

Anti-Draft Activity Spreads

David Wheeler

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The floodlights and the TV cameras swung around in a wide arc to survey the results of a question asked from the podium. The question: "How many of you are willing right now to stand up and say you're not willing to go and fight in Viet Nam?" In answer, more than one-half the 150 in the audience rose to their feet.

This was at the Conference on the Draft last December 28 called by a group of Detroit clergy. The speaker was Paul Booth, former national secretary of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

The incident is indicative of a new truth that is rising into the public consciousness. Although there have been pacifists and draft resisters who have refused to serve in every war, there is a qualitatively different response to the United States' intervention in Viet Nam. The answers to the draft calls are now becoming political. Instead of "I refuse to go," people are saying, "We won't go" to fight this war.

This is putting the draft and the Selective Service System in a new light. Although the Universal Military Training Act will be renewed again this session of Congress, the Selective Service (SS) is in for a lot of resistance at the local level.

The ministers' conference set the spark in Detroit and has developed into a permanent draft counseling center.

The National Council meeting of SDS, held in Berkeley in December, adopted a resolution stating SDS's opposition to the draft and urging that local chapters establish anti-draft unions. This is a question SDS backed down on last year after heavy harassment by law enforcement agencies followed a premature announcement.

Women Strike for Peace also passed a resolution nationally making the draft a first-priority issue for the coming year. WSP is journeying to Washington February 8 to have it out with congressmen over the draft law and military appropriations.

The SDS chapter at MSU has already announced the establishment of an anti-draft union there. Detroit newscasters quoted the release as saying the union was willing to undertake civil disobedience if necessary to make themselves heard.

The first meeting of the Draft Counseling Center on January 15 drew about 30 or 40 young men, mostly white students, who wanted to consult on their problems. Their questions on the draft reflected "pretty much the whole gamut of views" from those concerned for the requirements for a conscientious objector's classification (I-O) to those determined not to cooperate with the draft board at all, according to Rev. David Gracie, head of the Center.

The draft center, at 31 King St., is open each Sunday evening 8-10.

A group of prospective counselors met on the second week of the counseling center to begin training to assume roles later. The group discussed the widening of both the number and availability of the counseling staff.

At an administrative meeting the next week plans for the expansion of the center in terms of budget and publicity were discussed. When asked about the future of the project, Rev. Gracie said, "We are still approaching people as individuals, helping them in resolving their own dilemmas, and see no further role than this. I think the effect so far has been to greatly widen the scope of discussion on the draft. It has started wide discussion, particularly among the different churches in Detroit, and we hope they are assessing their responsibilities in relation to the draft. Just the fact that we're bringing people together, though, could lead to some kind of joint action."

On a more consciously political note, the Wayne State-Detroit SDS chapter has begun acting. The National Student Association (the group which recently gathered the widely-publicized “100 students” petition to Johnson) is sponsoring a nation-wide campus referendum on the draft, also to be submitted to Johnson and his advisors. In devising a group position on the referendum, the chapter pre-guessed the national policy by taking a stand advocating absolute abolition of the draft. No draft, no deferments, no roulette. The referendum announcement was the springboard for an educational campaign on the campus around the draft.

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