

2. STEVE KELMAN:

TIME FOR SOME QUESTIONS

IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS there has been a surprising expansion of the strength of the student activists who have been busy for a number of years trying to build a New Left in the United States. Armed with little more than a few generalized concepts and a profound sense that "something is wrong" in America today, these students are hoping that a revived youth movement will provide a base for a viable adult force for social change.

Now that the first goal—building a *broad* student movement—is on the verge of success, a time for stocktaking has come. Let us make it clear at the outset that I am in sympathy with the New Left and that it seems to me that a number of their approaches to American problems, particularly the idea of community organization of the poor, are original and promising. But I am disturbed by a number of elements in the approach of the New Left, particularly because the ultimate test of the success of the youth activists of today will be whether they can achieve their goals. And in the final analysis these goals cannot be achieved unless society as a whole—and this means primarily the adults—is mobilized.

What seems to me to be unfortunate is that the growth of the New Left has not been accompanied by an attempt to define attitudes towards a number of basic questions. So far there has been a succession of attempts to get rid of many things the New Left doesn't like (and there are plenty of them!). But few have enunciated what is wanted to replace these evils once they're gone. Behind the slogans of "let the people decide" or "participatory democracy" has been hidden an unwillingness to confront such questions. This is fine if the only purpose is to provide an outlet for youthful rebellion or romantic anarchism. But I hope that the motivations of the New Left are more serious than that. For what hopes to be a viable political movement, able to realize its goals, such vagueness is fatal.

SOME PEOPLE ON THE NEW LEFT try to cloak the lack of a positive immediate program (as distinguished from a negative immediate program consisting of a group of things they don't like) in the sylvan garb of the American pragmatic tradition. They criticize the Old Left for being caught in the mire of a rigid ideology and view themselves as being free from such shackles and able to work from day-to-day on the basis of a moral judgment on each issue as it comes up.

But like the Old Left, the new student radical groups do have an ultimate vision of the world. This is something the pragmatists lack. The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society, the most promising group on the New Left, specifies their ideal of what society should be like.

In a participatory democracy, the political life would be based... (on the principle that) decision-making of basic social consequence be carried on by public groupings. (Page 7)

The economic sphere would have as its basis the principle that work should involve incentives worthier than money or survival. It should be educative, not stultifying; creative, not mechanical; self-directed, not manipulated, encouraging independence, a respect for others, a sense of dignity and a willingness to accept social responsibility. (Page 8)

The United States' principal goal should be creating a world where hunger, poverty, disease, ignorance, violence, and exploitation are replaced as central features by abundance, reason, love, and international cooperation. (Page 42)

There is nothing wrong with ultimate visions, for one of the main functions of radical movements is to provide an ultimate vision for a society which is so busy concentrating on walking that it doesn't know where its steps are leading.

But it must be remembered that, in addition to a vision, older American radicals had an immediate program they were working for. People are fond of pointing out how many of the planks of the Socialist Party Platform of 1912 have since been adopted. This was because many of these reforms were directed towards positive improvements—postal savings, workmen's compensation, direct election of Senators, for example. Yet today there is a contempt for "piecemeal" reforms, a sort of feeling that "the System" will have to be torn down before we can even start thinking about what comes afterwards.

In a sense the New Left tends to have an idea of what it wants right now and what it sees for the glorious (and distant) future, but little idea of what comes in-between. There is certainly a day-to-day action program, but what does it consist of? Opposition to the War in Vietnam, opposition to current methods of urban renewal, opposition to academic bureaucracy, opposition to the "power structure" in general. Now let's assume for a second that suddenly all these objects of our disapproval disappeared. What would happen?

Let's take some examples. Talking to reporters after the April 17th March on Washington to End the War in Vietnam, SDS spokesman Paul Booth said in response to a question that what they wanted Johnson to do was "end the war" and that it was up to the diplomats to figure how. I'm not sure whether this comment was naive or stupid. Ending a war is much easier said than done, especially when the other side has been adamant in refusing negotiations. It's easy to denounce the war in Vietnam as "immoral," to blame it on the military, to cry out "End it!" It's much harder to reason out a program for what can be done.

Another example is urban renewal. The SDS Newark Project worked and agitated for a long time against the huge federal renewal scheme for that city. They clamored for control of urban renewal decisions by the people of the neighborhoods themselves. Finally, last February they got the project "de-activated." What have they done since then? *Nothing*. They have failed to come up with programs for giving the people involved a greater voice. "Give the people control of urban renewal" is a fine battle cry when you're trying to get rid of something you don't like, but when the time comes for replacing the old arrangement with a better one, positive thinking is needed. And positive thinking must be backed up by political power, which means in a democracy votes. Yet the Newark Project has refused to concentrate on voter registration, citing the alienation of the poor from government. That this alienation is probably

due to lack of participation does not seem to have struck the leaders of the Project.

THIS LACK OF DEFINITION of attitudes leads inexorably, I feel, to one of two alternatives, each disastrous. First is that the movement could fizzle out altogether as the students return to the comfortable middle class society they deserted. I'll get back to this first point later. The second danger is that the movement can be taken over, morally if not organizationally, by the more militant, ideologically pro-Communist or Maoist groups which have grown up concomitantly with the pro-democratic elements of the New Left. It is fashionable these days to pooh-pooh this danger and ridicule those with a fixation on the thirties and what happened then to non-Communist groups as the result of Popular Front tactics.

It is true that for all practical purposes the American Communist Party is a dead group. It is also silly to view the threat as one from students who owe their allegiance to a "foreign power." But the simple fact is that a serious threat to the democratic Left exists from such organizations as Progressive Labor, May 2nd, Youth Against War and Fascism, and the W. E. B. DuBois Clubs. The danger is that these groups have the ideology that the New Left lacks. They have ideas for what to do once the old is gone. And the man who has ideas, no matter how wrong these ideas are, is at an advantage when policies are going to be decided.

Yet many on the New Left refuse to learn anything from history. Reacting against the hysterical anti-Communism which served as a mask for pro-extreme rightism, they condemn anti-Communism altogether and apologize, explain away, or ignore the obvious fact, stated so clearly in the SDS Port Huron Statement, that "the communist movement has failed, in every sense, to achieve its stated intentions of leading a worldwide movement for human emancipation." I think that as students committed to a democratic society, to a respect for the individual and his rights, we must state categorically that there is no place in the New Left for collaboration, even on an issue-to-issue basis, with totalitarians or their apologists. From a moral point of view, the United Front is indefensible. From a tactical point of view it is disastrous, for the best way to get rid of genuine radical democratic movements is to point out Communist influence. And, even more importantly, the American people have overwhelmingly rejected Communist or crypto-Communist solutions to their problems.

Yet by failing to find out exactly where it stands, the New Left invites such a betrayal of their principles. In fact, anti-democratic student groups are already busy trying to make headway in the New Left. They were dangerously active at the Washington anti-War in Vietnam March and, in fact, in the whole Vietnam peace movement in general. And, unfortunately, groups like SDS are reversing their old policies for Popular Front-type alliances. As a confirmation of this trend, the recent SDS decision to remove a constitutional clause barring "advocates or apologists" of totalitarianism is significant.

But, as I said before, the only long-range answer lies in grappling with the basic question: *what* are the positive immediate goals of the New Left and *how* can they be achieved?

A good deal of this question revolves around the SDS relationship with American liberalism and its organizational representatives, the unions, the civil rights movement, and the intellectuals. Such a debate is going on in the SDS at the moment. In a letter in the *SDS Bulletin* (February 1965) Dick Flacks outlined the argument as follows:

At one extreme are those who argue that liberalism now serves as an appendage of the corporate system, attempting to co-opt potentially radical and democratic constituencies through token programs and social change... At the other extreme are those who seem to believe that the expansion of liberalism's political base would be a positive value . . . and expand the power of objectively progressive forces such as labor, Negroes, urban workers, and middle-class.

The fundamental failure with the first line of argument noted above is that it leads to a dead end. For the simple fact is that the way to get things done in a democracy is through a majority vote, and that a majority involves, inevitably, coalitions. To be sure, as radicals the New Left will inevitably go further than most liberals in the depth of change they want. But to call liberalism "an appendage of the corporate system" seems to me to be intellectual sour grapes that they've been able to get something done while the New Left has been mainly concerned with preserving its ideological purity and preventing its adherents from "selling out to the Establishment."

IN ORDER TO AVOID getting caught in the political desert (sometimes I think that elements of the New Left think that success would inevitably involve sell-out, and therefore relish failure), the New Left must look for allies. Organizing the poor is fine, but the dream of an independent grouping of the poor for social change is ridiculous. The poor are simply not strong enough numerically or any other way to be an independent base for constructive change. Our natural allies are labor, the civil rights movement, and liberal intellectuals. Although this may seem shocking to some, it is, I feel, axiomatic that our eventual goal is to become part of the so-called power structure, not in the sense of "copping out" and joining the exploiters, but in the sense of finding for the poor, for the Negroes, for every American a place in governing our country.

Where is the role of radicalism in all this? Perhaps the above lacks some of the good old anti-Establishment bleatings that are so popular these days. But our purpose must be to help improve the lives of Americans and America's role in the world, not to guard our personal purity from the corruption of politics. The role for radicals in a broad alliance for social change was tellingly pointed out by Bayard Rustin in a recent article in *Commentary*:

I believe that the Negro's struggle for equality in America is essentially revolutionary. While most Negroes—in their hearts—unquestionably seek only to enjoy the fruits of American society as it now exists, their quest cannot be *objectively* satisfied within the framework of the existing political and economic relations... The term revolutionary, as I am using it, does not connote violence; it refers to the qualitative transformation of fundamental institutions... to the point where the social and economic structure which they comprised can no longer be said to be the same... I fail to see how the movement can be

victorious in the absence of radical programs for full employment, abolition of slums, the reconstruction of our educational system, new definition of work and leisure.

There is a role for radicals in the liberal causes of today, be they reapportionment or civil rights. Our actions can help assure that these goals are not hopelessly watered down. Civil rights must not become tokenism; War on Poverty must not be a bureaucrats' war on the poor. But we can only act effectively within the framework of an alliance with other progressive forces.

We can provide idealism while others are obsessed with practicality. We can develop independent alternatives while others are working for a consensus. In short, we must not be an appendage of other liberal groups. But we must be allied to them! And our programs will be accepted to the extent which they are well-developed and viable. Instead of saying merely "let the poor control the War on Poverty," it should be the job of the New Left to have people come to meetings and make suggestions, instead of boycotting the "Establishment" war on poverty.

This is a program for people interested in action, not blind rebellion. The test of the maturity and viability of the New Left is whether or not it *prefers*, deep down, beating its head against the wall to getting something done. If the New Left refuses to understand what political power is about in a democracy, it is doomed to failure. Its members will probably salve their disillusionment with the comforts of middle-aged apathy. But if we go out with a real program of tangible results to be gained from political participation, bringing to the cause the enthusiasm that only youth can muster, we can do a great deal.

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3. PHILIP G. ALTBACH:

THE ILLUSION OF A STUDENT REVOLUTION

1965 WILL BE KNOWN as the year of the student revolution on American college campuses. The amount of publicity devoted to the student movement during the past academic year has been unprecedented, and to judge by its scope, the American campus has been shaken by student unrest on a variety of issues, from Vietnam to university administrative and academic policies. While it is true that the amount of student protest has been substantial in the recent past, particularly in comparison to the sterile decade of the 1950's, the "student revolution" is more a creature of the mass media than of true mass movement. It is doubtful that the recent rash of demonstrations will have any on-going politiciz-