

Bullets Fly at Anti-Draft Center

Kae Halonen

The resistance to the Draft Resistance Committee office at 12820 Hamilton in Highland Park has been stepped up into a Mississippi-style harassment campaign.

At 11:20 p.m. the night of August 28 someone shot three slugs from a large-caliber rifle through the front window of the office. Two more shots were fired through the front windows of the office in the dark hours of the morning of September 1.

Following the second attack, the office landlord, Mr. Tom Jewell of 12950 Hamilton, took a key and entered the office. According to Al Casey, owner of Casey's Bar-B-Que, Jewell was in an uncontrollable rage over the damage to his property. The signs of his visit were evident—he tore down signs, pictures and other wall decorations in the office and broke out the glass window in the office entrance.

Reports of the shootings were filed with the police. Vincent Stuart, Jr., the full-time organizer for the anti-draft group, and David Wheeler both gave information to patrolmen. The cops took away two rifle slugs on their first visit.

Investigation Stalled

Expectedly, the investigation of the incidents has been stalled. When Wheeler followed up the reports with a visit to the police station, two weeks later, a sergeant of detectives told him that the slugs were held up in the state police ballistics lab.

Previous to the shootings, a few tomatoes and eggs were thrown at the front of the office on one occasion. However, this was only small-time vandalism probably by some individual irritated by the anti-draft office's presence. But the bullets indicate a serious attempt to intimidate the staff of the draft resistance center and drive them out of Highland Park.

The committee has pledged to continue their work in Highland Park in a leaflet publicly circulated in the community. Stuart said, for the office staff, "Of course we aren't moving. We'll work underground if we have to, but we're going to keep organizing guys in Highland Park."

But the question remains: who would have such a pathological hatred for anti-draft and anti-war organizing to resort to such overt attempts at intimidation?

The opposition of the police force and City Hall to the presence of the draft resistance office has been no secret for a long time. Police harassment of office meetings began the first night the center opened up, and the city council and the Department of Engineering has been consistently trying to defeat the group through bureaucratic obstacles.

It has even been rumored that members of the police force had something to do with the shootings. But there are rumors like that after almost every incident of this type, particularly after the police actions during the Detroit uprising in July.

Birch Society

It is known that the paranoiac literature of the John Birch Society has been circulated to the public through the Highland Park police Station. (If you don't believe that, just look on the table to the left of the entrance inside the police station at 30 Gerald St.)

It is known that there are at least some members of the police force of the mentality to believe the John Birch scare-threats. One crewcut lieutenant said, "No, I didn't even know the stuff was here, but it sounds pretty good to me. Have you got anything against it?" Captain Usher, head of the Uniform Division, said, "Nope, didn't even know that stuff was there. But we don't object to anything that supports the police force."

The John Birch message is a particularly rabid type of anti-communism that sees the eroding influence of Communist plots in every aspect of the society. To what extent would that sentiment reach if it was armed, in uniform and in a position of authority?

If the night-time skulker that fired the shots was not a member of Highland Park's Finest, he certainly had their cooperation. Both the landlord of the office and the owner of the store next door reported in private conversations of visits by Police Chief Stephens, and the neighboring store owner also had another visit from a Lieutenant Hayes. In an article in the Free Press of September 10, Chief Stephens called accusations of pressuring neighborhood residents "libelous." He was quoted as saying, "We just warned them of what might happen to their business if those fellows stayed in the area."

It is not surprising that serious draft organizing is viewed as a threat. Highland Park has a high percentage of black and white working-class young men. Few are eligible for student deferment, most have been kept ignorant of any of the other alternatives available. Many do not want to go into the army to fight and die for questionable objectives.

These components make effective organizing in the city possible. Those who find their self-interest threatened by such organizing have no choice but to try to get rid of the resistance group.

Support Growing

The group has found wide support among the community and sympathy from residents, most of whom have had their own tangles with the provincial city government. There is a great need in the immediate area for information and help for the men of draft age.

The business meetings of the Draft Resistance Committee will continue as scheduled on Tuesday nights. Along with the regular business meetings, the committee is instituting programs and counseling sessions to be held on Wednesday nights for the young men in the area.

The committee is prepared to fight back and stay with the real needs of the community. With or without an office the anti-draft work will remain as a part of life in Highland Park. To continue organizing, the committee needs money and staff workers. If you can help, the committee may be reached at the office at 12820 Hamilton.

fifth Estate

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