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IDEOLOGY AND RADICAL COMMUNITY by Marc Savir
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Ideological tension within the "new left" is a good thing if it is understood and discussed and dealt with. On the other hand ideological tension which is attributed to differences in personalities, life philosophies, levels of commitment, insensitivities, rather than to problems of ideology tend to be reductive and destructive for the movement. That is not to say that problems in areas of personality and sensitivity (for example) do not exist. Hardly. Those too are real problems which must be resolved; and their resolution should be a dynamic part of the movement. Nor would I suggest a cart before the horse argument about these phenomena. Rather, let it just be clear that the need for developing ideological dialogue and a growing ideological base is itself a distinct need of our movement and one which can not be negated or ignored by arguments about authoritarian personalities, submissive personalities, advocacy of violence, condemnation of violence, propriety of certain kinds of demonstrations, impropriety of those demonstrations.

We must assume, that is, that we in the "new left" have at least as much in common, in terms of feelings, outlook, and intention, as almost any collection of like minded Americans that may be assembled. If this is true we may conclude that the very real tensions which exist among and between us derive in great part from our needs to feel and be unified, to be an effective political force for change, to understand, appreciate and love each other, to communicate in the context of a society which has more or less banned interpersonal communication. We need a developing ideology, a growing community, and a deep sense of unity.

Ideology, an abstraction

"Ideology is the manner or content of thinking characteristic of an individual or class; the intellectual pattern of any widespread culture or movement; specifically, the integrated assertions, theories, and aims constituting a politico-social program, often with an implication of factitious propagandizing" (Webster). Without an explicit ideology society is anarchic. With an explicit ideology society is often tyrannical. All ideology implies value judgement about the nature of man and the purpose of society. American capitalism, the prodigal son of western Judeo-Christian Tradition, has successfully incorporated the most undesirable aspect of anarchy (anti-social egocentricity) with the most desirable aspect of tyranny (submission through satiation). Capitalism, in its present monopolistic corporate form, is the major dehumanizing force in the modern world. It forces individuals to understand self-interest only in terms of profit and exploitation, in terms of class interest.*

While imperialism, the exploitation of foreign peoples, their resources, and markets is a logical and cultivated extension of industrial capitalism, fascism (the consolidation of state power by an allied military-economic elite) is an unwanted though predictable product of imperialistic wars and condoned oppression and exploitation. The system is first activated "non-violently" against the population in terms of advertising for conspicuous consumption. The public is effectively hooked on the idea that individuated self-gratification and self-indulgence via neatly wrapped pleasure packages is a natural and basic part of life. ("Life is a consumer product and I, who work 40 hard hours a week, want my money's worth.") This dehumanizing process permits the justification of violent imperialist wars against peasant populations. Violent subjugation of foreign populations is the prelude to violent suppression of all potential humanizing forces within the home based society. Fascist consolidation develops. Consolidation develops when the

capitalist rationales for the continued ordering of society (such as "because we have money we are free"; "Slavery and oppression may be bad for the slaves but it sure doesn't hurt the masters"; "Look at all we've done for the people of our nation"; "This society operates for the good of its people") become so tenuous to the citizenry that complete dedication and emotional fervor are required as the only mode of overt identification with the State. Becoming aware of the fact that its own rationale is faltering while an imperialist war is in progress, the corporate-monopoly capitalist state has no choice but to turn towards more overt fascism and thereby hasten disintegration by violently forcing the order on society where before it easily controlled by manipulation. (See Carl Oglesby's Containment and Change, Chapter 1, West meets West.) This is a very important point because it allows us to predict that, as in Germany, much more than the left will come under fire. Our developing ideology must understand and appeal to those groups that we believe to be the victims. Those groups are blacks, other minorities, and students and hippies; further than that professors, religious leaders, even some politicians could fall.

Can we develop an ideology which is humanistic not only in its projected philosophy but in its current strategy and tactics; one that meets the needs of all alienated and victimized groups too. Is an essentially non-violent revolution possible? On the one hand it appears both necessary because of the strength of the enemy and impossible for the same reason; but to posit a clear cut distinction between violence and non-violence does not entirely do justice to our search for a humanistic strategy.

If suppression of radical activities--and other forms of free expression as well--becomes more and more overt, we could be forced to either unite and fight or to face death, or imprisonment. Just as movements for self-defense in Negro communities in the South (and more recently the North) are not specifically movements for violent change or violent revolution, so too a white movement for self-defense should not necessarily be construed as the imminent vehicle for violence or violent seizure of power. If threatened with concentration camps it would be inhumane not to fight back.

On the other hand the feeling of impotence we have regarding the chances of in anyway forcing the government to do anything for us or of obtaining power through seizure is legitimate. The Government may be a paper tiger, but as Dennis Sweeney has said it took the Vietnamese 40 years to build a movement; it may also take us that long. Thus I find the notion of simple overt confrontation with Establishment power non-productive (unless of course it serves to heighten our commitment and ideological awareness or strengthen the movement, and this is already questionable - viz. Oakland.) But, at this point, forms of major confrontation, whether violent or non-violent become largely irrelevant because goals are not realizable and are even difficult to define. And there is the danger of precipitous reaction. In Germany Hitler built a fire under the Bundestaag blaming it on the communists; In Vietnam Johnson created the Gulf of Tonkin incident; it can happen again. It seems rather fruitless to precipitate reaction prematurely when we remain weak. Rather we must set realizable goals that are ideologically sophisticated. I believe the proper course is one of overt non-violence and continual limited confrontation. In other words we can build a radical movement so long as repression does not occur. How and when that movement might assert this power remains to be seen. It may be that the paper tiger can be delegitimized by giving it terribly sore feet, but we can not honestly dismiss the idea that non-violent revolution may be impossible. Furthermore, it is clear that blacks face continued repression and do not now have the luxury of a limited confrontational strategy like that outlined below.

But, if you are still with me I may have proved at least one point. Ideology in a void is an abstraction. To talk abstractly about ideology for an almost non-descript movement seems somewhat absurd. I will come back to this in the final section.

Ideology, Organization, and Action

If some radicals and dogmatists suggest that real ideological development cannot take place without constant general confrontation (i.e. study-action evaluation cycles) they will be guilty of placing a rather academic restriction on their definition of confrontation. If we understand the nature of the monopoly-capitalist system then we can evaluate the role of each institution within that system. We are all aware, for instance, that the University is a vital part of the current class structure and the economic-military-industrial complex as well. In order to build a true revolutionary base we must capture and transform such vital institutions that affect our lives directly. But this too can precipitate a direct confrontation of the "general" character already discussed since the University is largely controlled by the corporate interests and military interests that control the government. The police and even the National Guard are potentially at their disposal. While argument can be made for forcing the police onto the campus to show how we are dominated by the real outside world, I believe that the kind of actions necessary would either get us effectively thrown out of the University or at best close down the place. This would be inappropriate for the early stages of a potentially strong movement.

Rather we must act to capture power in the University by limited isolated but continual confrontations with lower levels of power within the community. Change can only be forced by a community that has a common definition of self-interest. This implies, for instance, that medical students might spend most of their time fighting for a radical base around curriculum inadequacies or authoritarian relationships between faculty and students. Local living groups might dismiss P.A.s. Women might eliminate dorm hours or might sit in at Cowell until contraceptives were distributed. Undergraduates might conceivably focus in on dismantling the impotent student government through community organizing for real student power. Failure to destroy ASSU by referendum or failure to capture the Presidency by a unified radical front would at least lay the ground work for an alternate student government which would act in behalf of student power. The issues would be unifying and the actions radicalizing for the local community. The action would be radicalizing because radicals in every group would deal with actions in an ideological framework, trying to justify their acts in terms of community and student power as well as in terms of goals. A tremendous sense of purpose could be gained from the fact that isolated encounters had grown out of and had the support of a radical unity.

While such low levels of operation may seem trivial on the basis of past university happenings in this country, we have never before had the opportunity to operate from a united radical base. I am confident that this cross campus base can be developed. Organization must remain local but coordination is implicit and continued ideological dialogue (through the Daily and through a viable ideological central front representing everyone around who wants to be represented including faculty, staff, university workers) is of critical importance because it is the only way a developing movement comes to evaluate, understand and unify itself.

The program outlined above is implicitly confrontational and would often lead to expulsion or threats of same, but that would be the limit of the Administrative power that could be mustered. Furthermore a really solid base might prevent expulsion as we hope to demonstrate with the case of the radicals who have been arbitrarily singled out for prosecution by Dean Joel Smith for the CIA

demonstration. (Complicity statements will be available at the Wednesday night meeting in Cubberly Auditorium Nov. 15, 1967.)

While I am not prepared to outline a limited confrontation program in any detail nor am I in a position to suggest what kind of coordinating structure can adequately represent the needs of the radical community I will say that Stanford does have a radical base, that SDS has failed to unite or in any way represent that base, that we are now at a point which requires some structure which meets the expressed needs of the community including a continual ideological debate all across the campus in subcommittees and the general campus community itself, that such a structure should have a subcommittee coordinating support for local actions of participating groups. In this context it would be the responsibility of radicals to define their own communities and to see that these communities were adequately represented. (Important actions against the Draft or other outside institutions (CIA, Dow, etc.) should be handled by groups like Anti-Draft Union, or by Ad Hoc Committees which could be formed independently or through the organization described.

Community and Where We're At

Finally the relationship of ideology to a sense of community has been briefly mentioned. It remains the most important work of radicals to develop the kind of spirit and friendship necessary for the construction of such a community. In an alienating society this is no easy task. Furthermore, we have seen over the past 12-14 months a degeneracy in the ability and willingness of radicals to communicate with each other. Examples of this are numerous. They range from the Free U. Love men who constantly direct vitriolic (hate message) jargon at dogmatic SDSers who want to "let the people decide" but who never even listen to anyone let alone "the people."

But how and why has this occurred? To say we are alienated is true but non-productive. To say the wrong people are leading or the wrong organizations exist may also be true, but how do such things happen? Acquiescence seems an oversimplified answer. Who was there or is there to acquiesce? And is someone who doesn't give a shit about SDS really acquiescing. Maybe. I offer the following analysis of our community problem:

All that many radicals initially have in common is an intensity of feeling. Feeling is a necessary but low level of discourse (particularly when it is internal rather empathetic). The primary needs of the radical have been to act against the war and to relate to black power. Both strengthen his commitment and awareness but neither has an immediate or direct effect upon his local community. He marches in S.F. or demonstrates in Oakland, then says, "so what." Action is therefore identified with causes not with life patterns or with community problems. The radical understands and resents this fact, yet community problems often seem much less important than the War. The radical understands imperialism but attack only its most overt aspects (the draft, etc). Organizing on campus around such large issues, although meaningful to some radicals is so remote from center of power and from campus realities as to appear academic to many.

In other words, most radicals don't spend too much time organizing against the war because they sense a real discrepancy between the radical awakening that the war has brought to them and the real inability of liberals and others to gain a clear picture of American imperialism through such a remote reality. as the war.

We would prefer to translate the war through more real and fundamental relationships in daily life in American Society on Stanford U.S.A. but we don't know how. The result is hundreds of "academic radicals" who trail along with most anyone who bothers to carry the ball.

The most unfortunate effects of this dilemma are:

1. No growth of radical community because of lack of identification of common ground outside of "causes" or issues.
2. No growth of ideology for the same reason as well as indirectly because of lack of community.

In conclusion, we radicals cannot understand our need for social community beyond the political sphere, we are unable to understand what ideology is all about. If we understand that ideology is an important bi-product of a community or society we may find legitimate reasons to patch up our fragmented, alienated selves and fight our way into free and open relationships and thus make human relationship possible. Listen to the rain, brothers and sisters.

*Marxists point out that this intensification of class interest works both ways by heightening the awareness of self-interest of the exploited class. Thus, it is agreed, the contradiction in class society inevitably grows toward revolution.