

A Further Alarm Signal from Chicago

An Open Letter from Fred Halstead

(Dec. 15, 1969)

Subject: Violent physical attacks on movement offices and persons by an ultraright white racist group operating with apparent immunity from police in Chicago and DeKalb, Illinois.

Dear Friends,

A situation exists in Northern Illinois which could have very serious consequences for all sections of the movement for social progress in this country. While at this stage the danger is not comparable in degree to what has happened to the Black Panthers or at the Chicago conspiracy trial, it is part of the same general picture.

A clandestine ultraright group calling itself the Legion of Justice and claiming to be composed of "young men who have served or will serve in the Armed Forces" has declared that those who organize antiwar activities are "guilty of treason," that no law protects such "traitors," and that the Legion of Justice will punish them physically.

The group has conducted several raids using Mace and bludgeons on movement offices inflicting injuries which required hospital treatment, and has stolen materials in these raids. It has then publicly announced some of these raids through an attorney who serves as the underground organization's public spokesman. This attorney has been a leading figure in racist counterdemonstrations against school integration and open housing.

So far as is now known the armed robberies have taken place in the Chicago Eugene V. Debs Hall shared by the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance, the Chicago offices of Newsreel (a movement film service) and a DeKalb, Illinois apartment near the Northern Illinois University campus where three YSA members live. The Legion has also made death threats against Richard Hill, the SWP organizer in Chicago. So far the most serious attacks by this group have been aimed at the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance. But known members of the Legion have been seen at meetings or halls of the IWW and the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the group has been active around the Chicago Circle campus of the U. of I. as well as at NIU.

The most serious aspect of the situation is that the group has carried out violent illegal acts under immunity from the Chicago and DeKalb police departments. Indeed these departments have harassed the victims instead of moving against the criminals.

The Legion claims to have 125 members in the Chicago area and 450 nationally. This is no doubt exaggerated and we do not know if the activities of the group go beyond Northern Illinois. But we do know that in the prevailing situation in the Chicago area, with immunity from the police and with the atmosphere created by Vice President Agnew's speeches and other Administration attempts to whip up a new witchhunt hysteria, such movements can grow and become a very serious threat to civil liberties and the ability of movement organizations to operate unless they are countered effectively and quickly.

I am writing this letter because there is every indication that physical attacks, either by this or similar groups, will continue, and that they will hit not only those already attacked but other groups in the movement as well.

The facts as I know them are as follows:

The situation first came to my attention Nov. 1, 1969 when I was in Chicago at a demonstration sponsored by the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam in support of the "Conspiracy Eight". While this demonstration was in progress, an attack took place on Debs Hall at 302 S. Canal St. which is shared by the Chicago branch of the Socialist Workers Party and the Chicago local of the Young Socialist Alliance. Because of the demonstration only one person from each of these groups was in the hall at the time: Tom Dengler, of the SWP; and Derek Jeffers, a young YSA member. In addition, two members of the Illinois Black Panther Party -- Eugene Charles and a young woman whose name I do not know -- were looking at literature in the Debs Hall bookshop.

At about 2 PM Dengler heard someone in the hallway outside the meeting hall and went to look. He saw about a dozen persons near the door in the process of

putting on stocking masks. As soon as they were seen they burst into the room, hitting Dengler with a blackjack. They used a Mace-like chemical spray, clubs and blackjacks to overpower the other occupants. They then took some files, tape recordings and a cash box, and left. The entire attack lasted only a few minutes. Jeffers required several stitches to close a wound in the head. The attack was reported to the police.

More than a week later, on Nov. 11, the morning papers carried notice of a press conference to be held the next day called by attorney S. Thomas Sutton who said materials "liberated" from a "communist headquarters" would be displayed to the press. Sutton is well known in the Chicago area as a spokesman for racist groups opposed to integrated schools or neighborhoods. He was a founder and president of Operation Crescent, an all-white suburban property-owners' group opposed to open housing legislation, which boasted of supplying "battle kits" to its demonstrators. One of Operation Crescent's demands was to deny the right to vote to welfare recipients.

On Nov. 12 the press conference was held at the Sherman House hotel. Sutton sat at a table on which was displayed some of the material stolen from Debs Hall. At least one plainclothes Chicago police officer was present taking notes. The Nov. 13 Chicago Sun Times carried the following account of what Sutton said at the press conference:

"These are liberated records," the attorney began telling reporters Wednesday. 'They were liberated Nov. 1 when a special strike force of the Legion of Justice visited the offices of the Young Socialist Alliance at 302 S. Canal.'

"You mean this is stolen property?" asked a reporter.

"No. It's liberated," replied Sutton, attorney for the Legion, and then he explained:

"Eight Legionnaires went to the Socialist offices where a most unfortunate incident occurred; to the surprise of the Legionnaires, members of the Black Panther Party were present.

"There was a meaningful physical dialog," he said in which two Black Panther members and two Young Socialist Alliance members 'were floored,' before the strike force 'gathered together certain designated material and documents of treason.'

"But isn't that considered breaking the law?' queried another reporter.

"We find that there is no law that can protect a traitor,' Sutton said."

Persons present at the press conference say the article quotes Sutton accurately. Sutton also said the Legion of Justice is a secret organization which has been carrying on "visits" to peace group offices since February, that it had "liberated" film from the offices of Newsreel, and that the press was invited to a "public burning" of the film, tapes and literature Nov. 15 in Civic Center Plaza. (This burning of film actually took place and the police did nothing.) Present at the Nov. 12 press conference were several SWP and YSA members who attended after reading the notice in the paper. Richard Hill, organizer of the Chicago SWP, and Carl Finamore, organizer of the Chicago YSA, listened to Sutton and then demanded he and those with him be arrested in connection with the attack on Debs Hall. The police present did nothing.

Sutton then ordered two young men with him to pick up the stolen material and leave. They were followed by Hill, Finamore and the reporters and finally after Hill insisted in front of the press some uniformed police outside the press conference room took the whole group to the police station. There Hill was allowed to file charges only against the two young men actually carrying the stolen material, Thomas K. Stewart and Edward R. Cozzi. Incidentally, Stewart was recognized at the time as having been around the YSA hall several times last spring. The police insisted that only misdemeanor charges of possession of stolen property of a small value could be filed against the two. The police would not charge Sutton, who acted as lawyer for his cohorts and was on friendly first-name terms with a number of cops in the station. The police did not question Sutton about his admission that he knew of "eight Legionnaires" who had participated in the armed robbery and assault at Debs Hall Nov. 1.

Contrast this treatment of Sutton and his cohorts with that of the slain Black Panther Fred Hampton who had been arrested, charged with serious felonies and sent to prison for two years for allegedly "liberating" \$70 worth of ice cream and distributing it to children.

On Nov. 13, SWP organizer Richard Hill, on advice of a lawyer, finally succeeded in filing charges against Sutton for "constructive possession of stolen property." The next day a young man named

Greg Shultz came to Debs Hall. Greg Shultz was recognized as a friend of Tom Stewart, one of the Legion of Justice members who had appeared at the press conference, and he was asked to leave the hall in a polite fashion. At no time did anyone lay a finger on him. But on Nov. 20, the police served a warrant on Richard Hill and Carl Finamore charging them with illegal restraint and assault and battery on Shultz. Hill and Finamore were arrested, held for five hours and released after posting \$500 bail for each charge. The process of making the victims the criminals and the criminals the victims was well under way.

Thursday Dec. 4 was the day Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were killed by a gang of Chicago cops who burst into Hampton's apartment in the early morning. That night, about 9 PM some thirty police rushed into Debs Hall, many with drawn guns. They said they had received calls that a gun battle with automatic weapons was going on at the hall. They proceeded to search the hall "looking for guns," they said. They found nothing and after questioning people and taking names they left.

This incident has a very insidious character. Undoubtedly the cops did get such calls. Indeed several SWP officials in other cities also received calls about the same time from persons claiming to be Richard Hill and Carl Finamore and saying that they had just been Maced and shot in the Chicago hall, and could help be sent. It doesn't take too much imagination to see that those who placed the false calls were very likely hoping that some incident would occur at Debs Hall when the cops arrived which would start them shooting, or at least that they would find unregistered weapons there which would give them an excuse to place serious charges against persons in the hall. In light of the previous attack, it is not too much to assume that the Legion of Justice perpetrated this hoax on the assumption that the SWPers and YSAers might have armed their headquarters and would thus be sitting ducks for the Chicago police in the atmosphere immediately following Hampton's killing.

The fact that this occurred the evening of Dec. 4, the day before Legion of Justice members Stewart and Cozzi were to appear in court on the charges filed by SWP organizer Hill, is also of some significance. For a pattern or harassment against Hill has developed with the clear intention of attempting to get him to drop charges. In court Dec. 5 the case against Stewart and Cozzi was postponed until early January.

On Dec. 6, a gang of men, dressed and armed in the same fashion of those who attacked the hall in Chicago, broke into

the apartment of YSA members in DeKalb Illinois near the campus of Northern Illinois University, threatening the lives of the students there and demanding the books and records of the YSA. One of the YSAers, Ray Hamilton, was struck in the head with a tire iron and required several stitches. All of the students were sprayed with Mace and had to be taken to the hospital for treatment. One of the invaders was knocked down and hurt in the scuffle and the group left quickly and emptyhanded.

In a manner similar to that of the Chicago police, the DeKalb police, when they arrived on the scene, directed their actions toward making the victims appear to be the criminals -- the police called the housing authority at this late hour to have an inspector come down and search for code violations. They searched the ashtrays and rifled through the literature, some of which they seized -- illegally in the absence of the tenants and without receipts or warrant. These actions by the police were witnessed by the landlady, Mrs. Zana Hepperly, who had called the police immediately upon hearing the attackers strike, and by a friend of hers, Prof. Sean Shesgreen, whom she also called to the scene.

The University community was aroused by this incident and an appeal to the President of the University for action against this attack was signed by the officers of the Student Government and other student leaders, including the officers of the Young Democrats, Young Republicans, Young Americans for Freedom, the Student Mobilization Committee, the American Federation of Teachers at NIU, as well as the Young Socialist Alliance.

Meanwhile, in Chicago SWP organizer Richard Hill on Dec. 7 received phone calls from persons identifying themselves as from the Legion of Justice and saying: "We missed you in DeKalb, if you don't get out of town we'll bump you off." On the night of Dec. 9 a threatening note attached to two Legion of Justice leaflets was taped to Hill's apartment door. This material has been turned over to the police. Copies are enclosed.

In addition to the above information, the following additional details have come to my attention:

On Nov. 14, Thomas Sutton appeared in DeKalb to lead a pro-war march by an "ad hoc group of pro-Americans" on the NIU campus. About 45 people marched. This places Sutton as actively involved in the DeKalb area before the physical attack by the Legion in DeKalb.

The first public mention of the Legion of Justice I can find is in a leaflet distributed last May at the U. of I.

Circle Campus in Chicago advertising a May 5 meeting at which S. Thomas Sutton was the featured speaker. The leaflet lists Sutton as "Director of the Legion of Justice," and says he will be "escorted by the Cicero Brigade of the Legion." A student who attended the meeting reports that among the "escorts" was one Sam J. Oleinick (also known as Cicero Sam) who gained notoriety as a leader in the physical attacks against the open housing marches led by Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1966.

Another piece of evidence tying Oleinick with Sutton and the Legion is that Oleinick and Sutton's young cohort, Thomas Stewart, were arrested and charged with vandalism while posting Legion of Justice leaflets at the NIU campus in DeKalb last Sept. 22. Sutton served as their lawyer and they were acquitted. The record of their presence together in DeKalb and a copy of the leaflet they were posting is on file at the DeKalb police department.

Oleinick has a record of violent activities against liberal and radical groups. He was arrested March 19, 1969 at the Wright Campus of Chicago City College for throwing eggs during a meeting at which Bernadine Dohrn, then organizational secretary of SDS, and Dr. Robert Shaffer, dean of students at Indiana University were speakers. Much more serious, Oleinick fired arrows from a crossbow into the First Lutheran Church of Berwyn (a Chicago suburb) May 25, 1969 (according to Chicago Sun Times, 12/12/69). The church basement is used as a coffee house and gathering place for young people. The arrows had Minuteman leaflets stuck to them. Oleinick and a companion were arrested because a witness took their license plate number as they drove from the scene. Oleinick pled guilty and was let off with 1 year probation and a \$500 fine even though he showed himself by this act to be a potential assassin. A man answering Oleinick's description has been seen observing several peace movement meetings recently. Written evidence exists that he came to the IWW hall in Chicago on August 7 asking questions and asking to see the files. He said he was interested in joining and filled out an application for membership. After the IWW discovered who he was and wrote him asking for an explanation, he did not return to the office.

The ubiquitous Thomas Stewart and a man answering Oleinick's description were also seen at a neighborhood peace conference sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation Nov. 8, 1969, at the First Presbyterian Church of Oak Park.

All of this indicate quite clearly that a violent and consciously fascist group -- the Legion of Justice -- involving some older, experienced members of ultraright white racist groups and some youth is operating in Northern Illinois with a pattern of violent, illegal attacks on antiwar groups, that it has openly boasted of such illegal activity and is preparing further attacks, and that it is carrying out this illegal, violent activity with immunity from the police. In addition, a part of the pattern is to attempt to entrap the victims of this violence into further victimization by the police. Indeed the prejudice of the police against the innocent and peaceful victims of these attacks is so strong that the effect is one of complicity. Such is the state of "law and order" in Chicago and DeKalb.

The purpose of this letter is to make you aware of the facts in this situation, to alert the movement about the dangers, and to urge any organization attacked or threatened by this or similar groups to respond quickly with exposure, both of the attackers and of any police complicity. The SWP and YSA are presently consulting lawyers in preparation for a broad legal and public defense against these attacks.

We also ask that messages be sent to the mayors of Chicago and DeKalb and to the president of Northern Illinois University at DeKalb demanding that the illegal, violent activities of the Legion of Justice be stopped and that the police departments which have allowed this publicly avowed illegal activity to continue be investigated and called to order.

I would appreciate copies of such messages.

Sincerely,



Fred Halstead
Socialist Workers Party
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New York, N.Y. 10003

COPY

COPY

COPY

LEGION OF JUSTICE

OCTOBER RESOLUTION

WE who have served, we who will serve in the Armed Forces of the United States have been betrayed by many of our political leaders, religious leaders, academic leaders and by the American people.

We have witnessed parades in which the Viet Cong flag is displayed with impunity, accompanied by chants calling for the victory of our enemies.

We have witnessed the exhibiting of films produced in the enemies capitol showing the deaths, beatings and humiliation of American military personnel while the audience cheers and laughs. In many cases, the films were exhibited on our Nation's college campuses and in church buildings.

We have witnessed leaders of various peace organizations visit the capitol of the enemy to give aid and comfort to the enemy and urge the defeat of our people.

We have witnessed leaders of these alleged peace groups wearing jewelry fashioned from metal of American planes shot down by our enemies, which in most cases, the occupants died agonizing deaths in flames.

We call upon all parents whose sons have been killed in Viet Nam, all parents whose sons are now held prisoners, all parents whose sons are now serving or soon will serve in the Armed Forces of the United States to demand that treason be punished.

We call upon the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Am-Vets to lead in the fight to demand that treason be punished.

We call upon all the American people, who in their apathy and selfishness have tolerated the spectacle of Americans cheering the deaths and the humiliation of our young men sent to die on foreign soil to demand that treason be punished.

RICHARD HILL HAS
BEEN FOUND GUILTY
OF TREASON.

TREASON MUST BE PUNISHED
AND BELIEVE US TREASON
WILL BE PUNISHED!

WE MISSED YOU IN YOUR OFFICE.
WE MISSED YOU IN DE KALB.
WE MISSED YOU AT HOME.
WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU
RICH.

PEACE

CALL TO ACTION

UNIVERSITY OF ~~E~~ ILLINOIS - CIRCLE CAMPUS

HEAR S. THOMAS SUTTON

PROMINENT ATTORNEY

AND DIRECTOR - LEGION OF JUSTICE

AND ESCORTED BY THE CICERO
BRIGADE OF THE LEGION

WILL SPEAK ON

HOW ELITE WHITE STUDENTS
CAN ORGANIZE AND TRAIN TO DEFEAT
S.D.S. "SLUM" AND BLACK RACISTS AT
THEIR OWN REVOLUTION - WITH THEIR TACTICS.

WE ARE TIRED OF SPINELESS, DEGENERATE
BASTARDS TURNING OUR CAMPUS OVER TO
INTELLECTUAL VOMIT.

IF YOU ARE TIRED OF ASSOCIATING WITH
EMASCULATED APPEASERS AND WANT TO JOIN A
COMPANY OF MEN - THE TRUE VANGUARD OF THE
FUTURE - THIS MEETING IS FOR YOU!!!

DATE MONDAY - MAY 5TH AT 2:00 PM
ROOM F-4

ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK.

YOUNG AMERICANS FOR FREEDOM
AND
LEGION OF JUSTICE