as to get things done," then the construction of "the largest possible ad hoc demonstrations on the lowest possible common denominator makes sense. That is the easiest way to call the attention of those in power to popular opposition to their policies." But, Weinstein continued, while "such an approach does challenge policy, it does not question the legitimacy of those in power, nor does it develop a stable base, or constituency, for those whose criticism of the existing policies is more than ad hoc."

And if radicals are serious about changing the political status quo, "their main concern must be the development of an independent, self-consciously radical constituency. They must have a mass movement that thinks as they do." Until such a radical constituency develops, Weinstein concludes, radicals "can only be manipulators or ideologues for other people's coalitions: their radicalism is only rhetorical. Building a constitu-





ency requires a commitment to replace those in power with those who share a consciousness that the basic social relations and institutions must be changed. And, of course, we should begin defining what those changes are to be."

**THE SOCIALIST GROUPS** on the New Left are critical of the organizations that recruit largely on a moral or emotional basis, but it is a characteristic of the New Left that differences are generally openly discussed in a friendly manner, with little of the bitterness that marks the Old Left's factional battles. The Du Bois Clubs, for example, emphasize the contribution of the Old Left to American radicalism, and stress that despite internal debates they do present a clear perspective toward the building of a national radical youth movement. The May 2 Movement declares that a new form of national anti-imperialist movement is needed, one influenced by the Cuban July 26 and Dominican June 14 movements. Its program stresses that to be for peace "is not enough" and emphasizes radical education.

The debates within the New Left also extend to many other areas, both ideological and organizational. They range from complaints that its members do not dress in conformity with social standards—and thus alienate the people they are trying to reach—to accusations that its members are insufficiently aware of the "crimes" of the Soviet Union or the "sacrifices" and "contributions" of the Old Left. (Usual replies are that the world of today is characterized by U.S., not Soviet, imperialism and that the tactics of the 1930s have little relevance to the needs of the 1960s.)

But despite the misgivings on the part of some of the Old Left and the apparent wide divergences among the new radicals themselves, there is generally on the left a sense of relief and excitement that a new generation is beginning to demonstrate its commitment to the building of a better world.







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