THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM AT S.F. STATE

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To understand what happened at San Francisco State College during the week of December 6th and the weeks following, it is necessary to know the events which led up to the December 6th action.

On November 7th a fight erupted in the office of the campus newspaper, the Daily Gator, between 9 black students and the editor of the paper and its staff. It is still undetermined which group initiated the violence in this particular incident (the case is being heard in civil courts this spring), but the long-term provocation came from the Gator and its editor, Jim Vasko. The Gator has consistently slandered and intimidated the Black Students Union with racist articles and editorials. Most glaring of these intimidations was an article written by Vasko last spring on Muhammad Ali. Another article, written by Vasko the day before the December 6th demonstration, predicted "snipers" and referred to black students as "goons".

A couple of days after the Gator incident, the College administration identified 9 black students from Gator photographs, and President John Summerskill immediately suspended them. This was the first overt act of racism carried out by the Administration. Rather than suspending all those involved in the incident, Summerskill suspended only the black students, the underlying assumption being that black students had perpetrated the violence and would perpetrate more.

About a week after the suspensions, a kangaroo court, made up of faculty members hand-picked by the Administration and members of the Administration itself, met to deliver a verdict corresponding with the sentence which Summerskill had already carried out. The closed-hearing court upheld 4 of the suspensions, placed 2 more students on probation, and dismissed the other 3. The 4 suspended were well-known members of the Black Students Union. SDS picketed these hearings, demanding that the suspensions be dropped and that the Gator and Vasko be suspended for its racist attacks on black students. Except for SDS, the campus, which is 97% white, remained silent.

The week before December 6th, at the initiative of the Black Students Union (BSU), members of SDS met with members of the BSU to discuss an alliance for joint action against the suspensions. During this week a new factor developed. The Administration, in a move to keep the campus clean of anything other than the "official Gator press", suspended Open Process, a semi-radical campus newspaper, and 2 members of its staff. The 2 suspended students were Blair Partridge, the editor, and Jeff Poland, author of a poem judged "obscene" by Summerskill. This added the free-speech issue and widened our base of support on campus.

On Friday of that week, SDS, the Open Process staff, and the BSU held a joint rally on the steps of the Administration Building to protest all 6 suspensions. Speakers pointed out that in both cases (the black students and Open Process writers) the sentences had been carried out without due legal process. BSU speakers put the suspension of the black students in the realistic context of the racism and oppression carried out against black people in this country.

At this point President Summerskill appeared on the steps, according to the San Francisco Chronicle, to "charm the demonstrators". What he in fact did was quite calculated and vicious. Agreeing to answer questions from the demanding crowd of 1,000, Summerskill took the microphone and admitted publicly that he had "acted precipitously" in the case of the 2 white students and was lifting their suspensions. Angered shouts of "What about the black students?" and accusations of racism came from the crowd. Summerskill steadfastly refused to even talk about the black students' suspensions. After this announcement—aimed at separating the white students from the small number of black students on campus in order to isolate the BSU and prevent any black-white alliance—Summerskill talked on for an hour or so espousing the tenets of American liberalism and talking of a desire to "work with you for a change".

Although Summerskill had succeeded in pacifying some liberal elements of the crowd, a large number met after the rally to form a coalition to fight the suspensions. The group adopted the name Movement Against Political Suspensions (MAPS) and formulated 5 demands: 1) Drop all 6 suspensions. 2) Reinstate Open Process. 3) Cease political harassment of students, faculty members, and staff members. (3 faculty members had their pay docked for participating in the Oakland demonstrations.) 4) Ban outside cops from campus. 5) Establish student control of student affairs—for example, student publications.

It was decided that if the 5 demands were not met by noon on Wednesday, MAPS and the BSU would carry out a demonstration inside the Administration Building. The BSU had issued a call to off-campus people in the black community.

On Monday MAPS held a rally to gain student support. After the rally, 100 students marched up to Summerskill's office to formally present the 5 demands. Vice-President Don Garrity acknowledged the demands in Summerskill's absence.

Here a noteworthy fact should be brought out: in view of all the lip service liberals give to "sitting down and working things out", Summerskill, rather than offering to meet with MAPS and the BSU to discuss the demands, spent the 2 days before the demonstration planning tactics with the San Francisco cops.

BATTLE AT S.F. STATE CONT.

Wednesday morning, when we arrived on campus, we found that Summerskill had locked the doors to the Administration Building and sent home all employees except administrators. The Gator came out with an article by Jim Vasko designed to create racist fear and hysteria on campus. He predicted "snipers" and called black people from the community "goons". MAPS had said there would be no violence unless the Administration initiated it.

It was decided to go ahead with the planned demonstration. A rally was started in the Commons and moved to the steps of the Administration Building. The crowd grew to over a thousand—some supporters, some just spectators. Summerskill was locked in his office with the head of the San Francisco riot squad. Newsmen had also been let into the building. The campus was crawling with plain-clothes cops with walkie-talkies, keeping in touch with Summerskill and Police Chief Cahill downtown.

About 12:30 the plate-glass door was broken and about 300 students and 3 faculty members went inside. About 1 p.m. groups of students left the building to interrupt classes and explain what was happening and why, and to urge fellow students to join the demonstration. A few minor scuffles broke out, directed mainly against plain-clothes cops and newsmen, whose pictures are used to identify people after demonstrations. At 2 p.m., the Administration officially closed down the school. Summerskill and Chief Cahill decided it was tactically wiser not to call for uniformed police.

Thursday and Friday MAPS held teach-in rallies to explain the reasons behind what happened Wednesday. A mass meeting was called for Sunday night to decide whether MAPS would take action again. The BSU had stated they would take direct action the following Wednesday if the suspensions of the 4 black students had not been lifted.

2 important questions came to light at this meeting. First was the question of whether to act or not. Some students put forth the argument that we should not take action because we lacked a mass base of support on campus and were alienated from those we were trying to organize.

SDS argued against this position. Realizing that building a base is primary, we realized also that in certain situations a movement, no matter what its size and strength, has to take a stand whether the objective conditions are favorable or not. We saw that the situation had polarized to the point that we had to take a clear stand against racism and in support of black people in their struggle for liberation, even if that meant isolating ourselves temporarily from our fellow students. After long and thorough discussion, the group decided by majority vote to take direct action. The action was to be a non-disruptive sit-in in the Administration Building.

The second major problem revealed a real weakness in MAPS: white chauvinism. White chauvinism was manifested in many different and subtle ways during the MAPS-BSU alliance. 1 example of this attitude is that MAPS didn't really view the fight against racism as primarily their fight, but as the fight of black people in which white people should play a secondary, supportive role. MAPS, in fact, was formed only after the suspension of the 2 white students, and the first action on Wednesday was planned to coincide with the actions of the BSU. Based on this growing awareness that white people should take the initiative in the struggle against racism, MAPS decided to take action on Tuesday, a day ahead of the scheduled BSU plans.

White chauvinism was not eliminated that night. Throughout the meeting people continued to talk of the need to support "our black brothers" in a patronizing to a kind of reverse chauvinism. However the problem was brought into the open, and people could begin to struggle individually and collectively against the effects a thoroughly racist society has on everyone in it.

The sit-in was carried out the following Tuesday with about 100 persons sitting-in in the Administration Building. Christmas vacation brought about a 2-week standstill on the campus.

Analysis

San Francisco State has a reputation as the most liberal campus in the nation and John Summerskill as the most liberal college president. We would not argue with this reputation. It is well-founded. The question which we ask and which over the past 2 months we have seen answered is: What is liberalism and what role does it play in contemporary America?

Defining liberal racism: Basically, anytime someone opposes the liberation struggle of black people, he's taking a position in defense of racism, regardless of the subjective rationalization. The most prominent reason put forth for being against the black struggle on campus involved the question of violence. The real question here is not whether one favors violence, but rather what are the means by which a people—in this case black people—can achieve liberation. The South Vietnamese went through a period of passive resistance before they took up armed struggle. Black people in this country went through the lesson of the civil-rights movement. In both cases it was learned that pacifism played into the hands of the ruling strata of the United States, because pacifism meant not fighting for real change.

There is a fundamental difference between the violence of black people or the Vietnamese and the violence of the US Government against them. The former are struggling to overthrow and liberate themselves from an economic and political system which depends on the systematic oppression and exploitation of people all over the world and on the super-exploitation of black people here at home. The armed force of the US Government is used for the defense and expansion of that system.

We support the right of the subjugated to use whatever means necessary to rebel against their oppressor, whether that rebellion occurs in the ghettos of North America, in the hamlets of Southeast Asia, or on this campus. The college community cannot and should not remain unaffected by this world-wide liberation movement.

Another question which became pre-eminent and which brought to light the undercurrent of racism was the BSU's call to off-campus people in the black community. This presence of off-campus people was given by some as a reason for being against the demonstrations. 2 points should be made here. First, as stated before, no matter what the subjective reason, objectively the position being taken is one in defense of racism. But more revealing is the reason for which the call had to be made. The black students could not rely on a 97% white student body to act against racism and in defense of the rights of black people. This is partially what we mean when we use the term liberal racism. White liberal students who would not tolerate a segregated lunch counter in Alabama not only did not act against, but in fact defended the overtly racist policies of a liberal administration. White students should have protested en masse last spring when Vasko began his racist intimidations. They should have demanded that Vasko and the Gator be suspended until its racist content was stopped. Because black students saw clearly both carry on a fight against racism, they had no alternative to calling for help from the black community.

Some self-criticism must be made here. During the emotional heat of the sharp struggle on our campus, we failed to make a distinction between the racism of the students and faculty and the racism of the Administration. Although the overt manifestations may be similar, there is a fundamental difference in reasons and causes between the racist policies of the Administration and the individual racism of the white students.

Racism is an integral part and an inevitable product of the present economic and political system. The Administration, as a representative of the ruling strata of this country, has a vested interest in maintaining that system, which includes racism. Moreover the power elite uses racism to divide movements which threaten its power. A classic example of this is the way the State government and the huge landowners pitted white workers against black and Mexican-American workers to prevent the organization of farm labor in California for over 60 years. An example closer to home was the lifting of the suspensions of the white students by Summerskill to isolate the black students, thus playing on the racism of a white student body.

We must continue to expose racism wherever it exists and challenge it head-on. This includes white chauvinism inside the Movement. But we must have a perspective of convincing the people that the racism in themselves and in this society is against the interest of humanity. We must win them to fight their own racism and to join us in the fight to change a society which perpetuates and uses racism.

Lessons on liberalism: In fighting the racist policies of the Summerskill administration, we learned a great deal about liberals and the role they play. It became clear that there are not fundamental political differences between the liberal position and the Right Wing. The differences are over strategy, not goals. Summerskill illustrated this point. By not calling the cops, he forced the Right Wing to attack him, which frightened the campus community into supporting Summerskill. In the final analysis, the Right-wing leaders such as Reagan, Rafferty, Unruh, and the Board of Trustees realized Summerskill had a better strategy for defense of the status quo and reversed their initial criticism to praise. The Right-wing scare was used to rally support for the liberal position. The same thing happened in 1964 when the Rightist Goldwater frightened the American public who is now carrying out the same policies Goldwater would have undertaken. This is important because it is liberalism, not the Right, which is the prevalent ideology in this country and the main obstacle to social change. Liberalism is a deceptive diversionary strategy used to co-opt many honest individuals and groups into supporting the status quo.

We also found dangers in fighting the issues on liberal tenets such as due process. Although due process was clearly violated, there were 2 weaknesses in making this the primary emphasis. 1 is that it tended to obscure the real problem, which is racism. Secondly, the Administration will follow due process only as long as it yields results which coincide with the policies which the Administration plans to carry out. This was illustrated by the trial of John Gerassi, a professor who participated in the demonstrations. He was tried by a committee appointed by the Academic Senate. This faculty committee voted 3 to 1 in favor of his retention, and Summerskill fired him anyway.

Another example of liberals not of the Academic Senate to grant amnesty to the 4 black students on the basis of double jeopardy. The Senate used the excuse of having a pre-set meeting agenda. But when Summerskill came under attack from the Right, the AFT, the Senate, and the general faculty side-stepped all agendas to begin planning support action for Summerskill.

Self-criticism: We have already mentioned what we feel are the 2 most important weaknesses of MAPS: the failure to make a distinction between the racism of the Administration and the racism of students and faculty members; and white chauvinism. MAPS was also weak in getting out good leaflets during the height of the struggle. Because it was a coalition, it was difficult for different groups and individuals to come together on political positions. SDS should have helped to overcome this by playing more of a leadership role.

Another criticism, which can also be made of the Movement as a whole, is the tendency to underestimate the prevalence of racism, including white chauvinism among radicals.

Racism came through strong, not only in the reaction of the college community but in the liberal press throughout the nation. The San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner almost paled Vasko in their reports of "roving gangs of Negro thugs". The Nation and New Republic ran articles on how MAPS and the BSU had "wrecked" the campus by taking a stand against racism.

We have to avoid falling victim to the liberal myth that racism is something which was largely eliminated back in the civil-rights movement.

There is now 1 new development in the situation at San Francisco State. 2 days after he was vindicated by the "task force" which was investigating him, as if to shatter any last illusions we may have about where he stands, Summerskill signed and had the San Francisco police issue 12 warrants for arrest. The charges were 2 misdemeanors. The list of 12 people—a selective political one drawn up by the Administration—comprised the better-known campus radicals, 3 opposition members of the student government, and 1 faculty member.

When we found out about the warrants, the week before finals, we held rallies and received more student support than we expected. It was decided that the 12 people would stay on campus to force the cops to come get us where we had support. We slept over 1 night with student supporters staying with us. Summerskill, who worked closely with Chief Cahill, had obviously made it clear he did not want us arrested on campus. Both he and the cops prefer pre-dawn raids on peiple's homes. As of this writing 7 of the 11 students have been picked up.

When Summerskill issued the warrants he told us about maintaining "peace" on campus. We pointed out that there had not been peace on the campus before December 6th, and there could not be real peace now until the conditions which caused the unrest, both on the campus

" There are a dozen pamphlets waiting for the ...

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