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May 27, 1968

Linda Morse
c/o Student Mobilization Committee
17 East 17th Street
New York, New York

Dear Linda,

I just received your letter of May 17th inquiring into my availability for the staff of Student Mobilization Committee, and explaining that you are considering work with GIs as part of future SMC programs.

My own experience in the army convinced me that this kind of project could be very productive and is an indispensable part of the movement to bring the troops home now. The young men who are forced into the army by the draft or their own social situations are being killed and forced to kill in a brutal and aggressive war. They not only deserve our sympathy and active support but will also respond to its manifestation. As the section of young people who feel the effects of U.S. intervention in Vietnam most directly and dreadfully, they certainly have the right to know all the facts about it and to express their opinions on it. I'm convinced that the GIs will become a key force for bringing the war to an end.

I am presently fighting an undesirable discharge from the army, and I am looking forward to continuing my work with GIs. At some time they are bound to express their opposition to the war as visibly and sizeably as the students in the massive International Student Strike organized by the SMC.

However, I must tell you that I'm deeply dismayed and disgusted by the actions taken by a group, including yourself, in the New York Working Committee of the SMC. First, Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton were fired from the staff of Student Mobilization where they had worked for over a year -- and played a central part in building the biggest student action we've seen in this country!

They were fired because they are members of a political organization, the Young Socialist Alliance. Then after overturning the principles of non-exclusion and consensus on which SMC is based, the same people in New York refused to hire Lew Jones, not because of any lack of personal qualifications, but because he is a leader of the YSA.

Now this same grouping has also disregarded the decision of the last SMC conference to hold another national conference within six months in a central part of the country.

Two of my comrades have been fired, and a third not accepted for the staff simply because they hold views, which are not necessarily different from the rest of the antiwar coalition, but are apparently offensive to a group of 15 or so people who happen to be on the Working Committee. How could I be expected to work under the threat of similar organizational penalties against me and the GIs I work with, if or when my ideas "crossed" this grouping in the Working Committee in New York? How could you expect me to function as window-dressing for a grouping that has introduced political discrimination and exclusionism into the antiwar movement?

Not so long ago my organization, the YSA, was in a minority in the antiwar movement when it declared that GIs could be very important in the fight against the war. Since that time a majority of the antiwar movement has come to agree with that view. But under the new gag-rule regime in SMC, I might have been fired at that time for speaking out for something that rubbed a section of the New York Working Committee the wrong way.

I had enough of being victimized by the army brass while I was at Fort Hood, not for what I did, but for what I thought and said. I fought for the right to express my views there, and I won't compromise that right now.

I was given an undesirable discharge from the army for my ideas because the brass were afraid that those ideas might "infect" the other guys -- as if they need "infection" by anyone else to be against this war. Although they admitted I was a "good soldier" and didn't disobey direct orders, they finally had to dump me as a YSAer.

I wasn't in New York and frankly don't know all the details about the charges and counter-charges. But I did read the Mobilizer that Syd edited and used it to get support in the army. I did read the correspondence that Kipp sent out to build the Strike, and I did see the results of this work and the effect of the Strike on GIs! I also know that if witch-hunting and exclusion are brought back into the movement it will kill it -- and this is a hell of a time to do that.

The war, as every GI knows, is still going on. During the last two weeks, despite the "negotiations," there have been more deaths in Vietnam than in any two previous weeks of the war.

When I appeared at the SMC conference in 1967 as a GI on leave, I was speaking to the central organization that drew together the various groups and individuals in the student antiwar movement. Huge actions against the war were built on that basis.

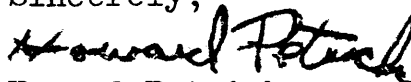
While on national tour speaking for my case I had the chance to talk to many GIs from various posts across the country. It's clear that a growing number of GIs are looking for ways to express their opposition to the war. In San Francisco, the April 27 march was led by a contingent of GIs. The SMC now has the possibility of involving increasing numbers of GIs in the struggle against the war.

It is tragic that the moves of the Working Committee have endangered the unity and future of the Student Mobilization Committee just when its activities are so badly needed. Any such measures that threaten the existence and success of the antiwar movement must be promptly reversed.

The first thing to be done is that Kipp and Syd must be reinstated. Then a full national conference of the SMC must be set for a central part of the country to allow young people (including interested GIs) to discuss the general policies of SMC, democratically review all actions of the Working Committee, and decide on what to do next in strengthening the on-going fight against the war.

I hope all these things will be done as soon as possible; we have an enormous responsibility to the Vietnamese and American victims of the war.

Sincerely,



Howard Petrick