

REPORT ON THE "NORTHWEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE TO END
THE WAR IN VIETNAM"

Seattle, Washington, Apr. 2-3, 1966; Meany Hotel

Approximately 120 attended the panel discussions and plenary sessions of the Conference, although less than 80 paid the registration fee. The Conference had not been widely advertised. Also it was very poorly organized. Nonetheless, it was an important first faltering step toward building an anti-war movement in the Northwest.

There were delegates from the Seattle area, Bellingham, a few from Oregon, about 25 from Canada, and a number from the Bay Area. From the Bay Area came Earl Gilman, (Wohlforth), Roger Plumb, (Robertson) Steve Cherkass (PL), Bob Avakian (Sheer Committee), Kipp, myself and others.

Some participants were older radicals (including a 55-year-old PL'er, one Clayton Van Lydagraf, who is a member of "Seattle Youth for Peace in Vietnam!") Most were young white workers and college students. A number of young people were getting involved in politics for the first time.

Unfortunately for the serious young people, the panels were chaired almost exclusively by PL'ers and members of the "Seattle Tendency." (This is what the Kirk-Kaye Tendency calls itself.)

When the Conference opened on Saturday morning we found on the literature tables, along with just-opened bundles of back issues of The Militant, two statements signed by members of the Seattle Tendency.

The first was a call for "A New Revolutionary Socialist Youth Organization" signed by eight Seattle youth and one independent.

We were not surprised, because in conversations with several young people, prior to the opening of the conference, we were told, "After the Conference the YSA is going to dissolve into a new and larger youth group." Even a young high school student wearing a PL button, whom we met at Frank Powers' house, knew about it.

The second statement was signed by Clara Kaye and Larry Shumm. It was called "A Revolutionary Perspective for the Anti-War Movement." This document carried the Kirk-Kaye line, not the SWP line.

When Kipp read the "Call" she immediately confronted Shumm and asked him if he had perhaps resigned from the youth. Under pressure he finally said, yes, he had resigned. In a few minutes Clara Kaye came angrily to Kipp and me, saying that Kipp had forced Shumm to resign. We answered that the "Call" in itself was a letter of resignation. This was a strange scene.

It was up to us to present our point of view to the Conference. We spoke several times in the panels and at the plenary sessions. A number of Northern comrades also spoke. We were able to set the tone in the panels. Kipp, as an "original member of the Berkeley VDC" was able to counter Avakian, who represented the Scheer Committee. In most panels we found ourselves at odds with the Seattle Tendency.

There they were, speaking in the name of the party, but giving their line.

John Severn was particularly outrageous. In one speech he said that "even if ten million people came out into the streets of our major cities tomorrow with the demand 'Bring the Troops Home' this would be meaningless." There were gasps of disbelief, but Severn plunged on, "They'd all go back to work the next day. It wouldn't stop the war in Vietnam." Nothing less than a military rout by the NLF would stop the war, demonstrations are meaningless. Later, in the panel on "Community Organizing," we ridiculed Severn's asseverations and put forth our position.

The conflict between our position and that of the Seattle Tendency was becoming apparent to all. There was, naturally, a certain amount of confusion. One panel chairman, an independent, asked Kipp if she were a member of the S.F. DuBois Club! When Kipp replied that she was in the YSA, the chairman expressed surprise, and asked Kipp if she knew that the people she had been arguing with were members of the YSA.

The final plenary session on Sunday afternoon, April 3, was supposed to discuss (according to the publicity flyers) "What Road Ahead for the Anti-War Movement." The day before the Conference this was changed to a panel discussion on "Perspectives for the Peace Movement." Note the difference.

This panel included members of the Seattle Tendency plus PL, DuBois Club, SDS and independents.

With the exception of a Northerner and the SDS'er, all

panelists presented their own multi-issue political programs as the program for the anti-war movement. Steve Cherkoss (PL) and Shumm were exceptionally sectarian, objectionable and wordy. It was obvious that the "perspectives" discussion was leaving the audience behind. They were voting with their feet.

I took the floor at the beginning of the discussion period to publicly disassociate The Militant and party from the Seattle Tendency and to put forth our transitional approach. Shumm had come on strong with "drive the G.I.'s into the sea." I also took a few slaps at Cherkoss' sectarian revolutionism, which briefly, went like this: "As a Marxist-Leninist, I say ~~the~~war in Vietnam is directly tied in with Black Liberation in the U.S. and the persecution of Puerto Ricans. The U.S. government is our enemy, not the war in Vietnam. Demonstrations won't stop the war. We can't use the machinery of the system to destroy the system so, what's to be done? We must join with the Black Panther Party in Alabama and with Jose Fuentes, a Puerto Rican independent running for office in New York; we have to build a movement that will end perhaps the seventh war from now." A perfect program for the present anti-war movement! according to Steve Cherkoss.

When I sat down, after speaking, a young woman asked for the floor. She solidarized with me and then threw the bombshell. "I want to know why the committee I represent, the Seattle Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the very Committee that organized the big protest last week, why weren't we invited to participate in this conference? This is not a representative conference!"

My speech had shaken them but this speech created consternation -- people running back and forth consulting to beat the band. They tried to answer her and me, but just couldn't. A few minutes later the chairman adjourned the Conference. Several independents came around and we made several more contacts, very friendly.

I should add that Duane Allen, a representative of the NCC spoke at the first plenary session on Sunday. He asked that a regional NCC be set up and that \$10,000 be raised to pay a staff and get the ball rolling. His appeal fell flat. He never spoke again.

In the panel on "Regional Coordination" the Northerners effectively scuttled plans for either an NCC-dominated or

PL-dominated regional coordinating committee. The Seattle Tendency happened to agree with us on this. The organizational motion finally approved by the conference was simple: "That we exchange mailing lists and that we propose the formation of separate coordinating committees in Washington and Oregon. These committees should exchange their newsletters and mailing lists."

Kipp and I picked up a mailing list, too. We turned 17 names over to Tom and Deborah. Deborah added a few on her own.

Comradely,

/s/ Asher