

Antiwar Report by Lew Jones

1968

One month has passed since the fight broke out in the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. In that period we have begun to consolidate SMC activists around the demands for an immediate national conference and the re-instatement of Kipp and Syd. In the next month this campaign must be accelerated in preparation for the June 29-30 Continuations Committee meeting in New York.

So far two mailings from Kipp and Syd have been sent to over 3,000 activists and a third is going out soon containing excerpts from the protests we have received. The last three Militants containing articles on the fight have also been sent to these 3,000 as will the next four issues.

The response has been an encouraging, if mixed one. Some activists, rather than go through the work of exploring the various political positions, always tend to shy away from a fight. Among non-CP adults in the coalition organizations, there tends to be a sympathy with the political outlook of the exclusionist bloc as they understand it, but sympathy with our protests of the exclusion.

Among the student antiwar activists there has been an encouraging response. While the New York High School Student Mobilization is unorganized, there has been protest from high school youth here. We have also received letters from Detroit HSSMC and other areas.

The Chairman of the German SDS wrote to us expressing his solidarity "against the revisionists." The Canadian antiwar movement responded quickly with a good statement.

We have received protests from most areas where we have locals. We have received either statements from individual leaders or from committees in Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Chicago, Minneapolis, Berkeley, San Francisco, Madison, Los Angeles and New York. In areas where there are no YSA members we have received more than a dozen protests.

While the protest campaign centers around building a caucus to fight for an immediate national SMC conference and non-exclusion continues, more basic political differences are beginning to emerge. Several basic themes have begun to appear in project reports, in an article in the New York Free Press by Art Goldberg, and in the position papers by Linda Morse, Gwen Patton, Phyllis Kalb and Clark Lowenstein mailed out by the SMC office.

First is the desertion by the right wing exclusionists of mass actions as the central focus of the fight against the war. In the CP's position paper, Phyllis Kalb states, "Things have changed very quickly in this country. Between the negotiations in Paris, Johnson's announcement that he would not run again, and the entry of Kennedy and McCarthy, the Pied Pipers of American Capitalism (sic), into the presidential race, the radicals in this country are in a strange position. While last October we were the leadership of the anti-war fight and people in the country who wanted to express their feelings against the war had to follow our initiatives to be heard, now their frustration and their anger has been blunted and they have found new leaders who offer a more 'real'.

istic' chance of ending the war. They no longer rely on our initiatives. The radicals, many who became so through the antiwar movement now stand on the outskirts watching this movement. Clearly then, a mass mobilization is not the next item on the agenda."

Linda Morse in modified form repeats this refrain, "SMC's relevance in the future can no longer be measured by mass actions alone." A sub-committee on antiwar activity dominated by the exclusionist bloc came to the same conclusion, "With or without an escalation of the bombing of North Vietnam and the war as a whole, there will be a spirit in the antiwar movement projected against the government that some form of mobilization . . . will be spontaneous." (emphasis added) (or, in other words, the CP and pacifists don't intend to work on this.) Further, "This sort of escalation on the government's part cannot be used to build a national Mass Mobilization aimed at one spot. But by combining a literature program with a demonstration contingency plan we can build the spirit for local actions against local targets."

A second theme paralleling the first is a turn toward other issues, de-emphasizing the war. This takes the form of verbal harangues by staff "leaders" for programs of "local organizing", individual action of one kind or another, protests against racism, etc. For example, the exclusionist bloc originally thought they would set up schools to teach whites that they are racists, and now project sending "white civilizing teams" into white communities for the same purpose. This is the current stage of the single issue - multi issue fight.

Thirdly, and as a result of the above two, the exclusionist bloc now openly believes that SMC ought to become another SDS but not quite as radical. Art Goldberg wrote an article in the New York Free Press which said just that. (Reprinted with an answer in the next YS.)

In short, the fight before the SMC is the same fundamental fight that has periodically erupted before in the antiwar movement -- to stay in the streets united in a confrontation with the state, or to retreat from the prime political question to more secure protests around "local" issues and individual actions.

This time around there is a lot more at stake in this fight. There is the fact that thousands of youth have acted in harmony with our line for over three years. There is also now the existence of an international antiwar movement which has developed in response to the increased escalation of the war under the impetus and example of the American movement. It has largely been our work that has enabled revolutionaries in many parts of the world to build mass united antiwar actions in spite of the roadblocks put up by the reformist CPs and SPs. In part, the present fight is a fight over whether that will continue.

The present fight takes the form of "multi-issue" vs. "single-issue" orientation. It is important that each local review previous fights on this question. Reference should be made to the article by Peter Camejo in the June 14 Militant and the article by Harry Ring and Lew Jones in the June 21 Militant.

In discussing the politics of this fight, it is important that the questions be posed correctly. Now, as in the past, the single-multi issue dichotomy is a diversion from the real question. No one in the antiwar coalition is opposed to multi-issueism. Most, in fact, have a multi-issue perspective that they hold firmly.

The prime question American radicals face is whether they are to unite in action against the imperialist aggression in Vietnam; to shoulder the international obligation to oppose the imperialist action in a united fashion. And to do this in spite of thorough-going differences on any number of questions. Of necessity, if united mass action is sought, a coalition limited in the sense that what unites all is opposition in action to the war and support to the right of the Vietnamese to determine their own future is what is needed.

For those, and there are not a few, who seek a means to fundamentally change American society, we make our views known to them and try to recruit them to our ranks. Each group that seeks to impose their particular multi-issue outlook on the antiwar movement has been the very same organization that has opposed mass action in the past. Similarly, each of these groups -- from SNCC to the DBC -- have failed to build and consolidate a solid organization for themselves.

Although we have no direct access to the day to day functioning of the office, this right wing group, as near as we can tell, is confined to its own milieu. That is, it is not campaigning to win over those who have demonstrated, but is relying on their control of the apparatus to carry them through.

Black activists, insofar as they are involved in the antiwar movement, have sided with the exclusionist bloc. This reflects their own frustration in not consolidating an effective organization and the reformist pressures they are subjected to. John Wilson, Chairman of NBAWADU, chaired a session of the Freedom and Peace Convention last weekend in New York.

Meanwhile, the events in France, Europe and Vietnam aid us in the fight. These developments deepen the objective necessity of a formation like the SMC and cry out for another mass action. Secondly, we can use the example of the European student movement to increase the consciousness here for continued development of an American part of the international antiwar movement.

We have several immediate tasks in preparation for the Continuations Committee meeting on June 29-30.

1. We want to make an increased effort in the next month to circulate the various written materials, especially the Militant.

2. Continue to circulate the petition. This task is important not only because it keeps the pressure up, but it can help lay the basis for a reconstituted student antiwar organization.

3. We must begin to take steps to insure that independents attend the Continuations Committee meeting in large numbers.

4. Money to carry on this fight is required more urgently.

5. Names and addresses of those who should receive the mailings from here should be sent in.