

# Anti-war activists: 'There's still a future in that past'

By BOB BEYERS

Don't mourn. . . . Organize!

That classic advice from labor organizer Joe Hill was taken to heart by 300 anti-war activists celebrating the 20th anniversary of the April Third Movement (A3M) at Stanford May 6-7.

Aging but unbowed, they swiftly adopted a suggestion from a new generation of student protesters, voting overwhelmingly to establish a Progressive Alumni Club.

Open to all, regardless of class, its potential objectives include support for ethnic studies, minority student and faculty recruitment, student initiatives for the homeless and possible progressive candidates for the Board of Trustees.

Lenny Siegel, whose Pacific Studies Center in Mountain View, Calif., has provided a long-term research base for local establishment critics, said people active in the Midpeninsula peace movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s created a revolutionary tool for organizers worldwide: the personal computer.

Those who convened the Home Brew Computing Club included draft resisters who developed their electronics skills repairing bullhorns, Siegel said.

"The PC industry was not invented by capitalists; they took it over. It was started by people who wanted to control their own tools, like carpenters," he added. The result has been "a whole new industry which the military can't control."

"People in power will always have more computers, more guns and more printing presses," he conceded. But the proliferation of PCs and their worldwide use as an organizational tool are "to a large degree the legacy of the way we related to technology in the late 1960s."

## History recalled

Looking even further back, Stanford history Prof. Clayborne Carson, editor of the Martin Luther King Jr. papers, said the early 1960s sit-ins by Southern blacks comprised "a truly mass-driven movement," involving 80 to 90 percent of all students at individual black college campuses.

"Anyone could do it," Carson said. Participants "did not have to get politically educated. They could do from day one as well as the next person."

"Leaders of the sit-ins were not necessarily bright, articulate people familiar with the different currents of Marxism. They were people who could be trusted, who gained their credentials through participation."

Author of a Harvard University Press book, *In Struggle*, a history of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, Carson said individuals like Stokely Carmichael and Bob Moses provided "grass roots leadership." Built from the bottom up, this sought to avoid "vanguardism" of the most articulate.

"Meetings went on for days and days," Carson said, to wide, understanding laughter. There was a conscious attempt to build broad support for the movement among people from many different backgrounds.

Later in the 1960s, the struggle became more radical, but less able to reach out to this mass base in Mississippi and Alabama, he said. External repression provides only a partial explanation for its subsequent decline; "we have to look within," he said.

David Harris, who went to Mississippi to register black voters in 1964, said: "We went without politics, with no sophisticated political ideology. . . . People were being denied the right to vote. That was as much as it took."

"We were looking for adventure."

"The Old Left had ideologies; we had values and experiences we sought to combine into a political agenda. The impact went far beyond our own participation."

The Mississippi experience showed Harris that "America is capable of perpetrating evil and tolerating evil."

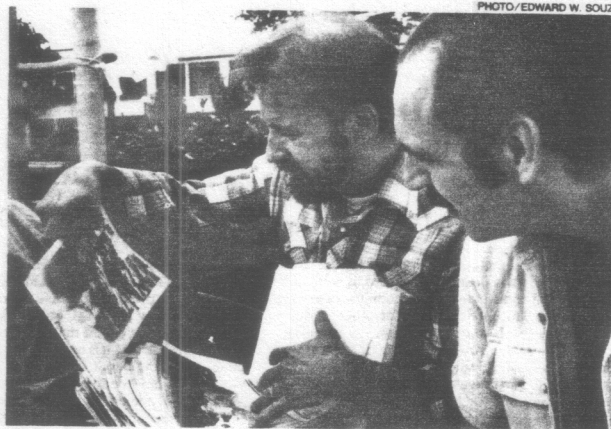
Contrary to the image conveyed in the recent movie *Mississippi Burning*, Harris said the first FBI agent he encountered there said: "What's your problem, nigger-lover?"

White civil rights workers learned from "extraordinary models of heroism" in the black community, he added. One 72-year-old black woman who tried to register to vote "had a cattle prod stuck up her vagina." was detained by police for 72 hours and went right back to try to register again, as soon as she was released, he recalled.

Where John Wayne had been the universal hero of his high

The revolution was not just in political philosophy but in life style

Reunited anti-war activists Bill Black, left, and Myron Filene reminisce over 1969 police photos of the April Third Movement demonstrations



school days, after Mississippi "we wanted to be different kinds of people; we had seen what the guys with the short haircuts did."

When Tim Haight suggested Harris run for Stanford student body president in 1966, "that SOB told me I wouldn't get more than 500 votes," Harris chuckled. "We won by the biggest margin in the highest turnout" ever.

Harris, now a journalist, later became a draft resister, served time in prison and ran unsuccessfully for Congress.

"In Mississippi, we learned that people don't have values until they act on them," he said. "Evil is done by people who have families and love their kids."

"We were at our best when we were most vulnerable. We had fundamental, simple beliefs and acted them out. We ultimately convinced the rest of the population we didn't have to destroy Southeast Asia."

David Ransom, who was an editor of the *Peninsula Observer*, an anti-war newspaper, said "there's still a future in that past."

Students in the 1960s felt that Stanford trustees were "modern-day robber barons," Ransom said. Several children of trustees were attracted to the movement, which "reached its high point" with the occupation of the Applied Electronics Laboratory that gave A3M its name.

Ransom until recently was an editor of national publications for the Service Employees International Union.

"People in power don't give up without a fight, so we had to eat up their eclairs," commented Marjorie Cohn, referring to the disruption of a trustee luncheon by A3M. Wide laughter erupted.

A cheerleader in high school, Cohn now practices law in San Diego. "The revolution was not just in political philosophy but in life style," she said.

"We knew we had to liberate ourselves before we liberated society."

"We were very down on liberalism" but seem to have "slid progressively into liberal politics," said Walter Lammi, a radical leftist turned conservative editor and itinerant scholar.

After a brief exchange among several alums on the "L-word," Harris said it is "a mistake to evaluate abstract concepts."

"Where we lost it was when we forgot where we were from. I couldn't go back to Fresno to make it understandable to people there."

Arguing over terms like liberalism is "worthless, a waste of energy."

"We had a sense of optimism and hope, that through our efforts we could create a world that was in some ways better," said Saul Wasserman. Young people today are "scared a great deal."

"If you listen to their music, you don't sense the optimism, the potential of having power."

Dede Donovan said women learned from their participation in A3M, facing the now familiar challenge of trying to

achieve their goals within male-dominated groups or creating their own separate organization.

Now a law professor, she helped raise bail and handle legal issues for A3M as a second-year law student. Women and men should work together on the "national disgrace" of child care and related issues, she said.

Jim Shoch recalled prolonged debates between "rocks" and "no rocks" student protesters. The rock throwers alienated many but "forced people to take the issues more seriously," he said.

When the protest movement seized the Democratic Party in 1972, a lot of the public "freaked out," contributing to political backlash and the Republican resurgence.

Some feel "the revolution came and went — and we lost," Shoch said. But at the very least "the Vietnam syndrome" made it impossible for the United States to send troops to Central America.

Now a graduate student, Shoch formerly worked with the Democratic Socialists of America. This may seem "moderate and insipid" but "I have no regrets," he said, to loud applause.

"The movement did make a difference; the war did stop," said Robert McAfee Brown, professor of religious studies here from 1962 to 1976. Since then, he has experienced "reluctant radicalization."

The United States has been "a purveyor of massive evil," with "an incredible track record of supporting the most reactionary groups around the world," Brown said.

This is not hatred of homeland, he added: "We love America — or at least we love what America ought to be, what it would mean if we took seriously the notion of liberty and justice for all."

"The great threat we face is not political but economic," a system in which "all of us get most of the goodies" with "intolerable costs for the rest of the world," Brown said.

"Nations like ours with a disproportionate share of goods should begin to share more voluntarily," he said. "Otherwise we can be very sure the poor of the world will try to take from us what we would not offer them."

Paul Rupert, a business consultant once banned from campus for five years, said too much "thinking of the millennium" can lead to frustration and disappointment.

Because the movement "expected so much to follow, (it) blinds us to what we accomplished," he said.

"We made unique contributions to Stanford: We got it out of war research, unloaded a white elephant (Stanford Research Institute, now SRI International) and put it in a position where many universities would like to be now on ethical issues."

Rupert said the graduating classes of 1968 through 1974 are "significantly less involved in the ongoing life of the University" and donate less per person as well.

But many still retain personal ties to campus. And "there are at least 10 very substantial fortunes in that cohort," Rupert said.

"Students didn't talk with us as aging radicals" but as alumni who could be active supporting their efforts, he noted.

"Stanford is an intelligent university; that's why we came here. It takes the long-term view and understands alumni include many important, active people."

"We've learned how to deal with the machinery of this world much better," said Joel Yudkin. "Being older gives us more power, not less."

Wrapping up nearly four hours of panel discussions at Tresidder Union, Barry Greenberg urged what he called "unapologetic rebels" to pay homage to the late Abbie Hoffman.

Quoting Hoffman, Greenberg said: "We were young . . . headstrong . . . excessive . . . but, God damn it, we were right." Loud applause erupted.

Actress Sigourney Weaver, perhaps the most widely known A3M alumna, did not make the reunion. But *Alice in ROTland*, an original play in which she performed during the A3M movement, was reenacted.

The Rev. B. Davie Napier, former dean of the chapel, was honored at a reception Sunday, May 7.

Individuals interested in learning more about the Progressive Alumni Club should contact Lenny Siegel, Pacific Studies Center, 222-B View St., Mountain View, CA 94041; phone (415) 969-1545.



'We were young . . . headstrong . . . excessive . . . but, God damn it, we were right'

April 3 Movement protesters vote to end their occupation of the Applied Electronics Laboratory in this photo taken on April 18, 1969. The students were demanding an end to classified military research on campus