

A Generation in Revolt

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from Liberation News Service-*Liberation* magazine

Tim Leary's invitation, in the Beatles' words, to "turn off your mind, relax and float down the stream" did not, at one time, send shock waves through the New Left. The vision of multitudes seduced by psychedelia into a blissful, passive, apolitical euphoria sent shivers throughout the alphabet soup of the straight-laced Left establishment.

LSD were three little letters to conjure with! What would become of S.D.S. and W.R.L. with their mailing lists completely stoned? The immediate Movement reaction to drugs and dropping out was to describe it as playing into the hands of the government, allowing the creation of a totalitarian system whereby the rulers provided free drugs for the people (or at least the dissenters) in order to keep them happily and quietly oppressed. LSD was bread and circuses, the ultimate pacification program.

This particular vision proved false, though more and more young people began experimenting with drugs, and among young people, anyway, to be in favor of peace became synonymous with being pro-pot. The use of drugs, the ritual surrounding their use, has had a profound effect on the thinking of the American Left and has led, ultimately, to a reinterpretation of Leary's phrase. Drugs have become a most effective organizing tool for reaching young people (and have helped change the consciousness of many of them), and "dropping out" has become a political and revolutionary act. A broad section of the Movement has gradually moved beyond a dependence on confrontation politics into the politics of alternative (not parallel) life-styles, and in so doing has developed, or is in the process of developing, an existential dialectic of revolution that differs with the thinking of the Old Left and breaks with much of the political orientation of the New Left as well. "One's life is one's only political instrument," Resistance organizer Dave Harris has said. "We must therefore develop a whole new way of life—a new mentality. And we must do it not by talking about it or leafletting but by living it."

The impetus for this new outlook comes largely from among Resistance people and from those independents with a loose affiliation to the Diggers, Yippies, or hippie movement in general. Of course, the Movement overlaps; many hippies are in The Resistance. The Resistance began with a political concept of turning in draft-cards to the federal government as a means of provoking a confrontation with the government over the issue of the draft. But the act of giving up one's deferment and accepting the risk of a long jail sentence raised other questions that needed to be answered.

Resisters had to organize more resisters, a full-time job. They needed money, but had no time for jobs or, in many cases, school. They faced discrimination against felons after prison and problems with wives and girl friends. Moreover, the break with Selective Service, as meaningful as it is, is nonetheless limited. What about taxes? What about the compromises of everyday living? To risk a long prison term to protest the war and yet support the system that promotes the war at every other turn seemed senseless to many people. The logic of resistance demanded, therefore, that resisters begin changing their lives to make as meaningful a break with the system as possible. This led them from a negative reaction against the system to an affirmation of the possibilities of life outside the system. "Live your life as if the revolution was in process", resisters said to one another. The revolution is now!

The varieties of life-style in revolution are endless. The hippies contributed the vague but revolutionary idea of "do your thing" (as long as it doesn't impinge on anyone else's thing) which meshed nicely with their ideas of

community. Resistance brothers and sisters, like hippie families, have established communes in many cities; other families are buying land in rural areas to establish self-supporting homesteads that will be used as bases for activists. On the West Coast, resisters are talking of buying gas stations. Elsewhere, underground papers, music, restaurants and other enterprises are run on a communal basis by people who have dropped out or are beginning to drop out—from the established order.

When a number of these alternative enterprises and institutions are functioning in a local area, an alternative community may come into being that serves the function of local government. The Free Community, established by the Diggers in San Francisco, is the most fully developed of these. But it is not enough to establish an alternative enterprise. It must function in a more humane way than the existing enterprises and must operate not for profit, but for the benefit and freedom of the community as a whole. Everything from established methods of running a gas station- to traditional concepts of marriage and child-rearing may be altered or abolished in the process.

The concern of alternative Life-styles is based on the understanding that to be a radical is a life-long commitment that goes beyond the length of the Vietnam war or the war that follows. It is also an acknowledgment that confrontation in itself is not sufficient: a more cohesive and strategic long-range program is needed. Ironically, whereas The Resistance has moved away from dependence on confrontation, the hippies (Diggers-Yippies) have moved from the idea of personalized revolution towards street confrontation, especially guerrilla theatre and Provo-type actions. But more and more confrontation is viewed as a tactic with limited objectives and specified goals. Massive confrontations, like the various Stop the Draft Week activities and the Pentagon confrontation of last October will not change the power structure.

Indeed, violent and massive confrontation may have had its comeuppance on the streets of Paris. By structuring their rebellion in the form of a street confrontation (Could they have done it any other way? I don't know.), the students seemed to be replaying past history, and playing right into the hands of the police. The police contained them, sometimes with great brutality, but always with a minimum of force (compared to the force at hand).

At the Pentagon, in Oakland, at Whitehall and at Columbia similar scenarios were played out. The police have barely begun to fight. The students had nothing to fight with, and, had they the weapons and...the will to use them, the police would have simply... escalated the weaponry needed to put the rebellion down. (Many Movement people point to the resistance of the Vietnamese as an example of how technology can be neutralized and defeated by revolutionary will. But in Vietnam technology is on the side of the Vietnamese who are one with the land and its people. The Americans are blundering outsiders, their planes, napalm and M-16s ill-suited for the war they are made to fight.)

Confrontations are also ill-suited for the kind of revolution the students in America and Europe want to make. Theirs are revolutions to improve the quality of life. They want personal liberation rather than national liberation, which is presently being fought for by the Vietnamese and other peoples of the Third World. To succeed in a power struggle against the force of the government is to organize a movement as tightly controlled and militarily powerful as the society we want to change. Franz Fanon may be relevant to revolutionaries struggling against political and economic imperialism where the effort is directed against a foreign power, but to bring about a more humane and decentralized society through highly structured and centralized and para-military means is to defeat the purpose of that struggle.

The French, of course, did succeed to an unexpected degree. But the success of the students came only with the support of the workers, which, for historic reasons, is not likely to happen in the United States, unless a severe economic depression occurs. The French worker is heir to a long revolutionary and Marxist tradition. The American working class is composed of people who abandoned the European revolutionary tradition to accept lock, stock and gun barrel the myth of America as the land of opportunity. This myth is enforced by totalitarian media which through advertising, the press, radio, TV and movies reinforce the belief that with a little hard work and a little luck every American can become a Rockefeller. The French worker identifies with his brothers on the assembly line; the American worker identifies with his oppressors; he wants only what his boss already has. This may change with a depression and also with the introduction of psychedelic drugs into working-class homes, but against the voluminous decibels of the mass media, how effective can an organizer, leafleting in working-class communities, expect to be

But even in the event of a depression and of a swing to the left by large numbers of American workers, students in America would still find themselves essentially isolated as, in the end, the students in France found themselves to be. The workingman, unless he goes through some deep head-changes, is more interested in quantitative demands (income, hours, working conditions) than in the qualitative demands of the students who seek a basic reorientation of the values of their society. A government—especially a highly industrialized and wealthy government—can afford to make economic concessions to the workingman. The workers of any country can be easily bought off unless their demands go beyond economics. Rather than risk civil war and wholesale disruption of society and its economy, a government will appease its rebels and make economic concessions it can all too easily afford.

But the students want power, even if it is power to defuse, limit and decentralize the power of government. And no government is going to agree to its own abolition. It is not going to yield power to the people without a fight. The Compagnie Republicaine de Securite police that battled the French students and the Tactical Patrol Force that invaded the Columbia campus were nothing compared to the force the French and the American governments are prepared to use to maintain power. Confrontation as a cutting edge in the struggle to change the relationship of power between government and people is self-destructive.

But confrontation is useful and necessary for tactical purposes. The confrontation at the Pentagon neither disrupted the war-making machine nor exorcised its evil. But it did put the participants through some very beneficial head changes and it served to desanctify the authority of the military.

Confrontations are profound educational experiences that build community, radicalize their participants and occasionally win reforms or concessions. But by themselves they are unlikely to restructure the distribution of power in our society.

In addition to the tactical uses to which confrontation can be put, a long-term strategy of resistance must be established. People have to dig in for the long haul. A change in society through a struggle for power is impossible and probably undesirable. But it is quite possible and desirable to defuse the power of government by dropping out and establishing alternative institutions that not only function independently of government authority but operate in the way one would want them to operate after the revolution. Thus, instead of a Hegelian dialectic (waiting for a series of events to unfold into a revolutionary situation), the idea of revolution becomes existential. The revolution is now. Live it.

Personal revolution in itself is not sufficient to bring about lasting social change on a societal basis. American history is full of beautiful people who went off to create their own revolutionary life-styles without having any effect on society as a whole. But today, for the first time since frontier days when a dissenter from the status quo could march off into the forest and found his own community, dropping out on a mass basis is not only possible, but is already happening. The revolutionary implications of this are startling.

The possibility of a mass break with the values and institutions of American society is inherent in the generational revolt, which in the past few years has become so pronounced that one can almost speak of the existence of two separate nations within the United States, one, old and straight: the second, young and groovy. (And also a third, black, for which an alliance with the second, says Eldridge Cleaver, is both possible and desirable.)

The isolation or separateness of the younger generation from the established society is the most promising source of revolutionary potential today. Millions of young people in virtually every city and town across the nation are in some stage of rebellion against parents, family and ultimately against the system which the adult world strives to sustain. This is a generation adrift, cut loose from the anchors of the past. Traditions have become meaningless, as has the inherited concept of family. "I get by with a little help from my friends," the Beatles sing for a generation which looks to its peers and not its parents for support. The Movement—people in motion becomes a substitute family, religion and culture. The result: A new consciousness, new values—the idea of community, sharing with and trusting one another, tolerance and respect for any and all deviations from a norm which is never acknowledged to exist, new concepts for which there are no words, old Christian virtues long ago forgotten. And at every instance, at home, in school, on the street, with regard to sex, drugs, work, play, interpersonal relationships and goals, the contrasting values of old and new-age ideas come into conflict; laws and the "accepted" standards are violated and revolt is assured.

What happens when these millions of rebellious kids begin to make decisions about the way they are going to live their lives? Having experimented with drugs and seen into the inner reaches of their minds, having seen

the police riot and judges imprison people for smoking flowers, a private act that even medical people consider harmless, having experienced the hostility that comes just from being, from walking down the street with long hair, having suffered through schools that don't educate but only enforce conformity, having experienced what it is to be young, alive and beautiful in a country that makes power a virtue, profit and property a religion and death a policy...having lived with all this and more, will these young people so readily give up the freedom they now insist upon for themselves to go to work for IBM, General Motors, Dow, Prudential Life? Will they tolerate junior-executive status? Become Organization Men? And what happens when they don't? When they refuse to be channeled into the old-age order of things and opt instead for the alternative of life? No, Mr. Robinson, plastics is not where it's at.

Already we see the beginning. Draft resisters and young activists unimpressed by the embarrassment of a jail record, frightened only by the time wasted, not of being felons and ex-cons—in the new society a virtue! At Columbia, many of the suspended students won't go back, see no point in going back to complete their academic education, because the experience of struggle is more meaningful, more vital and a damn sight more educational!

We see the beginning also when college newspaper editors don't go to work for the N.Y. *Times* or *Life* or *Plastic Age*, but instead start their own newspapers, hundreds of which are already in existence and contribute to the ongoing revolution. Rock groups, in many cases, no longer consider themselves part of "show biz," but serve as the philosophic voices for the generation (Bob Dylan and the Beatles, most obviously) and function economically, in some cases, as part of the community, performing for money so they can support community activities and, in the tradition of the San Francisco rock groups, provide free music for their people.

But the free and creative energies of the youth revolt can all be lost to the future if already-committed radicals don't begin digging in and establishing the framework of alternative communities from which to build further. There is no field of endeavor that can be ignored. The young medical students and M.D.s involved in the creation of free health clinics and who serve as medics during the street demonstrations and the lawyers who service the radical and hip communities are building this framework.

But it is essential, as it is revolutionary, that these professionals begin to view themselves not as giving service, but as being part of the community. Medicine or law is their thing, just as for me, a writer, an underground paper is my thing and the construction of houses on rural land may be the contribution of an accomplished architect or carpenter.

Some fields are more ripe for revolution than others. Publishing, for instance. There is no longer any reason for authors like Norma Mailer, to pick one at random, to make Bennett Cerf or the stockholders of Simon and Schuster any richer and more powerful than they already are. Why not a movement publishing house/cooperative/family with revolutionary working conditions—informal and communal, etc.—employing young radicals in various capacities (giving them time off to demonstrate, clear their heads, go to jail) and pouring the profits back into the community?

For dropping out is only one half of the ongoing revolution. There must also be communities for people to drop into so they can survive as free men and make their own lives meaningful as, by the way they live their lives, they change the world.

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/60-august-15-september-4-1968/a-generation-in-revolt>

Fifth Estate #60, August 15-September 4, 1968

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