

STUDENT
POLITICAL
ACTION,
1960-1963:

THE VIEW OF A PARTICIPANT

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INTRODUCTION

Three years have passed since the student body politic first stirred from its slumber of the '50s. The stir was widely heralded, by the press as well as by relieved members of the elder academic community; but, understandably, excitement and a frantic, not always successful effort to keep up with events have outrun analysis of trends in student political activity. This is not hard to understand. The "student movement" is no static phenomenon, but one very much in the throes of continual reshuffling, reorientation, self-assessment, as both a collectivity and a set of organizations. Since much of the more noticeable sort of change manifests itself at the beginning of the academic year, an attempt to "hold the movement constant" for purposes of analysis must be especially tentative at this time (September, 1963); all interpretations contained below must be viewed with this caveat firmly in mind.

The subject matter of this paper consists in the texture, complexion, goals and forms of activity in student politics, and their variations over the past three years. These are harder matters to get at than, say, crude growth figures, and for this reason research is a largely impressionistic process. I have tried to gather the widest possible range of impressions, however, primarily from students who have been actively involved in recent activities, including myself. Particularly, I wish to thank Robb Burlage and Dorothy Dawson, both of Students for a Democratic Society, for their hours devoted to recounting the history of civil rights activity in both North and South; and officers of the Northern Student Movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and Young Americans for Freedom. All concrete facts emanate from those sources or from printed materials issued by these and other organizations, and from my own memory. I hope their selection as well as presentation does not reflect my political bias. Needless to say, I am responsible for all facts and interpretations contained below.

1960: THE STIRRINGS

The decade of the '50s was by no means devoid of organized political commitment on American campuses, but little of this commitment was visible from the outside. McCarthyism had not relinquished its grip on the potentially active student constituency, and most escapes from privatization took the form of "study groups" and other barely public manifestations. But McCarthyism was not entirely responsible for the silence; the Right was equally as quiescent as the Left. Regardless of the reasons, the silence was undeniable.

Once one hole was driven in the dike, however, a reservoir of withheld energy began to pour through in organizational form. The first stirrings of "something different" were soon followed by others. Although the scene today is considerably more variegated and complex than that of late 1960, still the latter picture was far richer than could have been predicted at the beginning of that year; perhaps this is a measure of the energies that had been refrigerated for years before.

If one seeks a date with which to begin the chronicle, February 1, 1960, will serve. On that day, a handful of Negro students in Greensboro, North Carolina, left their campuses, if not their books, to sit at a lunch counter and ask to be served. They were not, of course, but their request, and the manner in which it was made, burst into the press as no previous protests had. The bombshell exploded in a South strewn with inflammable matter. In a matter of weeks, sit-ins had cropped up in Tennessee and elsewhere in the South. At an April conference of sit-in leaders in Raleigh, N. C., the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed as a loose state-by-state network designed, as SNCC writes today, "to circulate information about the Southwide protests and to promote joint activities by the protest groups that made up the Coordinating Committee." Staff was minimal, and most state contacts continued as full-time students unless they were expelled. Throughout 1960, sit-ins and other forms of nonviolent direct action occupied the full energies of the Coordinating Committee. It had as yet no coherent strategy, few thoughts of possible levers for social change, and little sense of the full-time commitment necessary to sustain a coordinated program. Still, a structure that would expedite further discussion along these lines had been erected, and reacting to day-by-day spontaneities was difficult enough.

The Northern response was not long in coming. On several Northern campuses, the news of the first sit-ins generated the need to "do something here." Spontaneously, ad hoc committees formed to picket commercial establishments that discriminated in the South. At the University of Michigan, the Vice-President of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) called and coordinated a spring conference on civil rights in the North that stimulated further activities along these lines; significantly, this was the first time that SDS, a small, multi-issue organization of a decade's standing, had stepped out of discussion groups and into the generation of, if not participation in, action projects. At this point one can mark the birth of the dual concept that discussion groups were insufficient responses to an essentially new situation pregnant with the possibility of success, and that action should and could succeed in wedding superficially disconnected regions of concern---buying power and civil rights.

While it is generally difficult to pinpoint the individuals responsible for this crystallized response to events in the South, it seems clear that a relatively large proportion of graduate students was involved in leadership roles, including many for whom the pickets provided the opportunity to release their values from the privacy harbored during the lean years of the '50s. Many of these found the new experience tonic, and remained active in succeeding years. Others had been aware of the previous silence only superficially. For these, primarily younger college students, the response to the sit-ins represented, if not the coming of political maturity, at least their first expression of political values. Unadulterated idealism, groped at on city pavements from Berkeley to Boston, became, if not fashionable, at least tenable, as did the notion of direct action.

On the left of the newly politicized student community, the progression from study groups to action developed through 1960 as one thread in the experimental package of modes of involvement. On the Berkeley campus of the University of California, a student political party called SLATE had formed a continuation of a seemingly spontaneous campus protest against compulsory ROTC. At this point in the chronicle, SLATE stands out as the first non-Communist, not explicitly socialist political grouping to take positions, and action, on a variety of issues, including military policy, university reform, and civil liberties. On a campus later to be plagued with a bewildering multiplicity of organizations on the left, it grew rapidly into the atmosphere of ideology; but ideology springing

from grievances against a repressive school administration and applying native head-against-wall experience to wider social spheres, not ideology dredged from a bitter and sectarian past. Its humanistic tone and multi-issue emphasis were to foreshadow later developments in quite remarkable fashion, and its direct influence on the organizational efforts of some Midwestern students was considerable. (A partisan history of SLATE can be found in David Horowitz's Student, New York: Ballantine Books, 1962.)

SLATE sprang to national prominence via its involvement in protest demonstrations against House Un-American Activities Committee hearings in San Francisco, later to be widely publicized in the controversial HUAC film "Operation Abolition." The "San Francisco riots" of May, 1960, probably occasioned student politics on the Left not through imitation--HUAC, after all, could not visit every city, although students elsewhere hankered for an opportunity to "show their stuff"--but by demonstrating that students had power, that they could stir up a political storm, that they could challenge an organ of Federal government and be recognized as a force significant enough to extract the appellation "Communist" from Congressmen and Federal officials. If one set of demonstrations could call forth a defamatory motion picture, was there not something in this talk of "a new student generation," and a "student movement"?

At the same time, the arms race developed as an issue around which campus groups could be organized. The tiny College Peace Union, rooted primarily in a scattered community of student pacifists, merged with the newly formed Student Peace Union (SPU), and throughout 1960 the merger began to take shape as a real organization. The SPU had originated from a collection of clusters of activist students in 1959; the primary form of activity had again been direct, in the form of demonstrations against nuclear testing, ROTC, and in some cases for unilateral disarmament; the primary locus had been Midwestern--primarily at the Universities of Chicago and Wisconsin and Oberlin College, although activism broke out at Dartmouth and elsewhere as well. Throughout 1960 new affiliate groups arose in New England and the Middle Atlantic region, and the demonstration, sometimes in the form of the Quaker vigil, became by far the most popular form of "peace activity." The pacifist emphasis in the organization was still strong, as the active SPU turnout in the Polaris Action anti-atomic-submarine protests in the summer of 1960 confirmed. But a relatively new idea, that of "unilateral initiatives," was clearly ascendent, especially as SPU leaders perceived the necessity of involving non-pacifist students in commitment short of the fully abstentionist stance. That the United States could take limited steps of a nature that would generate Soviet responses in the political, military, and cultural spheres seemed a more palatable notion than the leap of trust required for belief in unilateral disarmament.

Unilateral initiatives had first been promulgated as a policy, rather than a disjointed set of "good things," at the Bear Mountain conference of peace workers and intellectuals that created the Committees of Correspondence early in 1960. Apparently the strong Harvard representation at that conference intertwined with other impetuses to drive two Harvard students to spend the summer mapping out a peace organization for Harvard and Radcliffe. They were responding to the failure of a Harvard chapter of the National Student Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (Student SANE) to break out its clique-based, emotional, folk-song-oriented enclosure the previous academic year; they sensed the need for an organization with both form and content tailored particularly to the Cambridge environment. They found inspiration in the experience of Robert Pickus' West Coast Acts for Peace, which had activated people on the principle of individual initiative, individual responsibility for and choice of projects, and only the skeleton of policy consensus. The thought was that Harvard students

would respond only to an explicitly "individualistic" form of structure; was not the Harvard student peculiarly jealous of his own autonomy? The success of Boston-area Woolworth pickets further convinced them that a ctive politics was possible at Harvard. TOCSIN, the organizational crystallization of these experiences and adopted notions, quickly accumulated a "hard core" of about fifteen students, primarily younger undergraduates. It was oriented toward pragmatic, intellectual projects: publications, research, forums, even dining-hall argumentation, although more strenuous forms of activity, including demonstration and participation in political campaigns, were not long in coming--the emphasis on individual initiative and responsibility was genuine. Involvement in a December "walk" on campus, calling for "individual concern" about war/peace issues in general and a resolution of the snarled Geneva test-ban talks in particular, heightened TOCSIN's active membership to about sixty. Meanwhile, a campaign to get Harvard and Radcliffe students to wear blue armbands in sympathy with the goals of the "walk" demonstrated that there were at least 1000 students willing to commit themselves to "concern" and "consideration."

The sleeping giant was stretching his right as well as his left arm, however. In mid-September of 1960 over 100 campus conservatives, many of them law school students and future-oriented toward "adult politics," met at National Review Editor William Buckley's house in Sharon, Connecticut to draft a statement of principle --"The Sharon Statement"--and found an organization--Young Americans for Freedom (YAF). The Sharon Statement affirmed:

In this time of moral and political crisis, it is the responsibility of the youth of America to affirm certain eternal truths. We, as young Conservatives, believe: That foremost among the transcendent values is the individual's use of his God-given free will, whence derives his right to be free from the restrictions of arbitrary force; That liberty is indivisible, and that political freedom cannot long exist without economic freedom; That the purposes of government are to protect these freedoms through the preservation of internal order, the provision of national defense, and the administration of justice; That when government ventures beyond these rightful functions, it accumulates power which tends to diminish order and liberty;...That the genius of the Constitution--the division of powers--is summed up in the clause which reserves primacy to the several states, or to the people, in those spheres not specifically delegated to the Federal Government; That the market economy, allocating resources by the free play of supply and demand, is the single economic system compatible with the requirements of personal freedom and constitutional government, and that it is at the same time the most productive supplier of human needs;...That the forces of international Communism are, at present, the greatest single threat to these liberties; That the United States should stress victory over, rather than coexistence with, this menace; and That American foreign policy must be judged by this criterion: does it serve the just interests of the United States?

YAF filled a vacuum on the Right. By the end of its first academic year, 1960-1961, it claimed 10,000 dues-paying members nationwide, of whom about 60% were highschool and college students. Like clusters and organizations on the Left, YAF was organized in chapters, with considerable strength lodged in the Midwest and the Ivy League schools. Nationally and to a lesser extent locally, it distinguished itself from its counterparts on the Left by its close association with adult conservatives such as those tendered YAF recognition at a National Awards Rally on March 3, 1961, in Manhattan: Barry Goldwater, Herbert V. Kohler, Russell Kirk, Taylor Caldwell, William F. Buckley, Jr., George Sokolsky. A National Advisory Board numbered some 150 prominent conservatives, many of whom favored YAF with enough financial backing to finance well-printed organizing

materials, a Washington Newsletter, a monthly magazine (New Guard), and a smoothly functioning national office in Washington. In 1960 as in 1963, YAF's connections with its adult counterparts were more than financial or nominal, the organization's leadership conceiving of YAF as a channel connecting the uninitiated student into the real world of politics--in which, to be sure, conservative politics was still possible. Relations with elected conservative officials have also been closer than similar connections on the Left.

While the Sharon Statement addressed itself to "the youth of America," it was devoid of content specifically relating to the student as a particular type of citizen; its planks could as well have been addressed to businessmen or housewives. While the lack of attention paid to the student's special nature and function in society was somewhat, perhaps largely, accounted for by the leadership's view of the student-as-apprentice, another factor can be isolated in having conditioned the oversight. Even a cursory glance at the newspapers seemed to prove that students active on the Left were overthrowing the notion that the student's place is in the classroom, or the library, or the dorm, or even in "student government." Exhortations for "involvement" in society seemed to be producing liberal and radical activities, not a active concern with restoring the fundamentals of free enterprise and national sovereignty. To many students, "the genius of the Constitution" lay not in the division of powers but in guarantees for civilrights, and they acted on that premise. And it was the Bomb, not Communism, that lay darkly over the horizon.

Moreover, a strong, almost medieval, sense of the importance of the social order in society, merging with a certain tactical exigency, contributed in leading YAF to an endorsement to what may be called the "student-as-student" philosophy of the student's political responsibility. This tactical exigency was occasioned by the August, 1960 Congress of the National Student Association (NSA), at which liberal and radical students for the first time coordinated their efforts to formulate a philosophical base for their budding activity. For years past NSA Congresses had been content to focus their attention on issues that the times deemed appropriate--student housing, parking facilities, dining halls, libraries, sometimes educational philosophy. Now, for the first time, politically active students were delegates to the Congress, along with representatives of student governments--governments, it should be added, generally concerned with the above matters rather than, say, democratic student-faculty formulation of curricula. To everyone's surprise, the new political stirrings bore legislative fruit in the form of a Basic Policy Declaration entitled, "The Student and the Total Community," which argued the case for the student-as-citizen, and moreover as citizen with a special responsibility by virtue of his trained intellectual faculties. The sit-ins were applauded, the House Un-American Activities Committee production of "Operation Abolition" roundly condemned; it was the active Left that was calling for student participation in the affairs of his community and society, not a nonpartisan "citizenship" organization. The 1960 Congress' unorganized Right, and soon YAF, could react in only one way: the student should stay in his study. In fact, of course, YAF urged and practiced out-going political activity similar to that on the Left: demonstrations, electoral participation, rallies, counter-pickets; but at NSA Congresses it stood, and still stands, for "taking NSA out of politics.") But the 1960 Congress signaled the coming of a new era on the campus. The student was evidently very much in politics, and the remaining questions concerned how, and why, and for what.

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

1.

As Montaigne wrote, "All generalizations are false." Still, the effort to make some sense of these stirrings cried to be made, and the cry is not to be ignored. If the stirrings can be frozen at the end of calendar year 1960, these observations may be made, elaborating and supplementing those implicit above.

Activity was generally direct, easily identifiable as utilization of the body. The catalogue includes sit-ins, pickets, walks, even attempts at student strikes by the SPU. For the peace-concerned, these forms of activity were much in the mainstream of previous activity; for the civil-righters, something new and spontaneous; for those on the Right, essentially a response to the tactics of the Left. Among campus peace groups, only TOCSIN was beginning to publish serious research and argumentative material, but even TOCSIN was stamped--in the campus mind, at least--in the metal of its first success, the December walk. A spring 1961 TOCSIN-run seminar on foreign policy issues folded after three or four meetings. Almost no research had been done by civil rights activists. Moreover, activity was generally not sustained; it was hit-and-run, or hit-and-be-jailed. One wanted to desegregate this lunch counter, stop that shelter project, or protest that Congressional hearing; but even talk of sustaining social change was rare.

Perhaps this was partially the case because the student actors were still full-time students, and regarded themselves in that way; or perhaps the causation worked in the opposite direction. Significantly, the Greensboro students took their books with them, and read them at the empty lunch-counter. Even a seminar was too time-consuming to sustain interest for any significant period of time. To be sure, seminars, conferences, and study-groups on social issues flourished in this period, but for most participants they were clearly adjunct operations, ancillary to their primary responsibilities and habits as learners.

Only hesitantly, if at all, were the actors active as students; for most, activity was a fitful if welcome interruption in campus life. That is, the university was not seen as a nexus of power and a possible instrument of social change, but rather as the center of life itself, or at most an arsenal from which useful weapons could be drawn, but which needed to be tended to--that is to say, conscientiously attended. (While one student acquaintance of mine found himself unable to study because of the drama of the first sit-ins, he remembers having experienced acute guilt feelings about this.) Hence forms of activity were chosen which did not threaten one's existence as a full-time student. And concentration on those activities temporarily narrowed the field of possible forms of action, thus making it unnecessary to contemplate not being a full-time student. So the circle went around.

2.

With the exceptions of YAF and such long-standing and relatively constant organizations as the Young Republicans, Young Democrats, the Young People's Socialist League, and the Young Socialist Alliance, issues were chosen and acted on separately, and largely without regard to others. Beliefs and program were crystallized without serious and thoroughgoing analysis of society. Values were often implicit, but rarely articulated, or seen as the foundation for a radical approach--in the root sense. Apparently the issues now of concern to students coming into politics had lain dormant so long that it was all one could do to expose, study, and act on them singly. The single-issue groups needed to form, to cope with their chosen matters of concern, to appreciate their own possibilities and problems before a more integrated formulation could be arrived at and acted on. Even YAF's Sharon

YAF

Statement generated issues separately, and acted upon them one at a time, one in one project.

At the same time, the cerebral foundations of the movements and organizations was blatantly moralistic. Something was wrong, something needed to be righted, we would do what we could to right it. Even TOCSIN, with its indulgence in expertise and belief in the possibility of progress through communication with the bearers of power within their own policy framework, had self-assertedly begun with the intention of undercutting the belief in "the value of weapons of mass destruction."* TOCSIN's ambivalence regarding emotion and thought, demonstration and friendly persuasion of foreign policy decision-makers, reflected both a new tactical eclecticism and deeper currents in the group, which I dwell on because I believe them to be present, at least germinally, in other campus peace groups. Harvard in late 1960 exuded the aura of proximity to power; it seemed entirely appropriate for the December walk to culminate in the phoned transmission of its sophisticated position on the test-ban talks to a U. S. Congressman, and equally as appropriate for its leaders to solicit and accept appointments with Disarmament Administration officials to discuss the test-ban and the idea of "unilateral initiatives." After the meeting at which the proposals were phoned to Washington, one female member bound to TOCSIN ideas by a strong emotional commitment was heard to say (to no one in particular): "At last we can do something!" Still, the emotional/moral commitment was the cement of the organization, particularly for the younger undergraduate members. It was impossible, in the final analysis, to create an organization entirely composed of experts, even if this were desirable; that being the case, only the group's elite could be confident of its ability to operate in Washington circles. Enthusiasm about their "successes" in the membership at large, even augmented by strong personal loyalties, would not sustain an organization. Consequently TOCSIN was to vacillate between the poles of "in" and "out" politics, despite its growing reputation as the "think factory" of the budding student proto-peace-movement.

But whether the emphasis was on statistics or morality, none of the campus peace organizations concentrated on the cold war as a system of phenomena with domestic import, or with partially domestic origins; instead, the attack focused on the arms race as cancer and not merely symptom, and often on symptoms of the arms

* Still, TOCSIN's emphasis on research, detail, "out-arguing the armers at their own game," was strong enough even a year later to stimulate one TOCSIN member to write a song, "The New Improved Tocsin," designed to be sung to the tune of "The Yellow Rose of Texas":

It's the new improved Tocsin, for you and You and YOU;
 We take in the disarmers, the arms-controllers too.
 If you can read and riot, if you can sign your name,
 The new improved Tocsin is your key to wealth and fame.

You'll have no cause to worry, if you can't understand
 The leaflets you'll be spreading, we make no such demand.
 Whatever your religion and state of mental health,
 The new improved Tocsin is your key to fame and wealth.

....
 We're not the striking women, we're not the SPU,
 You see how much we're different by the things we say and do.
 We dislike their emotion, their policy and dress,
 We join them in a protest only when we want success.

race such as nuclear testing and civil defense, and the arguments were primarily survivalist. President Eisenhower had not yet pinned a label on the "military-industrial complex," and C. Wright Mills' The Causes of World War Three had acquired only a small, if vocal, constituency scattered around the country. Perhaps only at the University of Wisconsin, where a dozen or so graduate students in American history began to publish Studies on the Left, did a peace-concerned cluster look for institutional roots of the cold war; while at the University of Chicago a mixed group of undergraduates, graduates, and young faculty founded the quarterly New University Thought (NUT), by its own statement to publish articles which,

however diverse their subjects, will be...radical in the original sense of "going to the root." Therefore, we demand of articles that they present the relevant facts fully, but always with a thorough analysis which shows the relation of specific problems to general ones. (First Editorial, Spring, 1960)

Specifically, NUT tried, not always successfully, to relate the cold war to the political, economic, psychological and philosophical framework of the nation; and to relate the arms race to the cold war. But Studies and NUT were magazines, not organizations, despite their visions of themselves as the intellectual spearheads of a student movement.

Still, the arms race served to draw students into the SPU and its primarily Eastern counterpart, the National Student Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. As membership snowballed--for the SPU, into the high hundreds--leaders of these organizations realized that radicalization would drive out many semi-committed or novice members; "the base had to be kept broad." Thus, at a "national planning meeting" of the SPU on August 27-28, 1960, for the first time it was proposed that

we adopt a position supporting unilateral initiative in our statement of purpose. The first such initiatives might involve, for example, stopping nuclear bomb tests, stopping production of atomic weapons, and achieving the removal of Chiang Kai-shek from power in Formosa. (Minutes, SPU National Planning Meeting)

Debate over the nature of the SPU, hence over the existing and desired composition of the organization is clear from the following excerpts from those Minutes:

Those favoring adoption of the unilateral initiative position argued that we should try to get as broad a following as possible. Using the word initiative instead of disarmament would bring in many people who would, at first hearing, never consider unilateral disarmament. A. said we would have to make the choice of a radical and limited membership or one with a broad appeal and a grass roots membership.

B. said that since we must work to create the atmosphere for change and not the change itself, we must keep the membership broad.

C. questioned whether we should formalize this in the statement of purpose. It may scare off people who agree with unilateral disarmament but who do not realize it. They read it in the Bulletin all the time.

Objections to the present undefined position were that the SPU would be watered down and lose its dedicated people. It was felt that liberals might move in and take over the leadership, making the SPU into a good-will-but-no-

action type of group.

A. stated that we have no alternative to deterrence, and that the whole problem needs much more study.

It was moved and seconded that a committee of five study the statement of purpose in the light of this discussion. This was amended with the directive that the following points be included in any such statement: 1) we are independent of the two power blocs, 2) we favor both freedom and peace, and 3) we will emphasize the search for new alternatives to the arms race. Motion passed....

But finally, as the minutes go on to suggest, skepticism about the size of the pool of potentially "hard-core," committed recruits on campuses, and intoxication with the prospects for accumulating students not devoid of moral concern but closer to mainstream liberal opinion, contributed to the acceptance of "unilateral initiative" as the basis of SPU policy:

It was suggested that a policy statement be written which would explain and expand the statement of purpose. This would be the official line which a majority could agree to.

D. moved that the statement be along the lines of E.'s and F.'s ideas of unilateral initiative. [E. and F. were influential leaders of the "adult peace movement."] Two substitute amendments, one advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament, and one advocating a statement which simply attacked the multilateral position, were defeated. The motion was passed.

A special caveat is probably appropriate here. These characteristics were attached to organizations and shapes sufficiently inchoate to prevent the solidification of their natures. With tactical eclecticism presenting obvious programmatic advantages--postponing agonizing decisions while catering to the diverse needs of students involving themselves for the first time--and given an increase in the numbers of the involved, ambiguities were bound to crystallize into clearer organizational trends. But the developing complexities defy compression in the remaining space. It is to these trends that I shall turn, then, with apologies for the summary fashion in which I must deal with them.

1960-1963: ORGANIZATIONAL TRENDS

1. Civil Rights in the South

Nonviolent direct action campaigns at places of public accommodation intensified and spread throughout early 1961, as Southern Negro campuses were contacted by state SNCC representatives and informed of the seeming efficacy of campus-based activity. And for the first time a Northern-based civil rights organization turned its attention from indigenous possibilities to direct participation in the Southern drama. The Congress on Racial Equality organized the Freedom Rides in the spring and summer of 1961, and Southern direct action reached a fever pitch in response to this show of intersectional solidarity. But where lunch-counters had been desegregated, activity waned, and elsewhere students were still quiescent. SNCC leaders realized the urgency of a serious reconsideration of programs and goals.

Happily, the opportunity for concerted thinking presented itself in the form of

an NSA-directed "Human Relations Seminar" that took place in Atlanta over the summer of 1961. The question was clear: after lunch-counters, what then? Mass involvement among Negro students for the first time made possible consideration of more time-consuming but conceivably more effective approaches to the achievement of change in the South. And change needed to take place at the root of the Southern political system--through the vote, it appeared; change also had to involve the active dedication of those disenfranchised, and thus seemed to require full-time proselytization, and the overcoming of a century's accumulated fear. The fifteen or so participants in the Seminar, thinking along these lines, achieved consensus on a new tactic, voter registration, and on the necessity at least to consider becoming "full-time revolutionaries." "Kids' work," desegregating lunch-counters, was all well and good, but even successes along those lines seemed to contribute little to destroying institutionalized segregation; to do more would require stepping out of the "kid's role." While the fifteen still talked of "going back to school after a year," according to former SNCC Chairman Charles McDew, they "weren't really concerned with that, and sort of knew we just 'wouldn't get around to it.'"

That die having been cast, the seminar graduates acquired allies in the drive to shift SNCC into the realm of voter registration, and succeeded; there seemed to be no alternatives. At the beginning of the school year, then, virtually the entire staff of SNCC moved into the chosen "dry run" town of Macomb, Mississippi. The state-by-state structure was tentatively abandoned, and the seminar graduates and other committed students--almost all Negroes--left school to concentrate on the Macomb registration campaign.

Perhaps it had not been realized that a registration campaign in the Deep South was tantamount to violent insurrection, both in its impact on the forces of civil authority and in the expectations raised in a previously depressed Negro community. In any case, to SNCC's surprise, the campaign sparked a spontaneous march of high school students that culminated in arrests and beatings. SNCC workers suffered the same response to their registration efforts. In a mood of despair they retreated en masse to Atlanta, to lick their wounds and take stock. There, these brutalized and unprepared former students decided that voter registration could not be divorced from direct action, that both were necessary--if not conceptually, then in fact--and that organization should proceed on both bases. This insight bore fruit, and consequently they drew themselves up on their own bootstraps. Field secretaries organized local efforts in both realms, primarily in the most repressive "hard-core" regions of the South, and found a growing willingness on the part of Negro students to leave school and grow local community roots. In each area--Southwest Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Eastern Arkansas, Southern Virginia--SNCC workers inspired collections of ready-to-work Negroes that qualified as "movements," by recruiting and committing local younger people either not in school or willing to "drop out for a while." And from the Greensboro sit-in evolved a SNCC that is today full-time, radical while still eclectic, and accurately describes itself as follows:

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee now consists of representatives of 24 autonomous...groups which are considered the prime expression of the movement....SNCC is not a membership organization, but rather an agency attempting to foster the growth of indigenous protest movements which may then affiliate.

As of August, 1963, SNCC had on its staff 12 office workers, 60 field secretaries, and 121 full time volunteers for a total of 193 staff people. Most of these are Southern students working in rural areas and small cities in Black Belt counties. Some are Northern students who have come South to work with the movement. The average age of staff is 22; 80% of the staff

are Negroes.

The surgery performed on SNCC Chairman John Lewis' Washington speech on August 28 highlighted the radicalization of SNCC, as the remainder of the speech did. This radicalization can be traced to at least two factors. First, as SNCC field secretaries began to bear the full brunt of local law, the Kennedy Administration did almost nothing to protect them; in at least two instances, the Justice Department stepped in to "moderate" a local movement--Greenwood, Mississippi in the spring of 1963, and Albany, Georgia, in August 1963. At the same time SNCC field secretaries were being exposed not only to the traditional police brutality and citizens' harrassment, but to charges such as "criminal anarchy" (Baton Rouge) and "inciting to insurrection," a capital crime in Georgia (Americus, Georgia). Only two responses were possible: withdrawal, or full-faced opposition to the Kennedy Administration. The latter course was taken.

Second, voter registration has been so slow, the institutions of segregation so well entrenched, that alternate levers of power have had to be sought. Concurrent with this search, and with contact with "real people" in local communities, has come a decision that the superficialities of segregation are themselves only symptoms of a far deeper malaise in America, North as well as South; that "white power structures" persist on economic as well as political foundations; that these bases are so interconnected that both must be toppled. It was thus deeply symbolic that a special SNCC mailing after the September 16, 1963 bombing of the Birmingham church ran along the lines of the following paragraphs:

We refuse to accept the idea that it is only the lower class whites who determine the course of racial progress in the Southern states. Rather, it is the silence of the real leadership--economic interests, many of which are located in the North--which encourages racial violence and condones police brutality. On the basis of what we learned last spring, conditions can be expected to remain as they are in Birmingham unless and until the basically Northern economic leadership finds it profitable to exert itself.

We therefore request all friends of Justice and supporters of SNCC to rise in protest of the deplorable absence of responsible action on the part of the city and state officials and the federal government. But especially, we appeal to you and ask that you use every possible means to exert pressure on the corporation executives who control much of Birmingham's economic and racial policies. These industrialists, by their silence and inaction, are supporting the killing of innocent children.

And there followed a list of dozens of corporation directors.

With this radicalization, and its transfer to Northern students who work for SNCC during the summer, comes a probably irreversible decision to continue "full-time"; part-time students simply cannot develop consumer cooperatives in Mississippi, as SNCC will try to do this fall, and many Northerners feel decidedly ill-at-ease upon their return to insulated, calm Northern campuses. At this point many SNCC staff-workers have been "with the movement" for two years; some could not return to Southern schools even if they liked; they are full-time. The Northerners have tried, and still try, to deal with their post-summer frustration by organizing groups to raise money for SNCC, by participating in community civil rights organizations--and, in many cases, by becoming full-time themselves. The dissonance occasioned by the conjunction of police terror and shaded quadrangles has been hard to treat as "business as

usual." From this dissonance sprang the possibility of a student civil rights movement in the North.

2. Civil Rights in the North

The spring 1960 Ann Arbor conference on civilrights in the North had led no further than sympathy and boycott demonstrations, but in the fall of 1961 a group of Boston-area students began to meet to discuss the possibility of a Northern program. Of the most dedicated and influential of this informal group, one was a native white Southern girl, previously active in Southern civil rights organizations, now spending a year at Harvard Divinity School, and another was a Harvard senior who had spent the previous summer around SNCC in Atlanta. The discussions dragged on throughout the fall and winter, finally seeping to New Haven and other college towns in the Northeast. The organizational product was the Northern Student Movement (NSM).

In 1962-1963, NSM's first full academic year, projects were initiated in Boston, New York, Chicago, Albany, N. Y., Philadelphia, and Baltimore; since then, offices have been added in Detroit and Washington. The effort to bridge the gap between the intentions and skills of the full-time student and the needs of the urban ghetto took form in the conception of the tutorial project: students would tutor grade school, junior high school, and high school attending Negro students in subjects inadequately taught in the formal curriculum. In each city at least 100 full-time college students have been tutors; in most, participation has been more spectacularly numerous.

But exposure to the ghetto convinced NSM leaders that the tradition liberal answer, "more education," fell far short of satisfying the most basic unsatisfied needs of tenement residents. Living in the ghettos, as full-time staff members do for the most part, they came to sketch these needs in more sophisticated fashion: politically, the need to participate in the life of the community and to feel effective as a political person; economically, the need for better housing and for jobs; socially, the need to develop individual interests and skills. Consequently, while the tutorial program remains the bulwark of NSM activity in the slums, at least for the full-time students involved, the full-time staff members--who number about forty-five at this writing--have organized rent strikes, a community newspaper, and a Maine-bound expedition to allow scientifically interested children to view the July, 1963 eclipse (Harlem); tried to get jobs for unemployed Negro youths (Baltimore); and in other, still underdeveloped ways tried to build native community organization that can formulate and act on radical demands and develop latent skills.

NSM has had to face, and is still facing, the problems that brought SNCC to a standstill in the spring and summer of 1961. In the first place, while some NSM projects--notably the Harlem Education Project--have succeeded in mobilizing native youths into full-time staff positions, most have not; over-concentration on the tutorials has given staff members insufficient time and energy to expend on bulldozing the wall dividing the intellectual and the community. Second, NSM has often been hard pressed to distinguish itself from social work projects, to translate the radicalism instilled in its leadership's brains and hearts by the ghetto experience into concrete programs. Third, even presently full-time staff members have difficulty accepting the assertion of one NSM leader that the achievement of social change in the slums requires a "lifetime commitment." Whether NSM succeeds in resolving these wrenching questions is problematical; but at least these questions are out in the open, where the considerable talent of the committed can be applied to th

3. Peace

SPU membership grew above 1000 over the academic year 1961-1962, as morally-concerned students, mainly younger undergraduates and high school students, responded to the organization's visibility on a growing number of campuses. The organization's geographical distribution became more uniform over the country. SPU program persisted, relatively unchanging.

TOCSIN, again to talk about the campus peace group I know most about, reached its peak membership in the winter of 1961-1962, at least nominally numbering 175 of an undergraduate student body of about 5000. (There were never more than half a dozen graduate members.) Members were fairly evenly divided among the four classes in the Colleges, with Radcliffe participation significantly higher in proportion than that at Harvard proper. The ambivalences sketched above persisted. There were more research projects, more forums, more debates; and yet, it was preparation for the Washington Demonstration of February 16-17, 1962, that brought new members flocking, at least temporarily, into the organization.

The idea for the Demonstration had been spawned at Harvard at the beginning of November, 1961, and a committee of representatives from five or six Boston-area college peace groups formed to develop the notion and garner support from other groups. By the end of December, co-sponsorship had been agreed upon by the SPU, Student SANE, SDS, and the Young People's Socialist League; and a number of unaffiliated campus groups as well had gone to work to gather demonstrators. But in several ways the demonstration was stamped with the "personalities" of the organizations most instrumental in its inauguration and most active in its planning--TOCSIN and the SPU.

In the first place, the form of the demonstration was distinctly dichotomous. The 4000 students who participated both days lobbied with their Representatives and Senators, and with Administration officials, many having spent the previous weekend training their arguments in regional seminars; they also picketed the White House. They argued the fine points of nuclear testing, civil defense, Soviet intentions, and poverty in the underdeveloped world with elected representatives most of whom either listened politely or told them they were "filled with baloney" (Rep. Chet Holifield, D., Cal.); they marched to Arlington Cemetery, where a representative of the group read a statement calling for disarmament "so that the Unknown Soldier shall not have died in vain."

Second, the agreed-upon policy statement for the demonstration reflected the tug between moral and military argumentation, although both were clearly in opposition to arms policies of the Kennedy Administration. For example, on the issue of nuclear testing, the eight-page policy statement contained both of the following excerpts:

For a government to endanger the lives of tens of thousands of people by the commission of an act to which they have not consented is profoundly immoral.

....

The only significant argument that has thus far been advanced in the defense of testing concerns the development of an effective antimissile missile. But no one has shown that as a result of tests the Soviet Union can develop such a missile; or that United States testing would bring this country significantly closer to its development. The crucial problems are not ones that will be solved through nuclear testing. Distinguishing actual missiles from decoys and aiming U. S. antimissile missiles--these are problems which would have to be solved before the United States need even consider testing. At present

they do not appear to be soluble.

Interestingly, almost the entire policy statement, which runs rife with such startling contrasts, was written by TOCSIN members; the dichotomy in argumentation was due, then, not so much to SPU "pressure" as to the conflict within TOCSIN itself--implicit though it may have been--and even within the minds of its leadership.

Still, the Washington Demonstration marked the apex of TOCSIN's influence as a voice for moderation, extended liberalism as opposed to radicalism, and "conversation with power" in the student peace configuration. Almost uniformly the lobbying failed to convert; military arguments were hard to polish; what then was the percentage in memorizing them? At most the SPU tolerated TOCSIN expertise, although they undertook more serious research after the Demonstration than before. And TOCSIN leaders themselves began to shift emphasis from "beating the Administration at its own game" to searching for alternative power centers within the society. For the next eight months TOCSIN then concentrated on securing and performing speaking engagements before local unions, business, church, women's, and other community associations, although they were still not clear about their objectives: were they seeking to create insurgent political forces, or to generate public opinion "permission" for Administration policies closer to their preferences? The dialogue went on, unresolved; so did the speaking program. But again--how many members could be trained to be expert speakers? Happily, the campaign of TOCSIN faculty adviser H. Stuart Hughes for the United States Senate came along in time to provide the promise of work for as many students wanted it, and about 300 TOCSIN members and sympathizers participated in the campaign in one capacity or another. But the campaign culminated in the Cuban crisis of October, 1962, and Hughes pulled only about 2.5% of the Senatorial vote. This combination of blows set TOCSIN adrift from its past, and it has not yet reached the shore.

While the Cuban crisis demoralized most TOCSIN members despite the existence of at least a thousand dissenters at Harvard, it sent SPU membership soaring above 3000, from which the figure has since dropped. Both organizations confront the same dilemma: if one is disaffected from the Administration, one must seek an alternative agency of change--but where is it, and how does one connect to it? The dilemma is particularly acute for TOCSIN, which after the Cuban crisis virtually abandoned any residual faith in the amenability of the Administration to its suggestions. Whether either organization will be able to find creatively different tactics and strategies sufficient to capitalize on eased East-West relations and yet distinguish themselves from the Administration; whether they will be able to provide the sense of community and participation to be found in the civil rights movement--these are open questions today.

4. The Right

YAF membership grew from 10,000 at the end of its first academic year (June, 1961) to 20,000 in June, 1962, to 25,000 in June, 1963. Still approximately 60% of these members are students, about 40% "community members." Membership turnover has been about one-third each year, probably higher than the corresponding figure on the Left. YAF has considerably widened its geographical base from its Eastern beginnings, and today nearly every state is represented. But the organization is not strong in the South.

Perhaps this is because the organization has steadily strived to enhance its "respectability," to the point of having driven many John Birchers, Southern racists, and followers of General Edwin Walker from it. At Harvard, for example, the YAF chapter voted to change its name to the Harvard Conservative Club, and altered its emphasis to one more intellectual and less reactive to hubbub on the Left.

YAF activities are still less sustained than those in SNCC and NSM, so that it is able to draw extensively on conservative students targeted on professional futures. Still, YAF's greatest appeal seems to be to freshmen and sophomores; many members leave active status as they come to attend to their studies, in order that their futures not vanish willy-nilly. While the Goldwater campaign can be expected to draft many more conservatives into active membership in YAF, nothing on YAF's horizon will transmute YAF into anything different from a part-time organization awaiting a future of part-time adult conservative politics.

5. An Integration of Radical Politics

As participants in single-issue student politics on the Left have come to appreciate the complexity of their chosen issues--realized, for example, the importance of last summer's domestic discord in the President's thrust toward detente with the Soviet Union; the importance of the economic problems of disarmament; the critical character of the economy in determining the possibility of employment for Negroes--as these ramifications have become clearer, large numbers of these students have come to see SDS as a vehicle for the integration of their respective movements.

Through 1960, 1961, and early 1962, SDS concentrated on solidifying its small base in New York and its budding chapters and clusters on about twenty campuses across the country. From discussion-group beginnings, the organization built a reputation as a collection of activists in the various movements nonetheless trying to formulate a social philosophy and strategy that would insist that seemingly disparate social issues be generated together--that would formulate the common political, economic, and philosophical roots of peace, civil rights, and economic justice. Like other organizations on the Left, SDS pursued a wide variety of tactics, from participation in New York reform politics to organizing conferences on university reform to publishing papers on aspects of social change to demonstrating. Autonomous chapters would focus on particular threads in the network of issues according to local circumstances, but would stay in touch with others through SDS publications. Gradually both college students and graduates felt their way into the organization, primarily to keep in touch with its thinking.

A June, 1962 Convention concreted this thinking in a sixty-odd page document called "The Port Huron Statement," which argued the interconnection of the issues and propounded a social goal in the form of "participatory democracy," individual participation in the decisions that affect one's life. The enthusiasm emanating from that Convention spurred organizational growth into the hundreds, and committed members so that fully 20% of the membership attended the June, 1963 Convention. The production of this Convention was still another document, this one analyzing present and future America from a radical standpoint and seeing the possibility of social change from the grass roots in the unorganized but vigorous outbursts of "local insurgencies" around the country in party politics, civil rights, the "peace campaigns" of 1962, and even the rustle of political consciousness

among some pockets of unemployed. The document urged radical students to initiate and participate actively in these "local insurgencies," and the membership has responded in remarkable fashion. For already by June 1963 many members were active in the various movements.

The last Convention generated excitement, as the Port Huron statement does, because of its unabashed espousal of a set of values revolving around participatory democracy, and the often anguish-ful attempts of members to find niches separate from neither the academic nor the larger community. SDS focus on the cold war as symptom of societal malaise and as systematic wrong seems to strike responsive chords; as, indeed, did even the minimal emphasis in the Washington Demonstration policy statement on the wrongness of the cold war. Thus a new kind of morality is circulating through the organization and into the older organizations with the single peace concern; and there are indications that even the mass of privatized inactive students are not unsympathetic, perhaps because the cold war is growing tiresome and for the first time seems conceivably finite in duration.

In an attempt to institutionalize the place of economic issues in the repertory of activist students on the Left, SDS has just established an Economic Research and Action Project, whose branches convey a sense of the organization's conceptual spread: it will publish pamphlets and a newsletter on economic issues aimed particularly at activist students in civil rights and peace groups; it has sent a staff member to Chicago to attempt organizational work with white unemployed youths; it will publish a pamphlet on the merger of civil rights and economic issues in Cambridge, Maryland, written by Swarthmore members who worked there last summer--and attempt to organize an action project on both ends of the issue for next summer; it is sponsoring some members' efforts to involve students in North Carolina in union organizing; it will organize campus conferences on the integration of social issues.

The full- versus part-time issue has intruded into SDS as well, with no resolution in sight. But, interestingly, the dialogue on methods and places continues internally among SNCC workers and teaching fellows, labor organizers and graduate students, ghetto residents and political theorists. Among the nearly 1000 members, the search for "radical vocation" unites high school students and graduate students. That this search is no longer shied away from, and related moreover to the acceptance of a thorough and radical analysis of the current situation, is auspicious for the organization, although the "afterlife" is still by no means certain. Bearing in mind, though, that campus organization after campus organization has been crippled by the inability of members to conceive of a post-graduate follow-up, the eagerness of SDS members to grapple with the monster may be significant indeed.

6. Some Closing Remarks

How one more year of complexity will shape this multi-faceted constellation is anyone's guess. One can be fairly certain, though, that, while active student involvement in political organizations will not exceed the 15% mark (the Harvard peak, if one includes Young Democrats and Young Republicans), the involved ones will continue to feel the tensions alluded to in the preceding pages: that between, "in" and "out" politics, between full- and part-time participation, between the intellect and the heart. If, however, American society continues to be shaken by internal disorder and change, it seems likely that larger numbers of students will come to question the

personal utility of traditional post-graduate slots, to see the possibility of personal efficacy in a framework of organizational effectiveness, to come into student organizations with an eye on their post-graduate extensions. And while the debate on the nature of those extensions continues, so will the activity, so will the eclecticism, so will the assertion of values, so will the attempt to overcome the distance of the intellectual from his society. As students of Japanese, Russian, or Latin American societies and futures have come to study the politics of their students, so will students of the American fabric need to their eyes on the developing student movement.

Todd Gitlin
September, 1963

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