

Antiwar Report by Gus Horowitz , April 16, 1969

The April 5-6 demonstrations against the war in Vietnam were far larger than had been originally projected. They were called at a time when there was widespread disorientation among masses of people because of the Paris talks. They took place after objective circumstances had changed. The second Tet offensive in Vietnam, and the Nixon administration's clear-cut intention to continue to prosecute the war at a high level served to catalyze the antiwar sentiment of large sectors of the population back into action.

The April 5-6 demonstrations were called at a time when the antiwar movement was splintered organizationally, and by a conference which, although it had fairly broad sponsorship, did not involve the participation of a wide spread of groups in the antiwar movement. In the course of organizing the April 5-6 demonstrations, most of the local antiwar coalitions were rebuilt to a substantial degree.

The Student Mobilization Committee, which was still weak organizationally last December, emerged as the central national organizer of antiwar youth, a fact that is more and more recognized by other groups in the antiwar movement. In particular, the SMC was able to organize substantial numbers of high school youth in the demonstrations.

These three factors, all essential to the success of April 5-6, point to our next course of action in the antiwar movement.

The next national action

It is clear that it is possible to organize another major mass mobilization against the war.

To do so will require the rebuilding of the national antiwar coalition, since the National Mobilization Committee is no longer viable, has lost considerable authority, and did nothing for the April 5-6 demonstrations. In the next few weeks we hope to lay the groundwork for another major antiwar conference. It is important that such a conference be representative of the groups in the antiwar movement. Accordingly, we are proceeding immediately to initiate the necessary preliminary discussion with other forces to obtain agreement for the idea of such a conference and to build it with adequate time and preparation to insure a representative attendance. It would be helpful if preliminary discussions about the idea of such a conference could be held among the central antiwar figures in each area, so that we can have a clear picture of what to expect.

The Student Mobilization Committee

The Student Mobilization Committee will be a key ingredient in helping to initiate and organize the next major national action against the war, as it was for April 5-6. In the course of building

April 5-6 the SMC gained national authority, and in many areas was able to grow in a very substantial way. Our main task now is to redouble our efforts to build the SMC, the central organization for antiwar youth.

Local areas should respond to the SMC call for large local or regional conferences to consolidate its organizational gains and to plan activity for the remaining part of the school year - high school and college.

The turnout of high school students on the Easter actions was phenomenal in several places and the objective situation has never been more favorable for organizing high school students. In addition, our rivals have no central focus for this activity and the field is wide open. In this context, the SMC is launching a campaign to win the right of high school students to organize against the war in Vietnam.

High school students should have the right to wear buttons and armbands in school; to pass out leaflets in and around schools; use the bulletin boards to announce antiwar activities; utilize school facilities such as rooms and auditoriums for antiwar meetings; invite antiwar speakers, including antiwar GI's, to speak at the schools, in classes, at graduation, and in special antiwar meetings; etc. This generation of high school youth does not belong to the warmakers, and it has every right to use the civil liberties every citizen is entitled to to organize itself to the fullest against the war.

All the major civil liberties organizations are willing to back these rights with legal aid. Already cases of this kind in which YSAers are involved have developed in Cleveland, Chicago, and New York. But it is important to understand that what is envisioned here is not a question of seeking defense cases. On the contrary, what is projected is an offensive, in which activists in the high schools begin exercising their rights to protest. If the school authorities respond by prohibitions, then legal action and broad actions in defense of the rights of high school students can and should be organized. This campaign should be a central campaign in every area and is one of the keys to building the SMC. Even where there are no high school contacts, we can begin such work.

On the college campuses, antiwar committees have not been as strong in many areas as in the past. But the objective situation is not unfavorable, as is proved by the rash of anti-ROTC and anti-complicity actions which have developed spontaneously on many campuses. If local SMC's project and initiate concrete actions against campus complicity of various kinds, they can succeed. Antiwar actions around graduations can be organized successfully in a major way. Why shouldn't antiwar speakers speak at commencement exercises, for example?

It is good to bear in mind that the widespread antiwar feeling makes audacity (not to be confused with ultraleft adventurism) appropriate, the audacity that flows from the confidence that the antiwar student speaks for the overwhelming majority.

Undoubtedly local SMC conferences will generate many other good

ideas for continuing SMC activity, can carry them out with militancy, a realistic sense of tactics, and an attractive flair, and gain greater authority and support for the SMC. The SMC national office is issuing a call for such activities on a national level.

Ft. Jackson Defense

In the next few weeks, a central activity for us will be defense of the Ft. Jackson GI's. This work is being organized by the GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee with the aim of involving as broad a range of support as possible and should be a central part of the SMC's activity. (See report by Larry S. for more complete summary.)

On using the SMC name

Over the past period a number of areas have been carrying out their youth antiwar work through committees which don't use the SMC name, although they function like SMC's (either city-wide or campus based), and look to the SMC national office for leadership, literature, etc. It is very important that we try to convince these committees to use the SMC name.

Where this is not possible due to the nature of the committee - that is, where it is not actually a youth antiwar committee, but a more general coalition including adults, or essentially a GI committee, it is important that an actual SMC be formed, even if this has to be done on a small scale at first. The objective conditions are such that an SMC will grow if it gets busy on the high school antiwar civil liberties campaign and other projects.

The SMC nationally is becoming more and more recognized as the central youth antiwar organization, a goal which we want to aid in every way possible. It is important that the SMC be able to speak as a real national organization in its publicity, to antiwar youth, and within the general antiwar movement, and that there be no confusion on this matter in local areas because of the lack of an official SMC.

In the past there have been specific local conditions which made it seem easier to function without using the SMC name. But now that the SMC has been rebuilt nationally, the over-riding national considerations outweigh any of these specific local circumstances. Now, more than ever before, the SMC is the central organization through which we do our antiwar work, and bring the militant, withdrawal, mass action line into the general antiwar coalitions. To maximize the effectiveness of the SMC requires that local youth antiwar groups in which we are involved function with the SMC name.

GI's

The April 5-6 demonstrations also confirmed our perspective regarding the inter-relationship between GI and civilian antiwar sentiment. The total number of GI's demonstrating on April 5-6 was more than ever before, and the publicity on the demonstrations indicated growing recognition of the GI component of the antiwar movement. The demonstrations themselves showed that the central axis of antiwar protest remains the mass demonstrations, of which GI's are one component. The

tremendous number of high school students who participated shows the importance of consistent, well-organized work in that area, and the high percentage of youth generally confirms our emphasis on building the SMC.

It should be clear that our general approach to antiwar GI's differs somewhat from our coalition approach in building antiwar demonstrations. Because of the possibility of victimization from the brass, there is no room in doing GI work for loose formulations, ill-conceived methods of organizing, "doing your own thing," etc.

It is one thing to enter into a coalition with people who have all sorts of ideas (some of them wierd) for purposes of a demonstration in which everyone involved agrees to march down the same street at the same time. It is a very different matter to try to act in common with such people in defending the rights of GI's. In this sphere we act on a certain basis and on that basis alone. It is a three-fold approach: collective action rather than isolated individual "acts of conscience;" emphasis on the legal rights of GI's as citizens soldiers; and opposition to the Vietnam war as the central issue around which GI's are exercising their civil liberties.

There is not the slightest room for variation or looseness on this threefold approach, or for coalitions to do GI work which involve other concepts of GI organizing. Only on the basis of these three points can we do effective GI work, minimize the chance of victimization, and fight effectively against any victimization that may occur.

Ultra-leftism

Finally, the demonstrations April 5-6 indicated that we can expect some problems from ultra-left groups in future actions. In New York and San Francisco there were attempts by small groups of ultra-lefts to precipitate confrontations. In the New York and Chicago rallies, additional speakers were added to the program without the prior consent of the organizing bodies. While these problems were not too severe on April 5-6, it is likely that in future demonstrations we can expect more organized attempts by the ultra-lefts to change the character of the demonstrations, not by convincing the coalitions, but by fait accompli.

To handle these ultra-left and provocation problems will require: (1) confidence in the ability of the antiwar coalitions to decide firmly the character of the antiwar demonstration; (2) adequate political preparation within the antiwar movement, explaining the reason for avoiding ultra-left adventures and convincing others of the necessity for (3) adequate marshalling to insure that the decisions of the antiwar coalitions are carried out.