

Antiwar Report

The Cleveland antiwar conference held on November 28, and the December 28-30 student conference at the University of Chicago have called what they hope will be massive international mobilizations for April 15 in New York and San Francisco. This mobilization has the potential of being the largest and broadest action against the war yet held. The goal of the mobilization is not only to turn out massive numbers but to make a concerted effort to involve layers of the Negro and labor movements in the planning and action.

The Cleveland conference formed the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, with A.J. Muste as chairman, and Dave Dellinger, Ed Keating, Sid Peck, and Robert Greenblatt as vice-chairmen.

The Chicago conference established the Student Mobilization Committee with an initial staff of Paul Friedman (an associate of Bettina Aptheker), Linda Dannenberg and Gus Horowitz. In addition to pledging itself to mobilize the student movement for April 15, the conference called a national student Vietnam week for April 8-15 to concentrate on antiwar activity, to indict the universities for their complicity in the war, and to culminate in the organization of the transportation of demonstrators to New York and San Francisco.

We had large groups, with representatives from every local in the East, Midwest, and Bay Area, at both conferences and participated in formulating all the major decisions.

Cleveland - November 28

The conference was attended by about 175 people. Most of the adult leaders and active sponsors of the November 5 Mobilization, several campus committees and the YSA-SWP were adequately represented. However, the other organized radical youth groups, including SDS, the DuBois Club and many independents had only a handful present. This was due partially to the lateness and hesitancy of the call to the meeting issued by Greenblatt from Ithaca, but primarily to the lack of real involvement of either SDS or the DuBois Club in the antiwar movement. Thus the conference did not adequately represent the potential student wing of any large-scale spring action. The groundwork could be laid at Cleveland, but these other youth groups would have to be drawn in afterwards.

Our main job was to educate those who had been involved in the November 5th Mobilization to the possibility of projecting a new kind of mobilization for the spring and to cut across the pessimism that the professors and activists, especially some of the non-YSA student youth, felt. Our arguments revolved around several themes: that the reason for the sense

of demoralization and lack of appreciation for the accomplishments of the antiwar movement was the movement's isolation from the labor and Negro movement; that the protests could not expect to rapidly end the war under these conditions; that nevertheless the economic and social pressures generated by the war, and the anti-Negro, anti-labor moves by the Johnson administration emboldened by the war, would increase as spring approached and we could expect resistance to them.

Further, we said that the core of the antiwar movement represented at the Cleveland conference had a responsibility to try to reach out and attempt to involve these other layers, as well as remobilize the middle class activists that have made it up to now. We said that we should think in terms of not just another day of protest but of organizing a qualitatively larger demonstration that would represent a new political step for the antiwar movement, taking advantage of the developments in the labor and Negro movements that we knew would occur in the next few months.

We were able to give some political content to Sidney Peck's original proposal for the spring mobilization, and our arguments had an effect. During the conference several of the leaders and organizers of the conference were convinced and came out in support of the April 15th mobilization.

The CP was also represented at the Cleveland conference. Unlike other conferences where they have tried to maneuver around us and find some substitute for large scale massive anti-administration mobilizations, their spokesman, Arnold Johnson, supported the call for the April 15th mobilization.

From what Arnold Johnson, other CP'ers and the Worker have said, we assume the major reason behind this shift in their attitude is the fact that the Vietnam war continues to be the center of American political life and that it is beginning to have more effect on the Negro and labor movements. They have come to recognize the necessity of being involved in the antiwar movement, and they must combat us through some form of cooperation. They realize they can't simply go around us as they tried to do in Washington a year ago.

Their goal of course, is to tie the antiwar movement into their reformist political perspective. They want to show that a massive base exists for a "peace" alternative in 1968, either in or on the fringes of the Democratic party.

Although the CP leaders were very clear on this perspective, one of the national leaders of the DuBois Club took the floor to disagree with Arnold Johnson, arguing against the demonstration with the familiar line of so-called community organizing type work. While the tops of the CP had decided on a turn, this apparently had not filtered down through the ranks yet, and the DuBois youth were still pushing the right-wing orientation that had left them outside the main stream of the antiwar movement.

The NCC played no significant role in the Cleveland conference. They were no longer pretending to be the national coordinating committee of the antiwar movement, and even handed out a position paper in which they said they were only one segment of it.

There was enough support at the Cleveland conference to enable us to nail down the perspective for April 15, and agreement on trying to make it the largest and best mobilization yet, reaching out more than in November to involve labor and the Negro movement. However, support for this was not unanimous, and since the student wing of the antiwar movement was not adequately represented one more step was needed to really get the April 15th mobilization off the ground.

Chicago - December 28-30

The idea for a student strike was publicly projected about seven months ago by Bettina Aptheker. It was another CP gimmick, much like the DuBois Club March on Washington or convention, to reach into the student movement, use Bettina's authority as a leader on the Berkeley campus to by-pass SDS, and call something that the CP could control and that would identify them as the leaders of the student movement.

The SDS national convention rejected the project of a student strike last summer, and there was very little general support for the idea. As the Chicago conference approached, the CP shifted their line on a strike somewhat, projecting instead the idea of some national student action in the spring, probably centered around the war question, and maybe a strike at one or two campuses.

They originally organized the conference as a typical front. CP youth went out and got sponsors without involving other radical youth groups, almost in complete secrecy. They thought that they could fill the vacuum in the student antiwar movement that has been created by the absence of a real national coordinating committee to end the war. Since no socialist youth group has hegemony or can play the dominant role, they apparently thought they might be able to slip in, take the initiative, and walk away with control over a big spring student action. At the same time, the CP was trying to get around the weakness of the DuBois Club which has been unable to recruit and educate cadre for them. They were paying for the weakness of their youth organization at precisely the same time that the antiwar movement was becoming more important for them. Even before the conference we heard complaints in several areas from CP'ers about the DuBois Club, and we noticed that it was the CP, not the DuBois Club, that was organizing the conference and setting it up through their own apparatus.

Prior to the Cleveland conference we had been planning to participate in the Chicago conference, primarily to prevent it from becoming another phony CP front. However, the nature

of our intervention was altered by several factors. One was the character of the turn made by the CP in Cleveland, which was reflected by the willingness of the CP youth to cooperate with us in the final preparations for the Chicago conference. Our comrades worked closely with them in the few weeks prior to the conference and we jointly worked out the details for the agenda and structure of the conference. Secondly, the lack of participation of the student wing of the antiwar movement in Cleveland, and the student nature of the Chicago conference, meant that it could fill an important gap in the preparations for the April 15th mobilization.

We aimed at accomplishing several things. First was to repeat the educational discussion of the Cleveland conference. We had to convince the participants of the fruitfulness of the April 15 mobilization. This included the CP and DuBois Club youth as well as the SDS'ers and independents. The CP was willing to go along with the April 15th perspective, but from the viewpoint of their reformist line these demonstrations are seen as pressure on the Democratic party and such an orientation has a built-in demoralization factor. Thus we still had to convince many of them of the importance of April 15, and we recognized that if we were successful this would have an important kick-back effect on the Spring Mobilization Committee formed in Cleveland, giving them a boost to go ahead.

Second, we wanted to tie the spring student action concretely into the April 15th mobilization. We wanted any formation that came out of the conference to be organizationally independent from the Spring Mobilization Committee, but for its work to lead up to and mobilize for April 15. We did not want some project like a petition campaign for the Gruening amendment, or a nebulous student strike, or any action not centered on the war question.

Third, it was crucial for SDS'ers to become involved, as well as independents from antiwar committees and non-organized radicals. We did not want a CP front, or a formation in which we and the CP cooperated to capture ourselves and pretend we were the student antiwar movement. We wanted the same thing we have been working for from the Washington convention on, a genuine national united front committee to involve the entire spectrum of the student student movement against the war. It was especially important to involve SDS, or at least a section of SDS, as their lack of participation in the last two big mobilizations has been a major weakness. The SDS representatives had to be convinced that neither the CP, nor us together, were pulling maneuvers to exclude them.

At the same time we were meeting in Chicago, the SDS National Council was meeting in Berkeley where they voted approximately 29-26 not to endorse the spring mobilization. This decision may not reflect the real feelings in SDS, and a referendum is underway to reverse this vote. However, it is still important that at least half of the SDS national leadership and many of

their chapters are willing to go along with the spring mobilization.

Fourthly, we wanted to lay the basis at the Chicago conference for setting up in every area united front committees involving us, the CP youth, and others. We wanted to establish a working relationship with them that would enable us to associate with their milieu, to get in contact with their forces, and open the doors to political discussion on the issue of which way for socialist youth in 1968.

The conference agenda opened with a plenary session where we could debate the importance of April 15th and convince as many as possible. This was followed by workshops where various aspects of the student movement were discussed and concrete plans and implementation for the student action were developed.

More than ever before, our fraction participated rather than simply intervened in the conference. We were not merely trying to prevent any adverse developments. Instead, we played a major role in the workshops as well as in the plenary sessions, arguing, convincing and laying out the perspectives and importance of the spring action. We were also able to cooperate with the independents and SDS observers, helping to secure their participation and quiet some of their fears. The representatives from the Spring Mobilization Committee especially played an important role, and were reconvinced of the correctness of the decision made in Cleveland.

The independents know that both we and the CP had large fractions in Chicago, and they were very sensitive to bureaucratic moves, or to having anything crammed down their throats. This constituted our major organizational problem with the CP who wanted to use the heavy hand whenever there was any disagreement or discussion. They were perfectly willing to ride over SDS and the independents and drive them out if they had to in order to get what they wanted.

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The initial mailing of the Student Mobilization Committee is enclosed, and as you can see, the decisions of the conference were essentially along the lines we originally proposed. Particularly significant is the fact that immediate withdrawal of troops was unanimously accepted as the political line of the student participation in the April 15 mobilization. Under the pressure of the war and their inability to counter our arguments, at this conference the CP youth came over completely to the withdrawal position. In fact, they acted as if there had never been any disagreement over the question.

The actual organizational independence of the Student Mobilization Committee from the Spring Mobilization Committee is important, as it will not be under the same pressures as the Spring Mobilization Committee or subject to the kind of back-sliding represented by A.J. Muste's last letter, (enclosed) in which he gave in somewhat to the negotiations position. The independence and the straight withdrawal line of the Student Mobilization Committee will keep pressure on the Spring Mobilization Committee, and the line of the student section will tend to be dominant.

The establishment of a broad, united front type organization, if maintained through April 15, and if the CP and other youth can be kept in, will be a big step towards organizing the student wing of the antiwar movement along the line which the Newsletter projected, that is on a united front basis with a political line of withdrawal.

The conference was also an important test of the development of the YSA. It was our youth against theirs, and it was clear that in terms of national breadth and depth our youth cadre is qualitatively superior. Our aims were accomplished in a conference they organized, ran, and called in the initial stages. The CP has paid a heavy price for the political line and organizational form of their youth group over the past few years. More than ever before our roots and authority in the antiwar movement paid off in setting the line and making the decisions of the conference. We were in on way outsiders.

Tasks

1) On the campuses in the local areas, units of the Student Mobilization Committee have to be set up, tying together in a united front the DuBois Clubs, the CP, us, SDS, independent Committees to End the War in Vietnam, and any one else possible. It is important to remember that the YSA as an organization is part of the antiwar movement, not just the YSA as refracted through independent committees. YSA'ers as such should participate, taking advantage of further openings to get in contact with the CP milieu particularly.

In the various areas, counterparts to the Spring Mobilization Committee must be set up, centered around existing united front committees or what ever ad hoc formations exist, and drawing in as many new forces as possible. The Student Mobilization Committees should participate in the Spring Mobilization Committees also, as a separate component.

Both the political line and the breadth of the Spring Mobilization will be determined not primarily in New York, but in the preparations of the various areas of the country for their marches on New York and San Francisco. The more areas there are that plan to participate unambiguously under a withdrawal line, and the more areas there are that draw in figures

from the labor and civil rights movement, the more successful will be the national mobilization. It is important that local committees correspond regularly with the New York offices of the Student and Spring Mobilization Committees, sending in progress reports and plans as they develop. This will play an important role in determining the attitude and willingness of these offices to move forward.

James Bevel of the SCLC, has agreed to be national director of the Spring Mobilization Committee. The decision has also been made that a printed call for April 15th will be out by February 15th, with a press conference, national posters, and other publicity.

Regular minutes are sent out by the Spring and Student Mobilization Committees to everyone on their mailing list. At least one person from each area should be on the mailing list for each. The address of the Spring Mobilization Committee is 857 Broadway, room 307, New York, N.Y. 10003. The Student Mobilization Committee is c/o Linda Dannenberg, 29 Park Row, 5th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10038.

The organization of the mobilization on the West Coast is going well, with Ed Keating and Kipp Dawson responsible to the Spring Mobilization Committee. Their address is 65 Colton St., San Francisco, California 94115.

The YSA has sent out a more detailed report on tasks and some of the complications involved. This was sent to one youth involved in antiwar work in each area, and NC'ers should be sure to read this.

Enclosed are the most recent mailings of the Student and Spring Mobilization Committees.

Jack Barnes
January 16, 1967