

Columbia: Notes on the Spring Rebellion

REVOLUTION IS THE
BEST EDUCATION FOR
HONORABLE MEN
—CHE GUEVARA

MARK RUDD

Liberal critics of the student movement claim to identify a cynical opportunism in the fact that student disruptions, aiming at racists and militarists, strike most painfully at the presumptively innocent campus itself. Their suggestion is that the militants should learn to distinguish better between their targets and their sanctuary.

The stereotype of ivory-tower detachment was nowhere better promoted than at ivy-league Columbia University. Nowhere was it more conspicuously empty a myth. The Columbia strike of spring 1968 achieved what then was the most concrete unification yet of the antiracism and antiwar fights, and this happened, quite simply, because of the extent to which Columbia, as an institution, was complicit in both crimes. There is nowhere in New York a slumlord more voracious and cold than Columbia. For generations, its bureaucracy has driven the black people of Harlem into tighter, fiercer, and more expensive ghettoization. And Columbia's ties with the Institute for Defense Analyses (since broken) typified the mode and manner of American scholarship's general servitude to the priorities of the warfare state. Institutional innocence was loudly claimed. Complicity was too deep to miss. The bitterness of the struggle which erupted there was in part a measure of this hypocrisy of the clerks.

Rudd's role in the strike began properly when he and a few other militants walked out of an SDS meeting which had voted all but solidly against militant support of the black students who had taken Hamilton Hall. The issues which were joined in that vote, that walkout, and the subsequent liberation and defense of other buildings are developed with exceptional authority in the following essay, written almost a year after the events unfolded.

BEFORE AND DURING the Columbia rebellion, the SDS chapter faced situations very similar to those encountered by other chapters around the country. Questions of militancy *vs.* isolating yourself from the base, questions of relating to a black students' movement, questions of student power *vs.* a radical position on the university, questions of how to work as a radical within mass political situations, all came to the forefront in our experience at Columbia. They also became the key questions at places like Brooklyn College, Kent State in Ohio, San Francisco State, Brandeis, and literally hundreds of other campuses where the Movement is at various stages of building itself. Had we had the collective experience of Movement organizers who had gone through similar situations before us, we would have made far fewer errors than we did; this article is being written with the belief that our experiences can be absorbed and used, and, what is most important, the Movement can go on to higher levels, evading old mistakes in order to commit the mistakes of the future. Thus far very little has been written about Columbia for *organizers*; in fact, very few of the questions posed above have ever been answered in print. This is a long overdue attempt to do just that.

This article cannot be considered a complete review of what happened at Columbia. It was originally meant as a reply to certain points, especially on "radical student power" and the "failure of mass politics" in Eric Mann's article which appeared in the fall edition of *Our Generation* and was reprinted in the November *Movement*. Eric's article can be read for its in other respects outstanding description of the rebellion after the April 30 bust and of its nationwide significance in answering the McCarthy threat.

BASE-BUILDING AND MILITANCY

New Left Notes this fall reported a split which had occurred in the Ann Arbor, Michigan, chapter of SDS, between advocates of a liberal-radical position on student power and "base-building" (called "The Radical Caucus"), and advocates of struggle and aggressive action in exposing the imperialist and racist university and building a radical movement ("The Jesse James

Gang"). Little known to activists around the country was the fact that a roughly parallel split in the Columbia chapter in March had prepared the way for the militant and aggressive stance of SDS which led to the blow-up of April 23. For years SDS nationwide has been plagued by the "base-building *vs.* militant action" debate—it took the revolution in the chapter at Columbia and the subsequent mass student rebellion to show the essential unity of the two lines, and the phoniness of the debate. (Recently, Progressive Labor Party has pushed this stupid debate to discredit the "right-wing, anarchist, Debrayist, mindless activists" it sees everywhere. The only result of this, based especially on the experience of Columbia, should be to discredit non-struggle PL as the real right wing.)

From April, 1967, to March, 1968, the SDS chapter had been led by a group of people who tended to stress "organizing" and "base-building" above action and "confrontation." Though possessing a "Marxist" analysis, they believed that the way support is gained is by going out to people and talking to them about this analysis. Various pieties about the necessity to build the base before you take action and the dangers of isolating yourself from the base were incessantly pronounced in the name of the "Marxist analysis." The word "politics" was used as a bludgeon with which to beat unruly upstarts into place and to maintain control over the chapter. One example will illustrate this point.

In early March, at a meeting of the SDS Draft Committee (which had been doing something called "political draft counselling"—a total dud as far as building a radical movement goes), the question came up of what to do when the head of the Selective Service System for New York City came to speak at Columbia. Someone suggested that SDS greet the Colonel by attacking him physically—which would clearly define the fact that we consider him to be an enemy. The idea was defeated by a vote of thirty-to-one after the old leadership of the chapter argued that an attack on the Colonel would be "terrorist, apolitical, and silly," and especially would not communicate anything to anyone (since the action had "no political content"). It was decided that the Draft Committee would be present at the speech to "ask probing questions."

Several SDS members and nonmembers then organized clandestinely the attack on the Colonel. In the middle of his speech a mini-demonstration appeared in the back of the room with a fife and drum, flags, machine guns, and noisemakers. As attention went to the back, a person in the front row stood up and

placed a lemon-meringue pie in the Colonel's face. Everyone split.

Only two groups on campus did not dig what became known as "the pie incident." First, there was the administration of Columbia University, which disapproved for obvious reasons. Second, there was the old leadership of Columbia SDS, which disapproved because the action was terroristic and apolitical and would jeopardize our base on campus. Meanwhile, almost everyone on campus thought that this was the best thing SDS had ever done (though we disavowed any part in it and said it was the New York Knickerbockers who had done the job). People understood the symbolism in the attack and identified with it because of their own desires, often latent, to strike back at the draft and the government. This was, in symbolic miniature form, the same dynamic of exemplary action by a small number and then mass identification which worked so well during the rebellion one month later.

In a criticism session held after the pie incident, members of the chapter began to learn the difference between the verbal "base-building," non-struggle approach of the old leadership (now called the "Praxis Axis" after the supplement to *New Left Notes* edited by Bob Gottlieb and Dave Gilbert, of whom many of the old leadership were self-styled followers) and the aggressive approach of those who saw the primacy of developing a movement based on struggle. This latter group, centered around myself and John Jacobs as well as others in and out of SDS, came to be known as "the Action Faction" due to the never-ending search for symmetry.

Subsequent to the ascendancy of the ideas of the Action Faction, the chapter began engaging in more and more militant confrontations—an illegal demonstration on March 27 against IDA (Institute for Defense Analyses), in which we chased two vice-presidents around the campus, the disruption of a memorial service for Martin Luther King in order to expose the fact that while Kirk and Truman were eulogizing King, their university was completely racist toward the community and toward its employees. The open letter I wrote to Grayson Kirk, printed in the chapter newspaper *Up Against the Wall* on April 19 (and later reprinted in the *Guardian*), was an attempt to express to the entire campus the spirit of militancy and struggle guiding our chapter.

This prominence of militancy and the aggressive approach should not be interpreted as a victory for the action side of the action *vs.* base-building dichotomy. In fact, action and educa-

tion (verbal and otherwise) are completely united, two aspects of the same thing (call it "base-building," "organizing," "building the movement," whatever you like). A leaflet or dorm-camassing is no less radical activity than seizing a building—in fact, both are necessary. At Columbia, we had a four-year history of agitation and education involving forms of activity from seminars and open forums on IDA to militant confrontations over NROTC (Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps) and military recruiting. All went into developing the mass consciousness that was responsible for the Columbia rebellion. The point I wish to emphasize, however, is that we had to develop the willingness to take action, minority action, before the tremendous potential of the "base" could be released. In addition, the vanguard action also acted as education for many people not yet convinced. The radical analysis never got such a hearing, and a sympathetic one, as during the rebellion.

There are no sure ways to know when the base is ready to move. Many militant actions which expose the participants will result only in an educational point entering the consciousness of the people, without developing mass support. An example of this is the sit-in against the CIA which took place at Columbia in February, 1967, involving only eighteen people (led by the Progressive Labor Party, before it had turned right). This seemingly isolated action (even the SDS chapter did not participate) helped ready people for the direct action to come one year later by making a first penetration into students' minds that direct action is both possible and desirable. (For a fuller discussion on the complex and significant history of the Movement at Columbia, see *Columbia Liberated*.)

We had no way of knowing whether the base was ready at Columbia: in fact, neither SDS nor the masses of students actually were ready; we were spurred on by a tremendous push from history, embodied in the militant black students at Columbia.

THE ROLE OF THE BLACKS

Before April 23, the Students' Afro-American Society and Columbia SDS had never joined together in a joint action or even had much cross-group communication. SAS had been mostly a cultural or social organization, in part reflecting the class background of its members (SDS's position on campus likewise reflected its members' middle-class background—the tendency toward over-verbalization instead of action, the reliance on mili-

tant, pure, revolutionary rhetoric instead of linking up with the people). It was only with the death of Martin Luther King that SAS began to make political demands—though still mostly about the situation of black students at Columbia. Another important factor in the growing militancy of SAS was the struggle of the Harlem community against Columbia's gym in the form of demonstrations, rallies, and a statement by H. Rap Brown that the gym should be burnt down if it somehow was built.

The push to the whites and Columbia SDS I spoke of came in its first form from the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., which spurred SDS on to greater militancy. Second, and more immediate, was the speech at the sundial at noon, April 23, by Cicero Wilson, the chairman of SAS, at which we were honky-baited, but also at which people developed the anger and the will to engage in direct action—i.e., tearing down the fence at the gym site. This one symbolic act opened the floodgate of anger and strength and resolve against the racism and prowar policies of the university, and set the stage for the occupation of Hamilton Hall which followed.

The pivotal event of the strike, however, was the black students' decision to barricade Hamilton the night after the joint occupation began. In this decision, the blacks defined themselves politically as members of the Harlem community and the black nation who would fight Columbia's racism to the end. It was also this action that gave the whites a model for militancy and, on a broader scale, forced the whites to wake up to the real world outside themselves (i.e., become radicals).

At the time that the black students in Hamilton Hall announced they were going to barricade the building, SDS' goal was the same as it has always been—to radicalize and politicize the mass of white students at Columbia and to create a radical political force of students. This self-definition, however, led to the conclusion that we did not want to risk alienating the mass of other white students by confronting them, say, from behind a barricade. Part of our decision not to barricade must also be seen as a remnant of the earlier timid and nonstruggle attitudes so common in the chapter.

The blacks, for their part, had decided that they would make a stand alone, as a self-conscious black group. This decision was also prompted undoubtedly by the lack of militancy on the part of the whites in Hamilton and especially our lack of discipline and organization.

After leaving Hamilton, a change came over the mass of

white students, in and out of SDS. People stayed in Low Library "because we can't abandon the blacks." Not only did people see the model for militancy in the black occupation of Hamilton, but they also began to perceive reality—a world outside themselves—and the necessity to fight, to struggle for liberation, because of the situation in that world.

The essence of liberalism is individualism and subjectivity—"if I'm unhappy, it's my own fault; if I can get ahead in the world, everyone can make it," etc., etc. At the point that people begin to perceive that the real world transcends the individual, that people are affected as classes, and that they can join together to fight back as classes, then the first barrier toward radicalization is broken. It was the action of the black students at Columbia—a group outside the individual fragmented "middle-class" students at Columbia—that woke these students up to the fact that there is a world of suffering, brutalized, exploited people, and that these people are a force willing to fight for freedom. Especially important to this realization was the power of Harlem, both manifest and dormant. Now the liberal universe—the isolated self—was shattered, and the mass occupation started by a handful of whites, the twenty-three who stayed in Low, grew to be the natural response of well over a thousand people who wanted to fight back against the oppression of blacks, Vietnamese, and themselves.

From another point of view, the militancy of the SDS whites forced others to reconsider their position and eventually to join the occupation. But the SDS occupation itself hinged on that of the blacks, and the overwhelming presence of the black students and Harlem itself in proximity forced us to keep the image of the real world—away from which middle-class white students can so easily slip—clear and bright in our minds. Because of the blacks, we recognized the immediacy and necessity of the struggle: Vietnam is far away, unfortunately, for most people, and our own pain has become diffuse and dull.

In addition to the vanguard position of blacks toward whites, the example and vanguard role of whites vis-à-vis other whites must also be stressed. When neutral or liberal or even right-wing students see other students, very much like themselves, risking careers, imprisonment, and physical safety, they begin to question the political reasons for which the vanguard is acting, and, concomitantly, their own position. Here, education and propaganda are essential to acquaint people with the issues, and are also the rationale for action. At no time

is "organizing" or "talk" more important than before, during, and after militant action.

One of the reasons why people joined *en masse* was the fact that white students, with the same malaise, alienation, unhappiness about this society and their lack of options in it, and the same hatred for the war and racism, saw a way to strike back at the enemy in the actions begun by a few. This was the same enemy, the ruling class and their representatives, the Board of Trustees of Columbia, that had been oppressing blacks and Vietnamese. So, with a little class analysis, articulated by SDS, hundreds of whites saw how they had to move, for their own liberation as well as that of others.

This is not to deny the importance of black militancy, but only to emphasize the complex and dialectical relationships existing between blacks, white militants, and "the base." In struggle after struggle on campuses and in shops, the blacks have been taking the initial and even vanguard role. San Francisco State, where the direction and militancy of the struggle has been given by the Black Students' Union and the Third World Liberation Front, is the best example of the most oppressed taking the vanguard. Kent State in Ohio, Brandeis, the high-school students' strike in New York City, and numerous other cases, similarly show the importance of black vanguards. This is not an empirical fact peculiar only to schools, but in shops and in the army, too, blacks have been taking the lead and whites following—e.g., the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, which gave rise to a white insurgent caucus in the United Auto Workers, and the Fort Hood 43.

The implication of the primacy of the black movement is not that whites should sit back and wait for blacks to make the revolution. It is, rather, that we should study and understand the roots, necessity of, and strategy of the Black Liberation Movement in order to understand how our movement should go. At Columbia, our understanding of the dynamics at work was at best intuitive: we knew that whites and blacks had to organize their own (Stokely had said so) but we didn't know how this worked in practice—separate tactics, separate organization. At some schools, such as Kent and San Francisco State, the white militants did as well or better than we to the extent that they were conscious of their own role in relation to black militants.

This question "in relation to" has at least two clearly differentiable pitfalls. First, because of the intensive and all-pervading

racism in the United States, white radicals are sometimes unwilling to follow black leadership. This was the situation during the recent United Federation of Teachers' boycott of the New York City schools over the issue of community control. Both the Progressive Labor Party and their arch-enemy, The Labor Committee, manifested their racism by refusing to support community control on the grounds that it was a cooptative plan designed by the ruling class to split the working class (both racist teachers and black parents are "workers" primarily, according to PL). Neither grouplet saw the class nature of a united black community fighting for better schools against the racist ruling-class school board and racist teachers union. The implication of this blind spot on the part of PL is that blacks are too stupid to figure out when community control turns into cooptation, and therefore, they should follow the dogmatic and unreal line of PL: black parents and white teachers unite to fight for better education (a position which ignores both the racism of many white teachers and the fact that blacks already are fighting for better schools). SDS, because of its internal factional warfare, lost numerous opportunities to support the black struggle and also to begin educating the white community about its own racism, both of which are absolutely necessary.

The second pitfall "in relation to" the black movement is a passivity based on the opposite side of the traditional white leadership syndrome. Blacks are often unwilling to take the leadership or vanguard position in a struggle, having had white leadership thrust on them for so long, or else feeling isolated (as they, in fact, are at many white schools), or else having assimilated traditional middle-class values of success (this latter point is both the most common and the most complex. For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see James Forman's new book, *Sammy Younge, Jr.*¹). White radicals at many places feel that blacks must initiate antiracism struggles, and that they will follow in support. The origin of this feeling is both the desire to see blacks taking leadership positions, a good thing, and also the attitude that racism is a "black problem" and cannot be raised legitimately by whites as a "white issue."

But any anticapitalist or "revolutionary" program must fight in the interests of the most oppressed—the blacks and the Vietnamese—as well as in the interests of the working class in

general. Thus our movement must be consciously antiracist if it is ever to advance beyond short-term self-interest or economism or reformism or any of the myriad other liberal errors. Racism must become a conscious "white problem," and must be fought at every point. This was our belief at Columbia, when Columbia SDS took independent action against the administration of Columbia for its racism by disrupting the Martin Luther King memorial service. The black students did not take part in this disruption, but the disruption did help shock SAS into action, along with other factors, especially the demonstrations of the Harlem community against Columbia. Similarly, at Kent State in Ohio, the demonstrations against the Oakland Pig Department recruiters, as antiracist demonstrations, were initiated by the white SDS chapter and picked up by the black students. At both Kent and Columbia, the black students then went on to take dominant and even decisive roles.

At school after school, white radicals are waiting for black students to take the lead. Since racism must be combatted, they are in error in not taking the initiative, giving both black students and the mass of whites the impetus to carry the struggle forward. They must also, however, know when to follow the lead of blacks, and when to work parallel. At Columbia, inadvertently sometimes, we did all three: initiating, following, and paralleling.

STUDENT POWER OR HOW TO LIVE DOWN AN OLD SLOGAN

One of the things we learned at Columbia is the old SDS dictum, "People have to be organized around the issues that affect their lives," is really true. Not in the way it has always been meant, i.e., student-interest-type demands like dorm rules, bookstores, decisions over tenure, etc., but in the broadest, most political sense. That is to say, that racism and imperialism really are issues that affect people's lives. And it was these things that people moved on, not dorm rules, or democratizing university governance or any of that bullshit.

The general public, and the Movement in more subtle ways, has been subjected to a barrage of propaganda trying to show conclusively that the rebellion at Columbia (as well as other rebellions) was due to campus unrest over archaic administrative procedures, lack of democracy in decision-making, and, above all, an immense failure of communication among students, faculty, and administration. It is unnecessary to docu-

¹ New York: Grove Press, 1969.

ment this beyond referring the reader to any article about Columbia in *Time Magazine* or *The New York Times*.

This student powerization of the Columbia rebellion and the New Left in general is an attempt on the part of the ruling class to de-fuse the social and political content of our Movement—rip its guts out, tear off its balls, and substitute some sort of faggoty, wimpy, tepid, “we-love-your-system-but-it-needs-reform,” McCarthyite gook in its place. In general, the Left itself has understood the primacy of revolutionary anti-imperialist politics present in the core of the rebellion, but few have had access to our arguments concerning student power and “restructuring” of the university, and thus many have believed either: 1) we admitted the necessity for reform and at least partially worked toward it, or, 2) the supposed failure of the Movement in the fall was due to the failure of Columbia SDS to respond to the mass movement for restructure and reform; in other words, we were coopted by the new liberal administration and Students for a Restructured University. Neither is the case.

Every militant in the buildings knew that he was there because of his opposition to racism and imperialism and the capitalist system that needs to exploit and oppress human beings from Vietnam to Harlem to Columbia. It was no accident that we hung up pictures of Karl Marx and Malcolm X and Che Guevara and flew red flags from the tops of two buildings. But there was some confusion over our position toward the university itself. We were engaged in a struggle that had implications far beyond the boundaries of the campus on Morningside Heights—and, in fact, our interest was there, outside the university. We did want to stop the university’s exploitative racist and pro-imperialist policies, but what more? This unsureness over program toward the university reflected a political confusion that only became solved as the radicals discussed more among themselves and were faced with a greater number of self-appointed liberal reformers who wanted to “save the university.”

Two days after the liberation of the buildings began, I was asked, in the middle of a crowded faculty meeting, the following crucial question by Professor Alan Silver, a good liberal who always considered himself a radical: “Mr. Rudd, is there nothing in the university worth saving?” Had I been as sure then as I was several weeks later, after much study, experience, and discussion, the answer *No* would have come readily. As it was, neither I nor any of the six or so SDS people present had any

answer. We had to decide what is the value of a capitalist university, what is its function in society, and what are the contradictions which can possibly make it useful to a revolutionary movement?

Given that the capitalist university serves the function of production of technology, ideology, and personnel for business, government, and military (we had hit at these functions in our exposure of IDA and expansion), the question of “saving” the university implies capitulation to the liberal mythology about free and open inquiry at a university and its value-neutrality. Whatever “good” function the university serves is what the radical students can cull from its bones—especially the creation and expansion of a revolutionary movement. The university should be used as a place from which to launch radical struggles—anything less now constitutes a passive capitulation to social-democracy and reformism, whatever the intention of the radicals involved.

This position on the university leads to a clear position on “restructuring”: *it is irrelevant*. Tremendous pressure on the coalition strike committee was brought by liberals who proclaimed the creation of a “new, just, democratic Columbia University” as their goal. Professing revolution as another one of their goals, they saw reform of the University as one of the many “steps” toward revolution. Behind this conception, of course, was the traditional liberal view of reform of institutions, one by one, which would through evolution lead to enough reform, somehow called revolution. Also present was a healthy fear of both the personal and social effects of struggle.

The radical answer to the liberal onslaught is somewhat as follows. Demands about democratizing the university are *procedural*—forms which of necessity will be empty and easily coopted by an extraordinarily powerful ruling class and its representatives, the Board of Trustees and Administration. What we are after is *substantive* change—such as, for example, embodied in the six demands and especially the demands on IDA and the gym. This is where our fight for power is located. How can any reforms in procedures ever mean power to change the university’s exploitative function if we can’t even win our direct demands on that function now? For radicals who were somewhat confused, we added, one of our main goals is the building of a radical movement that can engage in fights, that can struggle against capitalism and expose it and its institutions to more and more people and also gain support. Will our fighting over some petty little tri- or bipartite committees do

this? Or will we just be coopted into some silly little liberal game, deflecting the focus of our movement, and depoliticizing it?

Eric Mann, in his *Our Generation/Movement* article, criticizes the strike position on student power by saying, "leaving the issue of student power to the liberals is a bad mistake." According to Eric, there is a "radical position on student power," though it never gets explained beyond some vague phrasing of "structural changes within the context of the (radical) critique (of the university)." What are these radical structural demands? What will they accomplish?

Leaving aside the first question, one possibility for the goal of "radical student power" demands is to co-opt liberals to the Left, instead of to the Right. At this stage of history, however, people can only be coopted to the Right, since consciousness is necessary for revolutionary politics. This position can be described as "opportunism."

The other possibility for the "why" of radical student power is closer to the one Eric puts forward. According to Eric, there are *two valid categories* of issues: 1) off-campus-type issues, such as embodied in the IDA and gym demands, 2) on-campus reform issues, which Columbia SDS left to the liberals. "Building alliances with off-campus groups is an important task for the radical student movement," but this second type is also important. Much work was done by ad-hoc liberal-radical groups on departmental reform, but ultimately, the political content of this work was null in terms of building a revolutionary movement.

The validity of campus reform issues implies an understanding of the tasks of a student movement which is different from ours at Columbia and also that of the most advanced elements of nationwide SDS. We see the goal of the student movement not as the creation of an eventual power base, involving all students around all their concerns, radical and otherwise, which is a very old conception of what we're up to, but rather, building a radical force which raises issues for other constituencies—young people, workers, others—which will eventually be picked up on to create a broader, solidier revolutionary movement. Since the working class will be the agency of change, it is these people who must be addressed by any action initiated by students. This is very different from "creating alliances." It means the entire content of our Movement must be radical—i.e., anti-imperialist, anticapitalist—not concerned with the parochial, privileged needs of students. This

use of the student movement as a critical force is exactly what began to happen at Columbia; no power base was carved out; rather, good, solid, radical issues were raised for the community, the city, and, in fact, the entire nation. To the extent that our issues lacked a focus and a target other than students, they were not consciously "revolutionary." This criticism should be discussed more.

The reason we went so far with "restructuring" demands—we added the demand for participation in restructuring to our six demands (after the Trustees had already called for a student committee on restructuring, I might point out)—was both because of a certain amount of confusion along the lines of Eric's thinking described above, and because we misread the extent of the liberal base on campus for "student power," very much as Eric Mann does in his article. Self-proclaimed liberal "leaders" kept coming to the strike committee saying that their constituencies wanted restructuring and the strike committee was going to lose their support if their demand wasn't supported. Throughout the summer we considered the arch-liberal Students for a Restructured University to be the main competition to the radical movement on campus. But we were totally mistaken.

After people have been exposed even peripherally to a movement that fights for meaningful goals—an end to racism, an end to exploitation, the creation of a better world—how can they go back to their old liberal ideas about reform of institutions? We had underestimated the relevance of the radical movement at Columbia, and how deeply it undercut all the liberal sops. This fall, the fifteen student, faculty, administration, and trustee committees on restructuring held hearings on plans to reform Columbia. Out of a university of 17,000, 40 people showed up. Columbia College, the undergraduate liberal arts division, held elections for candidates to various restructuring committees. Out of a student body of 2,600, only 240 voted. Don't blame the turnout on apathy—15 per cent of the College was busted in the demonstrations last spring. The answer is clear—"restructuring" is not only irrelevant to radicals, it's irrelevant to everyone.

The liberals who set up SRU were supported with \$50,000 from Ford and other foundations as well as with publicity from *The New York Times*. Yet the people who founded SRU were both incapable of organizing masses—at Columbia, at least, only radicals can do that—and incapable of projecting interest in their reformist crusades. One of the reasons was that their

crusade was prompted not out of any material interest in the university with which others could identify (does anyone identify with the university?), but rather out of ego-interest. These were the liberal ego-freaks, the student-council opportunist types that abound on every middle-class campus, and take on the self-appointed title, "Student Leader." On every campus in the country, these people can be found both in and out of SDS, usually pursuing the most reformist politics so as to gain the most personal fame and power. Sometimes these people attack SDS, very often they are found licking our asses. It is also these people whom you find pushing "student power"—look at the national leadership of the National Student Association—so they can wear three-piece suits, striped ties, have sherry with the Deans, and be the future administrators and CIA agents of America. SDS must by-pass the freaks-on-the-make and reach out to other students and working people with politics that, indeed, are relevant. This was done at Columbia, until the time when we began to worry more about the student-power freaks than about the people.

Analysts of the New Left, both in and out of the Movement, are fond of saying that Columbia SDS failed to revive the strike because of Administration co-optation. Randy Furst, in a celebrated mis-article in the *Guardian* wrote, "Strike fizzles as liberals take over." James P. O'Brien, writing an all-inclusive history of the New Left, makes this authoritative remark, "The SDS chapter has been baffled by a liberal new president (Cordier) and by a proliferation of student proposals for structural changes in the university that have little relevance to the questions (still raised by SDS) of the university's relationship to society." And Eric Mann, in his article, warns of the SRU/liberal/cooptation threat. Don't our comrades realize that this position that our movement was coopted is exactly the left-liberal position of *The New York Times* in what it hopes is the obituary for the New Left? It is a liberal position which denies the integrity of our original struggle, saying that the radicals who were interested in real issues were only a tiny minority in the strike, and the other thousands were just protesting the lack of communication and democracy in a great but archaically administered university. Of all possible reasons for the failure of the strike to revive, this one of liberal cooptation is the least important. In fact, Cordier is a fat, imperialistic joke (once when he appeared at an outdoor meeting on campus to "meet the people," the people kept yelling, "Speak to the issues," to which he replied, "Yes, there are many issues, and there seems to

be more of them every day"). I've already cited some data on the extent of interest in restructuring. Of course there are many reasons why the Movement waned this fall, an analysis of which should be done separately when enough people have discussed the subject. Included in this discussion should be the effects of the baseless Liberation School, the repression playing on fear of further arrest and being thrown out of school, the escalation in rhetoric by SDS, the rise of an elite leadership in SDS, the insane sectarian faction fighting forced on the chapter by first the Labor Committee sectarians and then by Progressive Labor Party members who moved into Columbia (there was one member over the summer). Most of all, the failure of many students to see where the whole Movement is going, how a revolution will be made, and what are the life-alternatives for people within the Movement are questions which the Movement itself is only now in the process of answering.

FAILURE OF "MASS POLITICS"

After the police bust which cleared over a thousand people from five buildings, the rebellion faced a critical turning-point. The mass of students, faculty, community people, and others spontaneously demanded a strike against classes, shutting down the university. But the political basis for this strike—its demands, tactics, and organization—was still unclear. Radicals wanted the strike to maintain the original six demands, as a means of keeping the political focus on racism and imperialism, while liberals pushed for as broad a strike as possible—"You've got a good thing here, don't blow it, everyone's with you, but don't force your politics onto people" was a typical liberal remark.

The real danger, despite the chorus of liberal warnings, was in watering down the politics and the tactics of the strike. This the radical strike committee knew (this was the same strike committee that had been established during the liberation of the buildings, with two representatives from each building), and yet the result of the expansion of the strike committee, even with the politics of the six demands, was the eventual weakening and loss of mass base which occurred in the weeks after the bust.

In brief, the story of the expansion of the strike committee is as follows. The original committee called for a mass meeting for Wednesday night, the day following the bust. This meeting was attended by over 1,300 people, all vigorously anti-adminis-

tration, and most of whom were ready to follow radical leadership. At that meeting, the strike committee proposed a two-part resolution:

- 1) Expand the strike committee to include representatives of any new constituency groups to form on the basis of one representative to seventy members. Groups could join if they supported the original six demands.
- 2) Restart the university under our own auspices by running liberated courses, and eventually establishing a provisional administration.

Debate centered around the question of requirements for joining the strike committee: the radicals thought they were absolutely necessary in order to maintain some political coherence, while the liberals, centered around the graduate-faculties student council grouping, wanted, as usual, the broadest base possible, and no requirements. A full description of the political and psychological vicissitudes of this meeting is given by Eric Mann in his article, but in brief, through a misunderstanding, I capitulated the strike committee position to the liberal one, establishing an apolitical strike committee. This error in itself did not have to be fatal; nor was it, since the radicals did go out and organize like hell the next day, both in the constituent groups which were being formed and in the new strike committee itself. The new committee passed almost unanimously the six demands, plus a seventh demand on being able to participate in restructuring, so it looked to us (the radicals) that we had "reinjecte" politics back into the committee. One good aspect of the error, which should not be underestimated, was that the liberals were prevented from organizing themselves into an opposition for two whole weeks. They had had plans to walk out of the original meeting described above and form a rump strike committee, but those plans were blocked by my "co-optation."

The failure to deepen and expand the radical base which had formed during the occupation of the buildings, however, lay at the root of our problems. Instead of maintaining the communes as the bodies with effective power, they became only the left wing which sent delegates to a coalition strike committee organized much like a student council. Not only political sharpness, but also the militancy which defined our strike by struggle was lost.

The people in the buildings had fought. Many were new to the radical movement, many were just learning—this was a

time of openness, of new experiences and life-situations. If ever the phrase "practice outran theory" was true, this was such a time. People seizing buildings, yelling "Up Against the Wall, Motherfucker," fighting cops, committing their lives and careers to a movement for liberation—this was all new and unexplained in political terms. During the liberation of the buildings, too, the frantic pace had kept discussion on too much of a tactical level (Should we barricade? Should we negotiate with the cops?), often focused away from the broader questions that would tell people why, where this is all going, how it fits into a broader, worldwide struggle. After the bust, there was more time, yet two important factors relating to the formation of the coalition strike committee intervened: 1) The communes were kept together, but their function became more and more a combination veterans' organization and discussion group rather than power source. In the buildings the knowledge that political decisions had to be made, and that no one else would do it, held the discussions together. Now, through a system of representative democracy, and also the sharing of power with liberal groups, people in communes, feeling powerless, said, "So what?" The communes should have been given effective power. 2) The radical leadership was kept occupied in the nightly torture sessions called "Strike Coordinating Committee Meetings." Here we had to constantly fight the ego-freaks and others among the liberals to whip them back into line around such basic issues as amnesty and restructuring, which had been fought hundreds of times before. This was totally wasted time since the strike committee, instead of being a source of strength for the strike, was really the weakest element. Vis-à-vis the needs of the radical constituency, the strike committee kept the leadership tied up instead of free to talk with and "organize" the real base, working with the people, the real power.

This denial of power to the militants and reliance on the coalition strike committee resulted in the lack of militancy which sealed the fate of the strike and kept it from becoming a struggle as intense and sustained as that of San Francisco State. At the time classes resumed, approximately one week after the bust, the strike, still with the base of hundreds of militants who had been in the buildings, was faced with the question of whether to block access to classes. The strike coordinating committee passed a resolution calling for nonobstructive picketing for Monday. An assembly of "communards" met and concurred with this position, primarily because none of the strike "leaders" spoke for obstruction and militant confronta-

tion. The thinking of the group centered around the desire to involve more and more "liberals" in our strike, and also the necessity to maintain the coalition strike committee as a front for legitimacy's sake. Only intuitively did we realize that the front was sapping our Movement of its energy and momentum for struggle: the morning the picketing began, picket captains gave two sets of orders—private, to certain groups of militants calling for experiments in obstruction, and the other open and official calling for nonobstruction. The "experiments," in fact, went quite well and resulted in a further confrontation with the Administration, which threatened an injunction. At no point, however, was the pressure kept up, since there was no unified support for the small groups that obstructed.

That night, in the strike coordinating committee, the liberals, most of whom had not been out on the picket lines, were up in arms, threatening to appoint cops to make sure the lines remained nonviolent. Here again, in the interests of unity, the radicals made the fatal concession and backed down. There were many of our number who saw the mistake, but their counsel to "escalate at all points," certainly the wisest strategy in a struggle where radical politics has the upper hand and the initiative, went ignored.

How does a mass radical movement involve greater and greater numbers in decision-making? How does it maintain its radical politics when faced with demands for coalition? These problems are still unanswered, though the experiences of Columbia and San Francisco State do help provide some ideas.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COLUMBIA UPRISING

In these notes I've tended to emphasize the errors we made in order to communicate some of the lessons learned during what was for all of us the most intense political experience of our lives.

The failure to establish mass, militant, long-term radical politics has at least in part been answered by the experiences of San Francisco State and other schools. Martin Nicolaus, writing in *The Movement* has also pointed out that the Third World/Liberation Front/Black Student Union movement at San Francisco State has purposely allowed no leader/symbol/star figures to emerge through the mass media. Both politically and personally this has been a bad error in the Columbia struggle, though it has had some advantages.

The confusion over the radical position on the university, and the function of a student movement in building a revolutionary movement, has begun to be cleared up by the Revolutionary Youth Movement proposal passed by the Ann Arbor-Winter NC. The ideas in this resolution have not been completely clarified in SDS, but the departure from both student-movement-in-itself and also worker-student alliance politics is clear to most. This proposal is, in a sense, the ideological successor to Columbia.

The victories of the Columbia struggle, however, were great. It was the most sustained and most intense radical campus struggle up to that time, around the clearest politics.

At a time when the radical movement was the most disheartened and dispirited due to the grins of McCarthy, the Columbia rebellion broke through the gloom as an example of the power a radical movement could attain. It is no coincidence that the McCarthy movement at Columbia, starting off with over six hundred members the first day, has never been able to revive after the rebellion of the spring. Liberal politics were exposed as just so much shallow verbiage and wasted effort when compared to the power of a mass radical movement, around significant issues such as racism and imperialism. The radical "base," for the first time ever at one campus, attained a number in the thousands.

Nationwide, Columbia and Chicago provided the models for militancy and energy which attracted masses of students after the total failure of conventional politics this summer and fall. The content of that politics, too, the compromises and reformism of McCarthyism, were juxtaposed to the thoroughgoing analysis of the Left on imperialism, racism, poverty, the class nature of the society. This all was highlighted by Columbia.

At Columbia, our two principal demands, the ending of construction of the gym in Morningside Park, and the formal severing of ties with the Institute for Defense Analyses, were, in fact, met. This laid the basis for broadening the demands this fall to ending all defense and government research, and stopping all university expansion into the community.

Perhaps the most important result of the rebellion, in terms of long-term strategy for the Movement, was the creation of new alliances with student, nonstudent, community, and working-class groups throughout the city. A chapter that had been mostly inward-looking and campus-oriented suddenly opened up and began to realize the tremendous importance of the various types of hook-ups—support, tactical alliance, coalition

—which would broaden the radical movement beyond its white, “middle-class,” student base.

First of all was the tactical alliance with the black students in Hamilton Hall, sometimes close, sometimes more distant, but always working parallel toward the same goal. This was described at the beginning of this article, but it is worthwhile reiterating the tremendous importance of the experience as a model for the different types of relationships possible with militant black students.

Backing up the black students as a source of power, and to some extent behind the whites as well, was the Harlem community, sometimes mobilized, sometimes lying in wait. This force proved not only the greatest single deterrent to a police bust, but also provided *all* demonstrating students with support in the form of mass rallies and demonstrations, manpower, money, food donations, and morale boosting. Black high-school students sparked the militants in Fayerweather Hall, then returned to their own schools and within two weeks had created the most militant high-school antiracist strikes New York City has seen in recent times. A strike committee member spoke at a rally at Seventh Avenue and 125th Street in Central Harlem, the first white person to do so within anyone’s memory. Since the rebellion, the relationship between New York SDS and the New York Black Panther Party has grown increasingly closer.

As a result of the liberation of the buildings, anti-Columbia organizing activity in the mostly white Morningside Heights neighborhood revived to an all-time high. The Community Action Committee, organized completely by community residents, provided support to the students in the form of demonstrations and even a rent-strike of tenants in Columbia’s tenements. On May 14, the CAC liberated an apartment in a tenement on 114th Street in an effort to dramatize the decimation of the community by Columbia’s racist expansion policies. The CAC led numerous actions over the summer, all working closely with students at the Liberation School. The work of the CAC was not all a bed of roses: problems developed over the fact that the organizers were mostly middle-class young people who were estranged from both white working-class residents who were threatened and the middle-class residents whose buildings were not in jeopardy.

As a direct result of the strike, cafeteria workers, mostly Spanish-speaking, ended their thirty-year battle with Columbia, one of the most repressive employers in the city, with the formation of a local of Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospital

Workers’ Union, one of the few antiwar unions in New York City. Student organizers, all SDS members, or student “Marxist-Humanists,” did most of the work for Local 1199, and red-baiting by the bosses was effectively turned against Columbia since the workers knew the students would be on their side if the Union was denied.

More general off-campus results of the uprising, though important, are hard to estimate. Despite the distortions of the press, many people began to see that students are willing to fight militantly for good goals—ending racism, ending the war. Though no mass or general strike erupted in the nation around our demands, we feel the Columbia rebellion helped break down the antagonism of working people toward students fighting only for their own privilege (at least where the truth got through).

Internal changes in the chapter took the form of the wealth of experience absorbed by hundreds of individuals. It is almost a truism at this point to cite the incredible changes in consciousness that took place through the action (“Revolution is the best education for honorable men”—Che). The rebellion trained new leaders, some of whom have left Columbia to provide other local movements with leadership. From my travels around the country, I’ve seen that the level of political discussion at Columbia is as high or higher than anywhere else in the country, including the radical “center” in the Bay Area. The number of militants active in the chapter is much greater than last year, and, in addition, a chapter member with many years’ experience recently commented that the entire undergraduate school and most of the graduate students look to SDS for political leadership, and, most important, see SDS as acting in their interest. This is perhaps the only campus in the country where the SDS chapter can call the whole school its “base.”

Our strength was greatest at the time of our greatest militancy. It was also the time that we resolved to fight—to disregard all the liberal Cassandras warning us of the horrors of the police bust and the right-wing reaction. In a sense it was a time when we overcame our own middle-class timidity and fear of violence. We, of course, were following the lead of the blacks, but we were also forging new paths where elite white students had never been before. At that time nothing could defeat us, not the police, not the jocks, not the liberal faculty, so treacherous and yet so impotent, only our own (we found out later) weakness and bad political judgment. The liberal world was paralyzed; radicals had a vision of what victory seems like.

Of course we made mistakes, dozens of them. At the low points, feeling that the Movement itself had erred in irreconcilable ways (such as leaving Hamilton Hall, which we at that time did not understand as inevitable and even a source of strength), we found the strength to go on in the knowledge that somehow, history was carrying us forward. Also important was the observation that after making forty-three mistakes forty-four wouldn't make any difference, so we threw ourselves into the next crisis.

Above all, we learned almost accidentally the great truth stated by Chairman Mao Tse-tung, "Dare to struggle, dare to win."

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