

BEYOND  
PRAYERS  
TO AN  
UNJUST  
KING

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Both tactically and ideologically, the peace movement must begin to develop a revolutionary position vis-a-vis American society. It is becoming increasingly clear that peace cannot be attained unless some fundamental change is first effected within American society, that there is something about the functioning of the American "system" that does not permit it to respond other than violently to the yearnings of the people it oppresses. The news dispatches coming out of Bolivia are word for word the dispatches that came out of Vietnam five years ago. Nothing will change unless somehow the roots are changed.

In his new book Containment and Change, Carl Oglesby devotes a chapter to the phenomenology of revolution, a discussion of the changes an individual goes through as he comes to adopt the revolutionary position. One of the early stages is that of prayer and petition, the appeal to an authority higher than that which confronts the individual directly and oppressively. The form of appeal is incantatory quasi-religious; "if he only knew ..." Thus, if the sheriff is "the man" the king can be appealed to to set things straight. If Bull Connor is busting your head, just put in a call to John Kennedy and everything will be all right. One assumes there is a repository of justice as yet untapped.

Clearly, there is now something wrong with this assumption, and we in the peace movement are just beginning to come to grips with that sad fact of American life. The incantatory petition to just authority -- the April 15th march is a prime example -- will not change things, will not end the war in Vietnam, will not forestall the wars in Thailand, Bolivia, etc. It will reorient neither an economically expansionist foreign policy, nor a vigorously inequitable domestic policy. The reason, stated too simply, is that there is no just king ... or president. One cannot appeal to a repository of justice that does not exist. The incantation of protest must become resistance if we are to avoid the cooptation, invisibility and sheer impotence that have, up to now, been our experience with regard to the war and the whole issue of the garrison society in America.

There is, however, one potential repository of justice, and that is the people. The question then becomes: how do we reach the people? How do we tap the justice of the streets? There is no easy answer, for unjust kings have a way of convincing their people that injustice is justice. Values, after all, are not developed in a vacuum. Generally, they emerge not so much from the apparent needs of those who hold the economic and political power as from the needs of a society as from the apparent needs of those who hold the economic and political power in that society. A serf remains a serf not because of the

gun at his back, but because he has been taught and convinced that serfdom is his just and equitable lot in life.

How do we break through these lies and fictions to tap the latent responsiveness of a just people. Clearly, long term projects of community organization and radical education are necessary. This kind of education must respond to but go beyond issues of economic class. Most Americans do not live in poverty, but still are viciously gnawed at by the economic and social organization of their lives. There is an obvious uneasiness and discontent among the American people and it relates to the quality of their lives, not only to the amount of bread on their tables. Clearly, the issues are related. The Capitalist-Calvinist ethic is as much responsible for the emptiness of upper and middle class life as it is for the reactionary uneasiness of lower middle class life, as it is for the suffering and dire poverty of "under class" life, as it is for the breakdown of order in Vietnam, Bolivia, and Detroit. Our 12,000 American brothers who have died in Vietnam are as much the victim of the functioning of the American economy and social indifferences as are the countless hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese who suffer by our hand, as are the thousands of ghetto children who daily face rats and roaches, as are the middle class school boys who measure their lives by the number of things they possess, and so on down the line. If all the issues can be clarified and tied together by competent community organizers, if viable courses of action can be charted by an organized people, we will again see America moving in the direction of justice and democracy. In the long run, there is no substitute for solid organization and education.

But there are some short run contingencies we must also consider. As the United States is confronted by one revolution after another its reaction becomes more and more apocalyptic and insane. We must act, and act soon, before we are all consumed by the holocaust. The terrible urgency of the situation asks for organization and something more. It asks for some immediate well chosen direct action, even while our numbers are relatively small. It asks, that the various radical movements move into a tactically militant phase. We believe that this phase should attempt to actually stop the process of mass destruction. Within America two conditions can lead us to that end: 1) a confrontation and partial polarization of forces and 2) a disruption of the normal day to day pattern of American life.

### CONFRONTATION

Each time in recent years, there has been a public confrontation around the

issues of the war and the draft, the anti-war movement has gained ground. In the Levy case, for example, a good deal more support was mobilized behind Dr. Levy than behind the army. Realizing this, the army and the various powers have attempted to ignore and play down the many ripples (and occasional waves) of discontent. It is precisely our job to play them up. Confrontation from a position of strength can affect a polarization to our side while perhaps splitting the opposition into various factions. And even if the opposition is not split but pulled together by our confrontation, the current acquiescence of the American people is just about tantamount to full support of the war. By moving people off the fence, by drawing the lines more clearly, we can only strengthen our side, for to move from the acquiescent middle to the reactionary right is in the context of 1967 America not to move at all. Thus while confrontation is not by itself educational, it does serve to tap an already existing will of cynicism and discontent and can help to lay the groundwork for a concerted program of long term education. Here, the draft is a particularly good issue around which to force a meaningful confrontation. It is feeding the war in Vietnam. It is the direct source of felt oppression among young men. The draft as an institution replicates in miniature much of what American radicals have long directed their energies against. A strong confrontation around the issue of the draft can serve to make the movement strongly visible to the public at large and attractive to a large community of young men. At the same time, it can serve as one of many excellent focal points around which to mount a powerful radical movement.

### DISRUPTION

Flowing from the logic of confrontation comes the logic of disruption. We know that periods of crisis can frequently serve to stimulate growth. At the very least, they can stimulate changes in direction. Certainly, if the normal day to day pattern of American life were sufficiently disrupted, people in large numbers would have to begin thinking about their lives and the nature of the society around them. At least the question "why are things breaking down?" would have to be asked over and over again. People and societies have a hard time existing out of equilibrium. If we can succeed in breaking the emptiness of the current equilibrium of American society, a new equilibrium will have to be found, and we radicals must seize the opportunity to shape the new direction. Militant confrontation and certain kinds of well thought out civil disobedience can help to bring this about.

## THE RESISTANCE

Members of the Resistance are now organizing in about ten states. On October 16, 1967, we will publicly and collectively return our draft cards to the Selective Service System in several major cities throughout the country. On this date we want to provoke a confrontation with the SSS and through the political, visible nature of the act, engage those around us: community, student, and professional groups. Intelligently planned, the action on October 16 will not happen in a vacuum. It is only the top of an iceberg.

First, the more general counseling oriented approach to draft resistance provides an indispensable environment for Resistance actions like October 16: where are we to find non-cooperators if not among those who have been introduced to the concept through counseling groups? The orientation of draft counseling is important, however. At this point we need to depart from the counselor/client service approach. If draft counseling is to be relevant to resistance it must be made political. Not "we will get you out of the army" but "if your misgivings are political, how do you plan to resist?"

Secondly, the meaning of our action must be made crystal clear to the community at large. The action must take place conjointly with some vigorous long-range community organization. This is where the educational process comes in. The issues must be painstakingly tied together. Non-cooperation must be seen in its larger context: a seizing of control of our own lives and a conscious effort to redirect the movement of American society.

Thirdly, the action in October and others like it will be effective only if it is merely the focus through which further confrontations are generated. It cannot be a one-shot affair. It can only work if it is a moment of "critical mass" through which we channel our energies.

What would this process look like? Again, no one knows, but the Resistance is planning in terms of something like the following: on October 16, those who have committed themselves to the Resistance will return their cards as a group to an appropriate official -- perhaps the Federal Marshall in their city or area. For maximum visibility, support groups will join us in demonstrations as massive as can be mounted in the various areas. Perhaps there will be disruption and civil disobedience. On organizational details, each group must feel out its own area.

At this point, many will have declared their intention to resist. What follows? How does this intention play itself out in terms of a movement? It is crucial to emphasize that we in the Resistance are not attempting to organize

a slaughter of the innocents. What we do want to help organize -- with the cooperation of groups and individuals sharing our sense of urgency -- is a series of confrontations, growing directly out of the action on October 16. These confrontations will take place at every point Selective Service seeks to act.

If the government tries to ignore us, we will have to provoke confrontations. Contingency plans will be worked out in detail. Inevitably, some, if not all of us will be brought to trial. In each case, the legal process will be used as a means of provoking further confrontations. Again, visibility and disruption. Again, more new participants.

In conclusion, the Resistance must place itself firmly in the context of American radical politics. We all seem to share a crucial assumption: that people who have no fundamental stake in an essentially authoritarian corporate system will be responsive to a confrontation which challenges that system. American radical politics is in another period of transition, from protest to resistance. Thus, we of the Resistance feel that a strong, militant anti-draft movement along the lines sketched above, can be the source of confrontation which can focus the latent responsiveness of the American people. Success, however, presupposes coordinated organization now. This means that those presently involved in viable regional draft resistance programs must come to terms with the need for resistance in a concrete and open fashion. Now. Let us, together, go beyond prayers to an unjust king.

This paper was prepared by members of the New York City Resistance



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