

Report on the Struggle at UCLA, by Terry Hillman, June 17, 1969

General Background on UCLA

32,000 students attend UCLA. There is a very small percentage of black and chicano students. The school is located in the middle of a very rich neighborhood and the students that go to UCLA are a reflection of this. They belong to the middle to upper middle class income bracket. UCLA is noted for its conservatism and general apathy. The level of the students politically had shown itself to be about three years behind the times. In addition, Chancellor Young is well known by the ruling class to be the best in putting down student struggles through co-optation onto his famous fact-finding committees.

Radical Groups on Campus

SDS - SDS, through its policy of adventurism, has dwindled down to just the 6 or 7 PLers and PL sympathizers. It had been totally isolated on campus and became even more so during the recent struggle. SDS is now equated with PL and, in the eyes of the campus radicals, PL is equated with adventurism and idiocy in general.

CASE - The Community for Awareness and Social Education was founded as a result of the death of Martin Luther King. It was, at its founding, composed of liberals and was involved in community organizing and reforms for the Third World people on campus. Since it is funded through the university and had more members than any other group on campus, CASE people became the backbone and leadership of the struggle. Although the people in CASE started out as liberals, they developed very rapidly politically.

Campus Mobilization Committee - Although the CMC (UCLA version of SMC) was very large last year and built a successful action around the April 26th student strike, it was difficult to build a CMC this school year.

YSA - YSA began the school year with a fraction of nine. Most of these YSAers for one reason or another were not active on campus. Therefore, the activity of the YSA centered on setting up a literature table and attempts at building CMC.

UMAS and BSU - Both of these Third World groups are well-known for their conservatism. They are friendly with the Chancellor of UCLA and warned the Coalition not to rock the boat on any concessions they were squeezing out of the university. They refused to become a part of either the Coalition or the strike for Berkeley.

UCLA Black Panthers - While Shermont Banks was a leader in the Los Angeles Black Panther Party, the Panthers at UCLA had an entrust line in the BSU in an attempt to change its character to a more radical one. After the shooting of Huggins and Carter, the BSU sponsored one or two rallies. These were led by the Panthers. Shortly after this, Shermont Banks was deposed. The Panthers haven't done anything on campus since.

Specific Issues Which Led to the Forming of the Coalition

As a result of holding an "illegal rally" (not in a designated "free speech" area), Mike Balter of SDS-PL was threatened by the Administration with being expelled. A rally was held by SDS and CASE to protest this.

About 200 people at the rally marched to the administration building where there was a spontaneous sit-in. At the sit-in, broader issues were raised such as ROTC off campus, war related activities off campus, time-place-manner rules, open enrollment for Third World people, etc. Until this time the YSA was not involved. (This is over the course of two days.) From this sit-in, a call was issued for an open meeting - all groups included and any individuals who wanted to participate. We participated in this meeting and because of our intervention became immediately recognized as part of the newly forming leadership. At this stage, the most significant aspect of the meetings was its non-exclusionary policy. This gave the YSA the opportunity to show our line in action and we became respected for our line.

Our emphasis was to do everything possible to mobilize the largest number of people around the demands that had been issued to the administration. Although PL consistently espoused the taking of the administration building as the solution to all our problems, the majority of the people, and most significantly, the healthy leadership of CASE agreed with our position and PL remained isolated.

Another important fact was that the CASE people who became the leaders of the struggle, recognized that a large movement could have the best chances of developing if all groups who agreed with the demands worked together. Therefore, what had loosely been referred to as "the coalition" became formally called "The Coalition."

The Coalition, largely because of our intervention, had three major policies which were geared toward reaching out to the greatest number of people: 1) Education. Every type of educational tool was used, including door organizing, leafletting, making up pamphlets, articles and letters in the campus newspaper, etc.; 2) Action. Rallies, educational sit-ins (for a few hours). Visibility is the key thing here.; 3) Making use of every channel available in the superstructure of the University to present the demands, so that the "apathetic" or conservative students could not confront the Coalition, saying that it should have tried the legal paths and not resort to violence.

If any one of these ingredients were left out, it would have qualitatively decreased our struggle. It was this combination of things that our comrades stressed at every opportunity. In addition, knowing what action to take in difficult situations became an area where our intervention was the decisive factor - and where we gained a lot of respect.

Certain objective events helped the struggle at UCLA grow. The UC Regents, including Ronald Reagan, coming to UCLA provided a perfect focal point for a major action geared at getting ROTC off campus. The leaflet put out by the Coalition was headlined "We will talk to the Regents." The action consisted of a rally, then a march to the building where the Regents were meeting. The meeting was termed by the Regents as "open", although the room only held 150 people and only 40 students were allowed to enter. The Coalition sent people inside to demand an opportunity to speak and demand the meeting be held in a building where all interested students could attend. The main demands were defensively formulated - "Open the doors of the Regents meeting", "Let the students speak to the Regents", in addition to the demands of the Coalition (ROTC off campus). Because of the ground work that had been laid and because of the defensively formulated slogans, the largest turn-out in years for an action at UCLA took place - about 2,000.

By this time the Berkeley "Peoples Park" events took place. A response of horror was the reaction of the majority on campus. It was obvious that this issue was already involving people who had never been interested in the Coalition. A rally was held of over 2,000 by the Coalition. Berkeley hit previously non-interested students very hard, and they were ready for action. A mass meeting of the Coalition had voted that a take-over of a building should be recommended to the rally. Over 1500 of the 2,000 at the rally massed into the administration building. Decisions in the building as to further action were made in mass meetings throughout the night. In consultation with our comrades in Berkeley, we learned the importance of a state-wide strike in support of Berkeley. Because people were leaving the building during the night and early morning (no barricades were used), the leadership of the Coalition was getting frustrated. We fought in a steering committee meeting to call a strike. The leadership was convinced and organized themselves in such a way as to win over the mass meeting. A strike was called.

The question immediately arose as to the relationship of the Coalition to the strike. Should the strike be around the demands as well as Berkeley? Should the strike committee be composed of just Coalition leaders?

At first, the leadership was divided over the question. Part of the leadership felt that we should not give up the demands, and that the strike should center around the Berkeley issue and the demands. The other part (including YSA) felt that the reason we were getting so much support suddenly was over the Berkeley issue and not over the demands. We felt that it was primary to have a successful strike around the issue of Berkeley involving people that had never and would never have been involved otherwise. We also thought that this would be a good opportunity for the Coalition to educate on its demands (liberation classes, etc.). However, it was obvious that the leadership of the strike had to be broader than the leadership of the Coalition. What was finally adopted was a strike committee composed of representatives from the strike working committees. The strike was around the Berkeley issue, and the Coalition played an educational role. The strike was 30% effective, which is excellent for UCLA.

Because of the role that the YSA played, we gained much respect. When the question of who should represent the strike committee at the Sacramento demonstration arose, the only comrade who was active in the Coalition was chosen (without her even being at the meeting where it was decided!)

Since the march at Berkeley was the next most important event, upon return from Sacramento we pushed to have an all-out effort to mobilize for Berkeley after the two-day strike. This was passed at the strike steering committee. At a rally of 2,000 that day, we were asked to speak about this issue. Our comrade was again, along with another person, the UCLA representative to the intercampus steering committee held in Berkeley.

Role of YSA in the Struggle

It is important to note that we had only one comrade active in the struggle on campus. Nevertheless, we made sure that we were on the steering committee from the very beginning. This could be done since

the CASE leadership took a non-exclusionary attitude.

Since the leadership was not sectarian, it was possible to convince them politically. Therefore, we played a role in educating many people and illustrated how lessons can and must be drawn from our own as well as outside experience. We constantly stressed certain key points: 1) All major decisions should be made at mass meetings. Democracy works. The more people involved in the decision-making, the more people will work to build the action and participate in it. A leadership which isolates itself from the masses will end up leading only themselves. 2) All actions and activity should be geared towards drawing more and more people into the struggle. The majority of people believe there are "legitimate channels" through which grievances should be made. Although the leadership knows this is a farce, the people whom we are trying to win to our side do not. Therefore, we must show them that we are correct by going through these channels. The unconcerned administration will do the rest. The actions themselves should be timely. Moving to take a building before there is enough support can nip the movement in the bud. Mass education is also a key factor. 3) The movement, in order to be as broad as possible, should be non-exclusionary. Red-baiting, a tool of the ruling class, cannot be tolerated within the movement. This became a factor when the sentiment against PL as an ultra-left, dogmatic group tended to widen and encompass socialist or groups with a "line." Although YSA had consistently attacked PL for its adventurist ideas, when there was a reference to "those crazy socialists" (this did not come from the leadership of the Coalition), we drove home the question of no red-baiting. Because of the role we were playing, the person who had baited PL told us that he didn't mean anything against YSA, just PL. We explained further. Balter (PL) said, "Pretty good for a Trot." 4) United political action versus "do your own thing." UCLA suffers from a sizable group of "change society by changing yourself" hippies. Their answer to removing ROTC from campus is to promote "love" and "build a community" where no one is afraid to touch each other and people can feel free to take their clothes off in front of the ROTC when they're having their drills. This was just about the only time that PL and YSA were united to stress the importance of political action versus spiritual action.

Role of PL

UCLA PL is not different from PL anywhere else. Their adventurist, sectarian role gave them a very bad reputation on campus even before the struggle began. PL has 6 or 7 members and sympathizers at UCLA but played a much less significant role than YSA with only one person active. The attitude of the leadership of the Coalition was that it is too bad the struggle began around PL (Balter incident.) PL continued to lose face by participating in Coalition meetings and then going against the decisions made by the Coalition during the action. In addition, their attitude toward decision-making at mass meetings is that the "vanguard" should decide on a policy and tell the masses what to do. This elitism exposed PL for what it is. They also never ceased to warn the Coalition that they were in constant danger of being co-opted by the administration and that the leadership had already sold out since they were not willing to stay in the administration building during the sit-in. After the decision was made to leave the taken-over building to build the strike, PL never again showed its face.

Problems with the Coalition

Basically, the Coalition was very healthy in the sense that everyone desired to smooth over disagreements in order to maintain a working coalition. The CASE leadership played an important role in this regard. In addition, they have very good instincts as to what will draw the most amount of people into action. The YSA, then provided the consciousness of what was necessary, and CASE usually agreed.

However, because they had no real experience in the radical movement or any knowledge of revolutionary politics, CASE people developed unevenly. They began to consider themselves revolutionaries and even socialist revolutionaries without understanding the role of the party, or, for that matter, examining existing parties. This includes the necessity for a program. Therefore the tendency toward frustration leading to ultra-leftism developed. Luckily, our intervention and their general good sense was able to curb any wild ideas.

This lack of understanding led to the Coalition (minus PL and YSA) conceiving of itself as some sort of vanguard. They think that since the Coalition was successful in mobilizing masses of people into action over Berkeley and to some extent the original demands, they will be able to do the same thing by turning the Coalition into a multi-issue organizing group such as the Radical Student Union in Berkeley, and have, in fact, proposed the change in name from the Coalition to RSU.

YSA Intervention to Recruit Out of the Struggle

Our ~~working~~ intervention during the struggle and good personal relations with the rest of the leadership won us many allies.

Throughout the struggle, contact work was done on individuals in the leadership. This work included discussions on an individual basis about socialism, the YSA, and our program in general, as well as selling our literature, making sure to be able to contact the people during the summer, and inviting them to the socialist summer school. Although there has been a weakness in sub-getting, this area will be worked on even during the summer. The next step will include inviting them to dinner, forums, etc. In addition, the YSA held a liberation class during the strike which was attended by some of the leaders of the Coalition.