This essay started life as a "term paper" I wrote as an auditor of a high-school class on the '60s at Friends Select School, Philadelphia, in the spring of 1991. I am in the process of revising and expanding it, and would welcome readers' suggestions and comments.—J.J.

The U.S. Since the Sixties—Have We Gone Forward, Backward, or Just Around in Circles?

Jon Johanning

HE "SIXTIES"* MAY NOT HAVE BEEN THE MOST REMARKABLE decade in U.S. history, but I would imagine that, to almost everyone in this country who lived through them, these years surely were among the most striking ones of their lives, in one way or another. Close to thirty years later, we are still arguing vehemently about their significance and their lasting effects in our society. The social change movement, especially, alternately seems to be consumed with regretting that the passion, commitment, and mass actions of those years have evaporated and cursing the foolish blunders that were committed. "The times, they have been a-changin'," indeed; was it fortunate, or regrettable, that the Sixties did not last forever? How should we evaluate the changes that have occurred, both in the movement and in the society as a whole?

This is much too great a subject to be dealt with conclusively in a short essay, of course, but I want to try, at least, to lay some of the groundwork that is needed for answering such broad questions. Of course, whether we have advanced or regressed in the past 20 to 25 years is a question that each answerer must respond to from her or his own standpoint. I speak as one who became involved with the peace and civil rights movements in 1963-4, largely as a result of seeing on television the famous March on Washington at which Martin Luther King delivered his "I have a dream" speech; continued primarily in the peace movement in the later 1960s; and has participated in various social change activities ever since.

To make a first attempt at answering the question posed by the title, from my standpoint, I shall just mention a few items of progress and retrogression, both in the whole society and in the movement:

• *U.S. society as a whole* seems to have made some progress in tolerance for opposition views (for example, it seems inconceivable that a Congressional committee such as the House Un-American Activities Committee, abolished in 1975, would be revived today), some gains for women as well as gays and lesbians (not forgetting of course that there are long distances still to go), ecological concerns, and other areas. It has almost certainly gone backward in areas such as education, racial prejudice, and concern for the welfare of the least

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^{*} As is commonly done, I reckon this period as lasting roughly from the assassination of John F. Kennedy to the resignation of Richard M. Nixon.

advantaged people in general. And there seems to have been stagnation, at best, in the effort to reform the injustices of the economic system.

• The social change movement, I would say, has advanced to a large extent from being entangled in sterile, doctrinaire traps such as "Marxism-Leninism" and the "counterculture," but it has clearly fallen back a great deal in energy, numbers, and level of organization, and it has stagnated, at best, with respect to its lack of clarity about where it wants to go, its direction and vision, and the ways and means to get there, wherever "there" may be.

Before we can make these judgments more precise, we need to delve into a bit of theory, considering in very general terms why the politics of the Sixties developed in the direction it did. We also need to review some of the history of this time, although I cannot begin to give a complete account of those years; I will also add some notes about my activities during those years, to give you an idea of the angle of vision from which I observed this period.

It is generally agreed, I think, that the movement for social change which began to show such promise before about 1968–69 somehow got off track, and has never been the same since, with a few exceptions such as feminism and ecology. The popular explanations for this fact, such as some activists' overindulgence in drugs, the demoralizing string of political assassinations (JFK; Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner; Malcolm X; RFK; King; the Black Panthers; Kent State and Jackson State; and so on and on), the alleged corrupting influence of Dr. Spock's advice on child-rearing, are either untrue or only very partially true. The basic reasons for what happened at that time, I think, lie in the way social change is normally achieved in a (somewhat) democratic society such as ours, and the deviation from this normal course that politics took in the late 1960s.



THE EARLY SIXTIES: THE PLOT THICKENS

RDINARILY, IN SOCIETIES SUCH AS OURS, A CERTAIN KIND OF historical development takes place when pressing social problems cry out for solution; I shall refer to it as the "primary (or power) dynamic." In broad terms (leaving out, of course, all the short-term twists and turns) it goes like this:

• When one or more problems become too serious for the system to handle in the normal, established ways that discontents are usually taken care of, the radical sector of the society (usually so small as to be negligible) begins to grow in size and power. It tries by various ways to attract attention and get its ideas into the public arena, and begins to achieve some small successes.

- The "liberal" wing of the Establishment (those who accept the basic existing economic/social/political system, but want to make gradual, non-fundamental improvements in it) finds that it can use the apparent growing threat from its left in its everlasting arguments with the "conservative" wing (those who tend to resist any change): "If you don't agree to some of our proposals for change, those horrendous radicals might take over!" (While liberals and radicals frequently despise each other, and each would apparently prefer that the other vanish from the earth, they do in fact need each other. Dave Dellinger, who was largely responsible for organizing the "Mobilizations" that brought out hundreds of thousands to demonstrate against the war on the East and West Coasts each spring and fall for a few years, used to reply, when he was asked whether it was more important to organize the movement at the local or the national level, "Which do you think is more important, breathing in or breathing out?" The radical and liberal wings of the social change movement are just as dependent on each other.)
- Theoretically, there may be one of four results of this pressure on the Establishment:
 - (1) The conservatives do not give ground, and may in fact respond to growing reactionary pressure on *their* flank by trying to turn the clock backward; the radical pressure grows stronger and stronger, the Establishment weakens, becomes more corrupt, or otherwise loses its grip on the situation, and a revolution ensues
 - (2) The conservatives do give some ground, there is enough reform in the system to deflate the expanding radical balloon, and politics return to "normal."
 - (3) The problems somehow get solved by themselves, with little intentional political activity; the pressure for change dissipates, and politics return to "normal."
 - (4) The conservatives hold their position, or turn back the clock; the *radicals* falter and lose support from the public, and a quasi- or totally fascist result comes about.

Confining ourselves to U.S. history, examples of result (1) can be seen in the American Revolution (although a revolution in the economic/social sense of course did not happen) and the Civil War (with respect to slavery and the social structure of the South). There are numerous examples of result (2): the development of the labor movement up to World War II, the women's suffrage movement of the early twentieth century (and some other aspects of this "Progressive" period, as the historians usually call it), and the civil rights movement in the South of the 1950s and 1960s are a few. Result (3) no doubt also occurs frequently; in most cases, we are hardly aware of this happening. Result (4) can be seen most notably in the so-called McCarthyism of the 1950s, although fortunately the country was apparently not ripe for a full-fledged fascism.

Let us look more closely at the period of the early Sixties (say, 1963-67) against this background. From the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and the Montgomery bus boycott movement of the 1950s, through the freedom rides, the Mississippi Summer of 1964, and the Selma movement in early 1965, the freedom movement in the South followed the pattern of this dynamic very closely. Pressure from nonviolent demonstrators, conveyed to the nation

through televised images of their sufferings at the hand of bigoted authority, moved the Federal government to put pressure in turn on Southern communities, who gradually dismantled the various institutions of Jim Crow. This became the predominant paradigm of the nonviolent social change movement through about 1967-8: if we could do it in the racist South, we can force the system to change anywhere!

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In 1964, as a graduate student at Yale, I was inspired by seeing the previous summer's March on Washington on television to begin working with the New Haven chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and to apply for the Mississippi Summer project (for which I was rejected, quite sensibly, for lack of experience!). I spent the summer, instead, getting training in the nuts and bolts of nonviolent social change at the New England Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA) farm in Voluntown, Connecticut, near the Rhode Island line. There I got a taste of rural communal life (years before most of the "counterculture" communalists headed for the woods), participated in demonstrations at the General Dynamics Company's Polaris submarine shipyard in New London, met Mr. and Mrs. Schwerner, the parents of one of the Mississippi martyrs, who lived nearby, and went to Worcester, Massachusetts and Atlantic City (the site of the Democratic convention that year) to demonstrate against U.S. actions in Vietnam (again getting a jump on most of the movement). The Atlantic City demonstration was particularly memorable; about 200 of us, mounting the only demonstration about Vietnam at the time, unless I am mistaken, held a brief vigil on the Boardwalk opposite Convention Hall, next to the supporters of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The scene at the next Democratic Convention, in Chicago in 1968, was needless to say far different!

Soon afterward (I don't remember exactly when, but it must have been late 1964 or early 1965), CORE adopted a policy of refusing membership to whites, and I had to leave. It was a change that I fully understood at the time; I was, truth to tell, beginning to feel rather foolish wandering around the black community, as a young white graduate student, trying to organize in a setting I hardly understood at all.

Immediately I became caught up in the gathering storm over Vietnam. In 1964 (my first trip to the voting machines) I had voted for Johnson, who promised "no wider war" and suggested that he would save the little girl with the daisy, in the famous TV commercial, from incineration in a nuclear holocaust. February 2, 1965 marked the beginning of "Rolling Thunder," the first sustained bombing of North Vietnam, quickly followed on March 14 by the first "teach-in" on the background of Southeast Asia and the war at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Soon I was researching topics such as the history of France in Indochina and "strategic hamlets" for the new antiwar group in New Haven, and participating in more demonstrations, at first as minuscule as the one in Atlantic City. (That spring, a campus poll reported that 91% of the nation's students sup-

ported the war—by mid-1970, Louis Harris found, 91% of American youth and a majority of all Americans were antiwar. 1*)

The growth of the antiwar movement in the next three years or so, from the vantage point of academia, was truly astounding. Before long, not only we students and our teachers were marching, but Business Executives for Peace, Mothers for Peace, Scientists for Peace, and, for all I know, Insurance Salesmen for Peace were regularly turning up in front of the White House. Of course, we were greeted when we first hit the streets by calls of "Commies!" and "Get a job!", but by 1967 or 1968 (when I was teaching college in Portland, Oregon), I recall getting a respectful hearing at a Rotary Club lunch.

On a larger scale, the tradition of ever-growing mass mobilizations against the war each spring and fall in Washington, New York, and San Francisco, which Dellinger and others organized, was taking shape; as many as 100,000 showed up at the Lincoln Memorial in October 1967, as a few thousand radicals assembled at the Pentagon to try to "levitate" it by concentrated meditation on peace, or at least to move it "leftward" by laying siege to it. (The liberal/radical dynamic was operating here, after a fashion, but already signs were appearing that it would not be as effective as it was on civil rights.)

The "point men" of the radical wing of the antiwar movement were the draft resisters. (I received a conscientious objector classification when I first registered in 1959–there being no war then, it was not a particular problem for someone with a Quaker background. I kept a student deferment through 1966, though increasingly uneasy about being able to enjoy that privilege. By this time, I think, I had no draft card to burn, having lost it at some point and never getting a replacement. Finally, in 1967, I got an initial notification that I was to report for alternative service, and was seriously pondering whether or not to refuse this when I reached my twenty-sixth birthday and thereby went to the bottom of the draft list. Not the stuff of heroes, but there you are.) Resistance to the draft built to a peak, perhaps, at the famous Oakland, California induction center action of October, 1967, in which 3,000 people blocked access the first day, and as many as 10,000 in the next few days.²

In lieu of burning my card, I got up early once a week and went down to the Portland induction center at about 6 o'clock to leaflet the inductees. A few would take leaflets explaining their legal rights as they were escorted by military personnel to the center, but a few seconds later they were ordered by a burly soldier just inside the door to throw them into a large trash can; many threw them on the street as soon as they got them, or refused them. Once, a re-enlisting veteran tore the leaflets out of my hand and nearly beat me up. All in all, not a very heartening experience; but years later I happened to read in a newspaper article that the induction center that achieved the second highest record in the country for inductees refusing even to respond to their draft notices, after Oakland, was in fact Portland, so our local anti-draft group must have been doing something right!

^{*} For numbered references, see end of paper.

In fact, I am convinced, although you will find it very hard to get Establishment representatives to admit it, that the draft resistance movement, organized and unorganized, and the associated antiwar movement within the military represented the closest thing to a revolutionary outcome (number (1) in the list above) that the movement of the Sixties managed to achieve; the gradual withdrawal from Vietnam (referred to by Nixon as "Vietnamization") and the end of the draft were essentially due, I think, to the collapse of the Selective Service System and the growing collapse in military discipline in the U.S. armed forces. (So many draftees were simply ignoring their "Greetings from the President," not even bothering at the end to flee to Canada or try to fool their draft boards into thinking that they were crazy, ill, or homosexual, that the FBI could never hope to catch all of them, and more and more soldiers were going AWOL, deserting, refusing orders *en masse*, or even assassinating their commanding officers with fragmentation grenades—"fragging.")

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This, however, was several years in the future. In 1967–1968, the most one could say was that the liberal wing of the Establishment was being mobilized, but the conservative center, represented by LBJ, was still solid. Of course, we in the movement knew nothing of the deep split that was developing within the President's inner circle,* and especially the panic they felt at the Tet Offensive of January and February 1968, when the enemy hit simultaneously in nearly every part of South Vietnam, including the American Embassy, and dramatically refuted the claim of the U.S. military that "the light at the end of the tunnel" was in sight.

In the previous fall, Allard Lowenstein, the quintessential liberal, had begun a Dump Johnson movement, convincing Senator Eugene McCarthy to challenge the President in the primaries. Reporters in Vietnam were becoming increasingly critical, and the news media were allowing more and more skepticism to creep into their war stories. After Tet, in a February 27 TV documentary, the trusted grandfather figure Walter Cronkite flatly stated that we were "mired in stalemate" and the only sensible course was to negotiate "not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy and did the best they could." McCarthy came within a few hundred votes of beating Johnson in New Hampshire the next month, and everyone was astounded by the President's "April Fool" announcement that "I shall not seek, and will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president."

A few days later, on April 4, King was assassinated. A wave of riots in what were then called the "Negro ghettos" swept the nation. A young white woman named Bernardine Dohrn, who had done some legal work for King's open housing campaign in Chicago, had this reaction, according to a friend:

^{*} See, for instance, the memoirs of Clark Clifford, the most inside of all Democratic insiders.

[She] was really stunned. I must admit that I was fairly jaded by then, and I remember saying that with King dead, the Panthers and the other militants would have a clear field to lead the revolution. But Bernardine was sincerely moved, and she began to cry. She cried for a while and she talked about Chicago, when she had worked with King. She said she hadn't always agreed with him, but she responded to him as a human being. Then she went home and changed her clothes. I'll never forget that—she said she was changing into her riot clothes: pants. We went up to Times Square, and there was a demonstration going on of pissed-off black kids and white radicals. We started ripping signs and getting really out of hand and then some kids trashed a jewelry store. Bernardine really dug it. She was still crying, but afterward we had a long talk about urban guerrilla warfare and what had to be done now—by any means necessary.⁴

At a memorial service for King at Columbia University, a student named Mark Rudd denounced the university for hypocritically honoring him while continuing war-related research and planning to invade the black community surrounding it to build a gymnasium. This touched off the renowned Columbia student takeover, which immediately became enshrined in movement memory as the Tet Offensive of the student movement. Meanwhile, Bobby Kennedy had entered the race for president on March 16, after McCarthy's surprising showing, but was assassinated himself the night of the California primary.

In these few months, momentous events were compressed into an accelerating rush that hardly anyone could comprehend. The news of uprisings that spring in Paris and Czechoslovakia only added to the thrilling sense that not only the U.S., but the entire world was on the brink of an entirely new chapter of history.

But even more thrills were in store. As Gitlin recalls:

Our emotions were flooded. Along with Lyndon Johnson and Richard J. Daley and James Earl Ray, Ronald Reagan and J. Edgar Hoover and Sirhan Sirhan, "Eve of Destruction" and *Bonnie and Clyde*, Green Berets and Black Panthers and the N.Y.P.D., we were churning in a sea of rage.⁵

"Street fighting"—jousting with the cops, Molotov cocktails in hand, and breaking store windows, in imitation of the black rioters of the previous few summers, who were increasingly considered "the vanguard of the revolution" by white, middle-class radicals who were giving up on nonviolent protest—began in Berkeley and surged toward Chicago in August.

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Was I churning in this sea with Gitlin and others? Not really; I was still teaching college, although beginning to doubt the wisdom of this career choice for myself, and doing odd jobs for the local antiwar movement. In the summer

of 1968, I returned to the CNVA farm in Connecticut for a few weeks. The Saturday before the Chicago Democratic Convention, I was planning to drive to Chicago with a few other members of the group, hoping to inject a bit of non-violence into the proceedings, although we were aware that most of the activists planning to descend on the city had very different ideas in their minds, and that the threats of violence, whether sincere or not, had been played up by Mayor Daley to the point that many antiwar movement people had decided to stay away.

At about two o'clock that morning, sleeping in the main farm house, I was suddenly awakened by gunfire and a brilliant light outside (caused by a magnesium flare). The gunfire quickly ceased, to be followed by what sounded like a police car radio right under the window of the room. What had happened? Were there really police there, or someone with a radio tuned to the police frequency? I and the other two guys in the room were so frightened that when we heard a knock on the door and the voice of one of our friends saying that everything was all right, we did not believe it for a few moments.

It turned out that about ten Minutemen (a violent right-wing "guerrilla" group) had attacked the farm with the apparent intent to kill us and burn the place down, and had been captured by about 80 state policemen, who had been tipped off to this planned attack by the FBI, which had infiltrated the Minutemen and learned of it. This event was certainly the high point of my Sixties movement carrier, and I often reflected afterward on the irony of our lives being saved by the FBI and the police, whom many other activists at that time were reviling as "pigs."

To cut the story short, we flew, rather than drove, to Chicago. The first thing I saw upon getting to the Loop was a press car with a row of hard hats on the shelf behind the rear seat; this told me immediately that I was getting into a very serious situation! Having just nearly been killed, I was in no mood for further excitement, and spent most of the week holed up in the home of the parents of a CNVA person, watching events proceed on TV like everyone else in the country and venturing out a few times to help in some nonviolent actions which attracted no attention whatever amid all the chaos.

I need not spend much time detailing the political developments in the country after Chicago; one can turn to Gitlin or any other standard history of the period to refresh one's mind. Let me simply quote from Gitlin's list of a few of the events that happened soon after Chicago:

Just after Chicago, an early phalanx of the women's liberation movement picketed the Miss America pageant, dumped some of the more confining pieces of underwear in a trash barrel, and became known forevermore as 'bra-burners.'... In May, Berkeley's People's Park brought police shotguns into action, for the first time a white was shot and killed on the scene of a confrontation, and a largely white city was occupied by the National Guard. ... In July, homosexuals responded to the bust of a gay bar in Greenwich Village by fighting back against the police.⁶

These events, almost lost in the continuing turmoil over the war, fore-shadowed three movements that would loom far larger in the Seventies and Eighties: the women's movement, the environmental movement, and the gay and lesbian movement. The political milieu in which they would develop was far different from that of the anti-Vietnam War movement; Nixon and Agnew were elected and proceeded to stir up the "Silent Majority," who had seen Chicago on their TV screens not as a "police riot" against innocent demonstrators and representatives of the news media, but as a valiant struggle by Chicago's finest to subdue the filthy, rotten mob of kids who were tearing down everything that made America great, and the traitorous reporters and TV camera people who were taking their side.

When the environmental movement was launched for real on Earth Day, in 1970, a determined effort was made to present it as a joyous, non-threatening, wholly reformist movement that anyone could join, and for the most part it has remained so ever since (to the dismay of some would-be eco-guerrillas!), enjoying the support of a large segment of the society because its values coincide with theirs (who would oppose Bambi and Smokey the Bear?). The women's and gay/lesbian movements have had much harder going, because they have challenged some of the most central values of the society, as we shall see below.*



THE LATE SIXTIES: THE PLOT SOURS

LEARLY, THE SOCIAL CHANGE PROCESS WAS NO LONGER ON THE regular course of what I call the primary dynamic. What had happened?

Most analysts of this period recognize that there had been profound changes in the consciousness of the more radical, committed activists; they had become convinced that revolution in the U.S. was just around the corner, and that only violence would bring it about. At the Free Speech demonstrations in Berkeley (it seemed like ages ago), Mario Savio had cried out:

There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to

^{*} My own position is that the best course of action for radicals to pursue was then, and still is, nonviolent action. Arguing this position is detail is outside the scope of this essay, but see Dellinger, *Revolutionary Nonviolence*, for a penetrating commentary on the politics of the Sixties from a leader of the nonviolent movement.

the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.⁷

This had been the justification for radical activity up to now: whether it be effective or not, I must throw myself in front of the Juggernaut as a personal statement of my existential response to the horrors around me, if nothing else. Now, though, the attitude was that expressed by Dohrn, who was becoming a key leader of the "revolutionaries": "urban guerrilla warfare and what had to be done now—by any means necessary."

This state of mind had been developing for a year, at least. Jeff Segal, a leader of the Oakland induction center actions in October 1967, wrote:

People were mad about... the brutality they saw and were determined to make the power structure pay for what it did. They went into the streets and built barricades... would run up behind buses and rip the ignition wires out or would climb into trucks and steal the keys... start to paint things on the streets and sidewalks. The paint was really the original catalyst that loosened the people up and led to the many other great, beautiful things.... They... let their imagination and newfound sense of power run wild.⁸

By the time of the Kent State killings in May, 1970, even the decidedly unrevolutionary students at the Oregon school where I was teaching had gotten to the point that, like students at many colleges and universities throughout the country, they set up large barricades on the intersections of their campus and lived in them day and night for several days, halting most normal activity there. But "Vietnamization" (coupled with invasions of Cambodia and massive bombing of North Vietnam) continued, the draft ended, Nixon proclaimed that he was not a crook but was caught anyway and forced to resign, and the war itself finally ground to a halt five years after Kent State; by that time, most of us who had opposed it for so long had largely forgotten it, going on to struggle on new fronts: women's liberation, nuclear power, ecology, or gay rights.

The new dynamic that took over from the "primary dynamic" was what I will call a "secondary," or "consciousness dynamic." It too was nothing unprecedented. Similar events have happened before, when a tremendous shock to the world view of a society occurs which cannot be dealt with by normal political processes. For example, the rapid industrialization of England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the enormous social upheavals connected with it were reflected in the poetry of Blake, Shelley, Coleridge, and Wordsworth; later, a similar transformation of American society drove Whitman and others to what would be called in the Sixties an "expansion of consciousness."

In the late Sixties, the primary, power dynamic became stalled because the radical segment of society rammed its head into an absolute limit to its growth in numbers and power. I believe that this was primarily because the previous generation or two of American radicals had failed to educate the public as to the real nature and necessity of radicalism. For this, they were partly to blame themselves, but of course they also suffered a series of crushing blows from authority,

from the Palmer raids after World War I to the purge of radicals from the unions and the McCarthyist oppression after World War II.⁹

It should also be remembered that older, white, male American workers fared relatively well through the Sixties; it was the economically marginal and insecure groups, youth, non-whites, and women, who stirred up most of the trouble. The New Left, after all, was really marginal to American society from the start; it grew from the "beatniks" and the academic dissenters of the Fifties. To generate a really strong radical movement that could have underpinned a movement that would have succeeded in making major changes in society, the white, male middle class would have had to make common cause with these other three groups, but to an unfortunate extent just the opposite happened.

David Zane Mairowitz, in *The Radical Soap Opera*, diagnoses this illness very perceptively, I believe:

Classical economic motivations have, of course, been instrumental in shaping reactions against capitalist injustice. But activism has been stymied at every turn by the sheer enormity of its task; it has no real hope—nor has it ever had—of overturning the U.S. colossus. All the left-wing movement's attempts at gaining concrete political power have been crushed; most of its dreams for changing American consciousness are sheer pretense. As the movement is faced, decade upon decade, with the bleak facts, it turns increasingly to activities in the cultural field and builds itself fantasies of political significance in lieu of the real thing. In the same manner, one man's reaction to the political stone wall and to his own helplessness is to direct his radical impulse toward redesigning himself. This has come to be more and more the case as America Toses the traditional concept of a proletariat, and the "working class" becomes conservative. Rebellion is then the domain of the middle classes whose angerbase is generally noneconomic, and whose acts may be considered "leftish" rather than leftist. Most often a man's motives for political involvement can be linked to desires for "self-discovery" and the revelation of this self on a public platform. 10

There seems no doubt that this is at least part of what was happening in the late Sixties and Early Seventies; radicalism was displaced from "the real world" to the realm of fantasy, symbols, and myth, and here it was quite easy to take whatever extreme, "revolutionary" position one wished.*

The only problems were that this gave rise to an increasing risk of losing all touch with reality, and that others were just as free to escape into their own fantasy worlds. The Minutemen who nearly cut short my social change activities were clearly living in such a world which was symmetrically opposite to that of the "play radicals" who came to dominate the movement. Nixon's "Silent Ma-

^{*} Or woman's—Author's note.

^{*} Even Dellinger, ordinarily quite level-headed and acute in his political judgments, apparently got rather carried away at times; writing about 1970, he made the following astonishing prophecy: "The present disorders are not apt to be terminated short of a repression so severe that it resembles fascism, or institutional changes so far reaching that they will constitute a second American Revolution." ¹¹

jority" might not have approved of the Minutemen's actions, but their world view was not much different.

One way of describing the situation during the Nixon years would be to contrast the basic value principles of what has been called the "liberal consensus" of the U.S. in the post-World-War-II period with the principles to which most of the radicals of the late Sixties subscribed (see the Appendix). (In this sense, Nixon and his followers could be considered as liberals, since they would have agreed to most of these principles, as did John Kennedy and his supporters at the start of the Sixties.) In both cases, one could say that these principles partially reflected reality, but were for the most part expressions of how these groups of people profoundly *wished* to see reality.

As the radical social change movement and its "Silent Majority" adversaries dug into their delusory trenches, all political action, in the proper sense, came to a halt. Nixon's fantasies of the threat of the Left, stimulated by such fantasy-revolutionary actions as the May 1971 siege of Washington, of course, blossomed into the Plumbers and dirty tricks of the 1972 campaign, followed by Watergate and his resignation. The universal cry went up: "The system works!" It was as though the country was waking up from a dream into which it had plunged in Dallas on November 22, 1963. The Presidents Americans seemed to be yearning for became kindly father figures again (though there were two more attempts on the lives of Ford and Reagan by wacky would-be assassins); all was right with the world.

A second problem, together with this transition to a consciousness dynamic, was that, when they ran into an increasingly serious deadlock, those political radicals who continued to soldier on in the late Sixties and early Seventies fell back, for their model for organizational structure and method, on the only one that seemed to them to be available: the Leninist one of 1917.

This was a disastrous move. For several generations, as Mairowitz explains, the radical left in America, aspiring to become leaders of "the people," marched resolutely in one direction, while the people themselves marched in the opposite one. It became very tempting to adopt the Leninist approach: once we capture the state, we can use its power to force the people to do an about-face and at last follow us, their proper leaders. This approach apparently worked in Kerensky's Russia (although the ultimate human cost as the Soviet Union developed was of course enormous), but in Nixon's America it was just another absurd illusion. What I have been calling the "primary dynamic," a rather complex set of interactions between radicals, liberals, and conservatives, remains the real game of political progress in countries such as ours, but the would-be post-Chicago radicals did not have a clue about how to make it work.

The only method of radical organizing which would have had any chance of working in this situation, I believe, would have been to try patiently to understand what the "hard-hats," the "Nixon (later Reagan) Democrats," were thinking, how the world looked to them, and, through conscientious listening and dialogue, develop new ways of reaching these workers and winning them over. But to expect the Rudds and Dohrns of the late Sixties to submit themselves to this kind of discipline would have been truly utopian.

Certainly, in the next two decades, many political developments have come and gone. Just to recall the names of the Presidents during this period, Carter, Reagan, and Bush, brings a kaleidoscope of events to our minds. But I would suggest that the fundamental political reality has changed very little: with respect to any chance of fundamental change at the roots of the society, the primary dynamic has remained essentially frozen. If the political spectrum is thought of as a tug-of-war, with radical leftists at one end of the rope, liberals next to them, and conservatives and radical rightists similarly ranged on the other side, the game has been more or less a draw, with a few momentary successes on either side. In the fantasy or consciousness realm, no doubt, the popular imagination has been seized by right-wing retreads of the eighteenth-century ideas of Adam Smith, rather than the nineteenth-century ideas of Karl Marx, but in the real world the result, it seems to me, has been a general stagnation.



THE NINETIES: A NEW DRAMA?

RETURNING, THEN, TO THE LIST OF FORWARD, BACKWARD, AND circular trends in U.S. society and the social change movement at the beginning of this essay, I hope that some of the reasons for these developments have now become clearer. There has been little or no progress in "the real world" of economic and social issues, such as the economic position of women and racial minorities, solutions to the problems of poverty, homelessness, etc., or reform of the public educational system. Indeed, there has been notable backward slippage in some of these areas, as problems that have not been seriously addressed have continued to fester year after year. Some gains have been made in protecting the environment, but any radical changes in the energy industry and in private vs. mass transportation, which will be required to attack some of the most serious environmental problems, are still far in the future, it seems.

Changes in society's views of women have indeed occurred to some extent (and even in its view of gays and lesbians, partly as a result of the AIDS epidemic), but where these movements have tried to attack the fundamental "nuclear family" principle (see Appendix), there has been little success; "family values" are as popular as ever. Above all, the fundamental economic system seems as impervious to change as ever, and this is holding up further progress in these other areas, I believe.

What might be done to break up the political stagnation and resume the normal operation of the primary dynamic? It is too soon to be sure, of course, but there are signs, as this is written in the summer of 1992, between the Democratic and Republican conventions, that the ice may be beginning to crack. The incredible volatility of the presidential campaign so far seems to be a symptom of this, but at a deeper level, it is clear that both the American people and their

would-be "leaders" are groping around for new ideas and new directions, unsure of which direction to take in this post-Soviet Union, post-"Me Decade, Greed Decade" world.

Thus, the time seems ripe for a return of the primary dynamic, in which radicals generate new ideas and inject them into the "mainstream" discourse. What could radicals do today to help reinvigorate this process?

The brief flash in the pan of the Perot candidacy shows that a surprisingly large segment of the American public is hungering for some sort of alternative to the tired Republican and Democratic offerings, and this segment is clearly an descendent of the "hard-hat, Silent Majority" of the Nixon period, when the primary dynamic became stalled. The fact that this group is beginning to look for something new is the most hopeful sign I have seen in the last two decades. As usual, the Left has so far missed the boat completely; being as profoundly out of touch with "the people" as it has been, it is still relegated to standing on the sidelines, scratching its head, and wondering what is going on. But there is always room for hope, I suppose.

As I mentioned above, despite their mutual disdain, liberals and radicals need each other in very profound ways. Liberals need radicals to keep them honest, provide some backbone, and prevent their conscience from going to sleep as they consort with conservatives. In addition, radicals come up with ideas which gradually filter into the mainstream (national health care is an example of one such idea which is just now coming over the horizon; perhaps worker control of the economy is next). Finally, radicals serve liberals as a bogeyman to threaten conservatives into compromise. On the other hand, radicals need liberals for protection; the liberal commitment to civil liberties can protect radicals from very serious consequences in times of reaction. And, ideally, liberals can help to keep radicals humane, steering them away from the Leninist-Stalinist path to terror and dictatorship.

If the present situation developed in ways that I would regard as ideal, the path not taken in the late Sixties and early Seventies would be chosen at last. Radicals would develop enough humility to be willing for once actually to listen to the people they claim to want to lead and enter into a mutually constructive dialogue with them. New ideas would arise from this cross-fertilization. Liberals would pick up these ideas (or at least near relatives of them) and carry them into battle with conservatives. Once again, politics would be meaningful and progressive.

Will this happen? I don't know, but I do not see any reason why we should not try the experiment of setting our indulgence in fantasy radicalism aside and dwelling for a while in reality.

References

- 1. Shachtman, p. 122
- 2. *Op. cit.*, p. 131

- Op. cit., p. 131
 Op. cit., p. 133
 Gitlin, p. 306
 Op. cit., p. 318
 Op. cit., p. 342
 Op. cit., p. 291n.
 Shachtman, p. 131
 See Mairowitz, an excellent and witty account of the romantic, fantasy-revolutionary tradition within the American Left.
 Mairowitz, pp. 1–2
- 10. Mairowitz, pp. 1–2
- 11. Dellinger, p. xvii

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Appendix

Principles of Post-World-War-II Liberal Consensus*

A. Anti-communism, anti-socialism

Capitalism (in U.S.) is open to progress, provided that it can grow. This provides a material basis for the natural harmony of society. Therefore:

- Domestic "Cold War," going to extreme "McCarthyism" (which liberals found it difficult to resist)
- Collective-bargaining unionism replaces "class warfare"
- Gradual, not sudden, moves to equality and social justice necessary. Blacks, etc. will be rewarded if they "keep their places"; "pockets of poverty" will be naturally eliminated as society becomes more prosperous as a whole.
- Good citizens trust in their leadership, who know how to manage economic progress (increasingly by Keynesian principles: "fine-tuning economy"). Don't think for yourself or rock the boat; let your leaders bargain for your piece of the pie.
- Reliance on technological and social-engineering "fixes" to all problems
- Technological/economic progress requires unlimited access to natural resources; no danger of overburdening environment
- The prime duty of citizens/consumers is to *consume*—everyone's personal worth is measured by the scale of upward mobility and conspicuous consumption (those who are relatively poor are so because of their own faults).
- U.S. society must constantly "move forward"—stasis = death.

B. The nuclear family is the model for society

The natural harmonious order of U.S. society is necessarily founded on the pattern of the nuclear family; departing from it is highly dangerous.

- Father provides wealth of family (acts in "real world"); mother directs family's consumption and nurtures father and children, provides emotional comfort and hope (takes care of "ideal world"); youth must "keep in line" and will inherit the increased prosperity of the next generation if they do so
- In the society at large, (male) leaders = father (must be "democratic," not tyrannical, of course); women and children obey.
- Deviation—homosexuality, promiscuity (except for father's casual affairs), "smut," sexual experimentation by youth, premarital sex, etc.—will ruin everything.

C. The U.S. is the model for the world

Just as the nuclear family is the model for U.S. society, the U.S. is the ideal toward which the rest of the world should strive

^{*} In compiling this list, I consulted similar summaries by Shachtman (pp. 22–30), Gitlin, (pp. 60–6), and Hodgson (p. 76).

- As U.S. is gradually becoming more equal and just, "underdeveloped" countries should follow U.S. lead to grow out of poverty slowly—"social engineering" will work for them, too.
- Countries are judged by economic progress/consumption standard of value; except insofar as they "develop" into junior U.S.'s, they are of value only as "vacation paradises" (cf. pre-Castro Cuba and the Mafia).
- The Cold War is the paramount fact in the world. Every issue in foreign policy is judged by whether it helps Communists or "Free World," and there is no dissent on foreign policy.

Principles of Sixties "Radical (Non-) Consensus*

A. Up with socialism!

There is no natural harmony in U.S. society, because capitalism *causes*, rather than *cures*, problems.

- Resolute pro-socialist, anti-capitalist position mandatory ("anti-McCarthyism")
- Class warfare should replace collective-bargaining unionism.
- Revolutionary moves to equality and social justice necessary. Blacks, etc. must rise; poverty are not just "pockets," but inevitable consequence of the system.
- Leaders must be distrusted—people's organizations, based on "participatory democracy" (later Leninist centralism?) needed
- Technological and social-engineering "fixes" rejected
- Ecological consciousness—"limits to growth"
- Human values transcend consumption
- No-growth ideal for society

B. Down with the nuclear family!

There is no natural harmony in society; "whatever turns you on" you should be free to pursue

- Distinct roles in family denied—radical democracy and equality; experimentation with various forms of communal living
- Patriarchal values in society rejected
- "Deviations" are valuable and permissible; any kind of sexuality human beings can conceive of and take pleasure in is normal for them.
- Potentially fatal dilemmas for this radical position:
 - Nuclear family structure denied in theory, but women still oppressed
 - Trend to emphasize pleasure as the main ideal in life ends up supporting
 - capitalism's stress on consumption

* To make this list, I copied the previous list with the computer and changed each item to its opposite. With a few minor editorial changes, the result seemed about right, indicating how mechanical the process of getting from the liberal consensus to the radical one was. (Of course, no one group of the radical segment of society agreed with all of these positions, so calling this a "radical consensus" is a considerable exaggeration.)

C. The Third World should be the model for the U.S.

Inverting the liberal view, radicals looked for models for U.S. in China, Cuba, Vietnam, etc.

- Third World countries must revolt from world capitalism and U.S. domination to escape from poverty
- Non-Western cultures valuable in own right (this is part of the reason for interest in Eastern religions, etc.)
- Inversion of Cold War in world view, as well as within U.S.: American radicals must side, more or less uncritically, with Third-World revolutionary movements