

Draft Opposition Continues

Fifth Estate Collective

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More than a thousand people opposed to the draft met here in Detroit the weekend of February 12 to 15 at a conference called as a planning and organizing session by the National Committee Against Registration and the Draft (NCARD). The entire conference, from the Friday night pep rally at which a bevy of socialist and liberal politicians and labor bureaucrats spoke, to the workshops, and plenary sessions characterized by leftist block voting, caucuses and maneuvering, produced an eerie sensation of traveling back into the 1960s to one of the Student Mobilization conferences of that era. Every little political group, from the “support Albania” political bazarros to the laissez faire “student libertarians,” maintained a literature table in one salon which appeared to be a sort of political shopping mall, and one had to shoo away the newspaper salesmen like flies,

Nevertheless, the fact that the conference was able to garner the support which it did seems to be an indication of the wide-spread opposition to militarism no matter how much the media tries to peddle the “mood of new patriotism.” At the end of February, the Selective Service System announced that only 87% of those required to register at the beginning of January for the second round of registration had done so, but still they declared it a “success.” This is 6% less than what the government claimed for the initial registration last year in which sources like NCARD and the *Boston Globe* calculated that as many as 25% declined the trip to the Post Office. Assuming either set of figures to be correct there are somewhere between 600,000 (the SSS) and 2,000,000 (the *Globe*) young men who have failed to register. Even the government figure is formidable enough to demonstrate the presence of a massive resistance to the government’s orders. As far as it is known, to date, no one has yet been prosecuted for failing to register, meaning perhaps the government is waiting for the Supreme Court’s ruling on the constitutionality of a draft which excludes women.

By the end of the conference a march in Washington D.C. and San Francisco on May 9 was agreed upon. But since then another similar coalition, the People’s Anti-War Mobilization, has called for a march on May 3 on the Pentagon. The two groups have reportedly been negotiating to agree upon a date when they can both demonstrate in order to achieve a “maximum effect.”

But what was clear from our experiences at the NCARD conference was that we should not let the left and the liberals capture the anti-draft activity by making coalitions like NCARD appear as the only game in town, but nor are we interested in representing the “organizational competition” of the leftist sects. Still, if we don’t begin to create a movement based on our politics—opposition to all conscription and to all governments—we will end up being the black flag contingent at NCARD demonstrations after a long line of politicians have finished their speeches. Surely, we can do better than that, but we should begin soon.

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