

(Last Harass
P.O. Box 2994, Hill Station
Augusta, Georgia)
29 November 1968

Student Mobilization Committee
857 Broadway, Room 307
New York, New York, 10003

Dear Howie,

We have just received your letter dated Nov. 21, 1968. We are in disbelief that you have used the name Last Harass as in support of your conference. To sum up events and our reasons for this disbelief: an individual connected with Last Harass was contacted by phone by you on Nov. 14. Apparently you mentioned that a conference was to be held and to be sponsored by Mobe and wanted to know if this person thought such a thing was a good idea. This person, not knowing the history of Mobe or even the purpose of the conference, indicated that it seemed like a good idea to him. We do not know how you were made aware of his name or how you would assume that he was the decision making body of the Last Harass, but we're sure you'll understand our desire to make use of democracy in our organization. When he informed the staff of the Last Harass of your phone call, we collectively decided not to support the conference at that time and immediately sent a letter to you indicating that we did not do so and requested further information on the conference. We have yet to receive that information except for your recent letter that tells a little more but also informs us that you have already sent out literature with our organization in support of the conference. To quote from your letter dated 21 Nov., "Your paper, LAST HARASS, was listed on this leaflet as a sponsor of the conference per our phone conversation of the 14 November." But later, "I hope that this will help to solve some of your questions on the conference and after you have had a chance to talk it over you will throw in your support." As you state in your own letter, we are listed as supporting it but we are asked for our support at the same time.

Beyond the fact that you have used our name without our consent, we feel that we cannot support your conference for the following reasons:

- 1) We feel that the purpose of the conference is not based on any desire, as far as we can tell from your recent letter, to build a stronger anti-war movement in the army. We feel that an indication of this is your tactic of soliciting support from various organizations by using the names of GIs. In our case the names were not used by consent, and thus a violation of necessary security. We hope you will become aware of the security precautions that are necessary in order to prevent organizations from being effectively wiped out by a few swift moves by army intelligence when certain individual's connection with certain things have been confirmed.

2) Secondly, we feel that if Mobilization has not changed its idea about what it takes to build an alliance between the student antiwar movement and the GIs (a recent student march sponsored by Mobe on Fort Dix was really just a freak show and effectively alienated the mass of GIs more than anything else) the kind of tactic that Mobilization might try to push at the conference to build this alliance would in fact also alienate GIs from the student antiwar movement.

3) Thirdly, if you feel that by making a show of power by the publicity that would come out of this conference will help the movement, we disagree. We feel that real power comes only when people have organized themselves into organizations that can effectively defend themselves and that can carry on struggles for their rights. We feel that any move to scare the system by this show of power without the necessary organization behind it will only help to point out the individual GIs that participate in the conference to the military security officials and thus aid them in destroying us. We would dare say that there are no such organizations in the military that are strong enough to withstand this kind of pressure.

We sincerely hope that you will correct your error in listing the Last Harass as one of the supporters of your proposed conference.

The Editors
The Last Harass

Student Mobilization Committee
857 Broadway, Room 307
New York, New York, 10003
December 14, 1968

Last Harass, Editorial Board
P.O. Box 2994, Hill Station
Augusta, Georgia

Dear Friends,

I'm very sorry that the mixup occurred in the use of the Last Harass' name as an endorser of the national GI-Civilian Antiwar Action Conference. After speaking to a member of your editorial board about the conference, he assured me that it was okay to go ahead and list the Last Harass as an endorser, rather than just one individual's name. Your letter requesting further information from us in order to discuss the matter arrived after the first leaflet had already been printed, so there was no opportunity to remove the Last Harass from the list of endorsers. A second, more extensive list of endorsers, GI and civilian, is ready and will be printed in a new leaflet within a few days. We will omit your name as you have requested. We had no intention of including your name without your permission as that could only lead to hard feelings. It was purely a mixup as you can see. I hope that you will send a representative to the conference anyway, to take part in the discussions with other GIs and antiwar civilians and to discuss coordinated national action. In that way you can base your decision on whether or not to participate in the proposed national actions on the most complete information possible.

I think that the last part of your letter raises questions that GIs are discussing and everyone will have to deal with. For that reason, I am sending copies of this letter along with your letter to a number of the GI groups who are endorsing the conference. I hope that everyone will consider this discussion in the most serious manner, because it deals with important questions of how GIs think they should organize against the war, how they think they should relate to the civilian antiwar movement, and conversely how the civilian antiwar movement can work with GIs in our common struggle against the war. As a former GI who worked against the war while in the army, and as a present participant in the civilian antiwar movement, I would like to raise the following ideas for your consideration and for discussion among antiwar GIs in general.

Are GIs ready to speak out publicly against the war in Vietnam? You say in your letter that "we feel that real power comes only when people have organized themselves into organizations that can effectively defend themselves and that can carry on struggles for their rights. We feel that any move to scare the system by this show of power without the necessary organization behind it will only help to point out the individual GIs that participate in the conference to the military security official and thus aid them in destroying us."

I think you will agree that publicity and organization are complementary and necessary to each other. You can't publicize your aims and defend yourself without being organized. You also can't organize and defend yourself without publicizing your aims. The two are inseparable. It seems to me that it is too mechanical to say that publicity shouldn't be undertaken until a powerful GI peace organization is built. The two processes take place at the same time.

When I was in the army less than a year ago, it was my impression that a considerable number of GIs were against the war, and anyone speaking out got a favorable response. Since then, it seems that GI antiwar feeling has snowballed. Newspapers such as yours are an indication of this. The growing number of GIs who have openly participated in demonstrations and rallies is another indication. For each GI who acts publicly, there are thousands who sympathize but are silent right now. I think that it's fair to say that a good-sized majority of active duty GIs are against the war in Vietnam. Our task, then, is to find some way to organize this sentiment, to find ways in which GIs can organize and protest that won't get them into legal trouble and will have a real effect towards ending the war. Most GIs are against the war right now, including those who are in Vietnam. Nevertheless the war still goes on. But when large numbers of GIs publicly express their feelings then the war will have to be ended -- and quick.

What are the problems in doing this? It seems to me that two things stand out. One involves publicity and one defense.

First of all, GIs who are against the war have got to know that they are a majority, that it isn't just the GIs in one's own company who are against the war, but GIs in every company and on every base. Knowledge gives strength; the knowledge that antiwar GIs are a majority will show them that they have the strength to act. That's why papers such as yours are so important. They show that antiwar sentiment among GIs is not isolated to individuals, but is the popular feeling. That's one form of publicity that's necessary in order to organize.

But what can you do about it? This is the usual question that comes up next. Anyone who has been in the military service knows that one of the things that the brass tries to do is make it seem that citizens lose their constitutional rights once in uniform, and that free speech and assembly do not apply to GIs. Although they try to make GIs believe this, and although many do believe this, the facts are just the opposite -- at least according to the constitution. GIs do have the legal right to free speech; GIs do have the right to speak out against the war; GIs do have the right to demonstrate. True enough, the brass will attempt reprisals against the first GIs who speak out but experience shows that with proper legal defense, GIs can win, and can assure their rights.

In order for GIs to organize against the war, we have to publicize the fact that GIs have the right to do so. The only way to publicize that fact is to act; to be very careful to exercise

legal rights and thus minimize the chance of victimization; and to be prepared for an adequate defense in case the brass tries illegal reprisals. In that way antiwar GIs who speak out can show the others what can be done. This publicity is also necessary for organization.

In this sense, it seems to me that the main aspect of the "necessary security" that should be undertaken is the security of carrying out legal actions, so that any attempted victimizations can be fought. I don't deny the need for security, but too much secrecy can hurt organizing efforts. If a GI is to be actively engaged in antiwar activity (more than in his private thoughts) then I don't think that that activity can really be kept secret from military "intelligence" unless it is also kept secret from the very same GIs you want to reach. And you can't organize GIs to act out against the war unless you explain what you want to do. GIs who are willing to speak out now can reach others who are silent only if they do actually speak out.

Now it is true that the number of GIs who participate in antiwar action, though growing rapidly, is still not large in absolute numbers. But the active participation of hundreds of antiwar GIs now is necessary in order to show hundreds of thousands of others what they can do. Nobody is claiming to have the franchise on organizing GIs. They will organize themselves, by the tens and hundreds of thousands. But those who speak out now are the pioneers, and they are absolutely necessary to pave the way for really massive GI antiwar actions. And I don't think that day is very far off.

So the conference and the projected GI-Civilian antiwar actions for this spring are not really a premature "show of power" like you imply in your letter. What the conference is is one of the necessary organizing efforts in building the GI and civilian antiwar movement.

You state in your letter that you question the value of the conference towards building "a stronger antiwar movement in the army" because of what you call the "tactic of soliciting support from various organizations by using the names of GIs." Let me assure you that this is not the case at all. I feel that one of the necessary ingredients in building a stronger antiwar movement in the army is the cementing of an alliance, especially in action, between the GI and civilian antiwar movements. Both movements need each other, not for narrow purposes of simply strengthening their respective organizations, but for the common aim of ending the war.

GIs are the ones on the firing line. Antiwar GIs who act on their convictions are heroic, and are paving the way toward ending the war. But they need civilian support in a number of ways. One immediate need is in the field of legal defense. The civilian antiwar movement can raise money, obtain legal aid, and mount public protests against any of the brass' illegal victimization of antiwar GIs. That will make it harder for the brass to take reprisals

Imagine what would happen if there wasn't so much antiwar sentiment in the general population. The brass could isolate and victimize antiwar GIs almost at will. It's also true that the civilian antiwar movement has helped create antiwar sentiment among GIs. Except for the lifers the GIs were civilians just a short time ago and were affected by the civilian antiwar movement (and still are) in addition to the antiwar sentiment that service in the military creates.

Neither the civilian nor the GI antiwar movement can end the war alone. What is needed is a coordinated movement which will organize the power of the people, of all people, GI and civilian, who are against the war. Needless to say, though, no one is for civilian interference and domination of the GIs antiwar movement. Trying to unite the GI and civilian antiwar movement in common actions does not imply that civilians are "using" GIs, any more than it implies GIs "use" civilians.

The civilian antiwar movement is making an important turn now towards reaching out to GIs and supporting antiwar GIs. The conference is an attempt to draw all sections of the civilian antiwar movement together in order to continue in those efforts. Hopefully the conference will decide to call for GI-civilian antiwar actions in the spring, actions which will be organized and led with more antiwar GIs than ever before; and actions where the civilian antiwar movement shows its support for antiwar GIs. I think it's very important to continue efforts such as these, which can only help GIs organize in opposition to the war.

You also mention that "the kind of tactic that Mobilization might try to push at the conference to build this alliance would in fact also alienate GIs from the student antiwar movement," citing as an example that "a recent student march sponsored by Mobe on Fort Dix was really just a freak show." It's not Student Mobilization which you are talking about here. Student Mobilization Committee and all serious sections of the civilian antiwar movement have always been very careful to set a tone for their actions which could appeal to GIs. We definitely do not think that flippant and "freak show" type of actions help the GIs in any way, and we are opposed to any such actions. We realize that GIs who take actions against the war are sticking their necks out and any action that is undertaken should be careful to be "straight" and legal so that GIs can identify with such actions.

Just look at the tone, style and content of the leaflet we are distributing for the conference. It was done with the aim of reaching GIs in mind, and is being passed out to GIs all over the country. The leaflet states: "Peace actions by GIs took place all over the country this fall. These actions confirmed that there are many things GIs can do to help bring peace that are perfectly legal and entirely within their rights." That's the tone of the actions that the conference will probably propose. There will also be a teach-in for GIs at the conference. As the leaflet says: "GIs from bases around the country and Vietnam Vets will speak; also leading authorities on Vietnam; also legal authorities on GI

rights. Get the facts on the war and how GIs can legally protest."

The conference, I hope will place a very strong emphasis on the responsibility the civilian antiwar movement has to help in the defense of GIs' civil liberties. In addition, I should hope that the conference will repudiate any attempt by anyone to foster a "freak show" spirit onto the proposed GI-civilian action, or any attempt to call illegal actions which could maximize the chances that GIs who take part will get into trouble with the brass.

One of the ways to insure that antiwar GIs will have their proper say at the conference is for them to attend. That's why I hope that you will send a representative. The conference needs your opinion as well as the opinion of other antiwar GI groups from around the country. I hope that you will give the thoughts in this letter serious consideration, and that I will see you at the conference in Chicago.

Sincerely,

Howard Petrick