
THE NEHWON REVIEW

THE HIPPIES, THE NEW LEFT, AND ALVA ROGERS

by BOB CHAZIN

Alva Rogers, writing in Asp #9, February 1967, has some very uncomplimentary things to say about two segments of American youth that have been much in the news lately -- the hippies and the New Left. Extolling the virtues of personal cleanliness and the daily bath, he says that he "refuses to equate personal slovenliness and a pigsty pad" with any kind of intellectualism. No one does make any such equation, but apparently Alva finds it impossible to believe that the two can co-exist. And, writing of the New Left, he informs us that they "act like mindless barbarians...they yearn for a Russian or Chinese version of brotherhood. They're ignorant of history."

These simplistic remarks express a reaction not very different from that of the average middle-class American (of whom Rogers is proud to be one). What, we may

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ask, are the roots of these phenomena which so many Americans like Alva find so disturbing? And, moreover, why do such people find the hippies and the young activists of the New Left not only upsetting but also objects for scorn and ridicule?

It seems to me that the hippies and the New Left are both manifestations of the same phenomenon in American youth; they are differing responses to the same stimuli. The fact seems to be that a certain part of American youth is alienated from American society, and this alienation expresses itself in various ways, of which being hip and being politically active in a radical way are two.

Alienation is a popular word, and like many popular words, its meaning is not very precise. What I have in mind is a progressive disillusionment and disenchantment with the official goals of American society; in other words, a realization that the American Dream is just a dream, not reality.

We may well ask how this comes about. A large part of the explanation must surely be the wide discrepancy between the picture of the United States painted in the public schools and by the mass media, and the reality encountered by many young people who participated, for instance, in the civil rights movement. Several good examples of this sort come to mind at once.

Marshall Windmiller, who is a perceptive commentator on political affairs for the Berkeley non-commercial radio station KPFA (and also a professor of international relations at San Francisco State College), quotes from the official California eighth grade textbook on government, which is required reading for all eighth-graders in the California public schools:

What is the United States of America? It is a grand land ...a great people. And it is a group of wonderful beliefs... It is a country of dreams come true. Throughout the world, other peoples look to the example and leadership of the United States. It is viewed as a fabulous nation of opportunity. Here the union of energetic individuals, rich environment, and great ideals have brought forth a grand society.

And later on:

...in a free society like ours, losers must always have the right to become winners. The minority is entitled to its views. It is entitled, if it wishes, to try and convince others of the virtue of those views. In other words, the right to dissent is preserved. The loud voices of minorities become one more stimulus to progress.... Here, individuals who disagree with current policies are permitted to say so. Protests are not discouraged so long as they do not injure others or violate the law. (Emphasis added.)

This is the myth that the children of public school age are required to swallow. It is what their teachers tell them and what they must reproduce on examinations. But does it have any relation to real-

ity? Is it what they will find, when, leaving high school, they enter the real world?

I think not. The United States is currently involved in a war which has deeply divided the American people. This is not the place for a discussion of the war, and I am quite willing to admit that those who oppose the war in some fashion or other are a minority -- that they are dissenters from the official policy of the United States government. But it is important to note what the attitude of the government toward the dissenters is. It is certainly true that the dissenters are not in concentration camps or in jail. And they are not, as yet, being prosecuted for treason or sedition. But the government has brought home its chief commander in Vietnam, General Westmoreland, who declared, in a speech on 24 April to the annual Associated Press luncheon in New York City, that "the troops are dismayed, as I am, by recent unpatriotic acts here at home." No one believes that such a speech could have been made without authorization from high officials of the Defense department, or from the President himself.

This is, in fact, nothing more or less to affix the label "unpatriotic" on those who participated in the recent peace demonstrations and to stifle domestic dissent to the war. It was so interpreted the next day, as senator after senator (including several prominent senators who supported the President's Vietnam policy) rose on the floor of the Senate to protest it. This, and not the platitudes of the civics textbook, demonstrates how America deals with its dissenters.

An even better example occurred in the April municipal elections in Berkeley. A New Left group called the Community for New Politics ran a slate for the city council on a platform opposing the war in Vietnam and urging an expanded anti-poverty effort. This was a significant campaign, for, like the peace campaigns last fall, it was a protest carried out entirely within the framework of American political institutions, and without demonstrations of any kind. Part of CNP's campaign involved the rental of an outdoor advertising billboard, on which the names of the candidates were to be shown, together with the phrases "Oppose the War -- Fight Poverty." The billboard company accepted payment for the rentals, but then blacked out the phrase "Oppose the War" on the grounds that it "reflected adversely on the President of the United States." It finally took a court order to get the phrase restored.

There was nothing unlawful about the dissent expressed in either the April peace demonstrations against the war, or in the CNP billboard, but in both cases great pressure was brought to bear against those who were so outspoken in their opposition to official policies. The bitterness and disillusionment of those who believed in the kind of America pictured by the civics text is easy to imagine.

It seems to me that American society is becoming increasingly conformist and intolerant of dissent. It is true that the American constitution and judicial system provide excellent safeguards against legal persecution of those who differ from established policy, or those whose behavior, if not illegal, is at least noticeably "different" from that of the majority. But there are many other means by which those who

deviate from accepted standards of belief or behavior can be suppressed or intimidated into conformity or silence.

This is having two effects. One is that, increasingly, those who are opposed to official policies in a political way are becoming frustrated. This frustration leads not to a greater commitment to traditional political processes but rather to some sort of direct action. For when one feels that the usual methods of politics have no effect whatever on the actions of the government, what is left but a frustrated silence or some symbolic demonstration -- an action -- of one's opposition?

This reliance on direct action is not the sole property of the "mindless barbarians" of the New Left, either. In his article "The Malaise Beyond Dissent," Tom Wicker, writing in the New York Times of 12 March 1967, makes reference to the walkout from the National Book Awards ceremony of a large number of writers, editors, and publishers. These men walked out of the presentation because the awards were being made by Vice President Humphrey, one of the chief spokesmen for a war policy they opposed. This walkout wasn't the act of "college students or unknown youths." Rather, it was the act of well-known people in the New York publishing world who, moreover, have various media available to them to publicize their views. Wicker accounts for this protest by pointing to "a growing sense of dismay and despair at the inability of the individual to have an impact on public policy...." Seen in this light, are the actions of student activists at Harvard and Berkeley really so hard to understand?

The other effect of this great disparity between the ideal of America, as daily drummed into the heads of the children in school, and the reality they later find, is to cause a certain number of them to "drop out," in some sense or other. This, at least in part, is the genesis of the hippies.

It is not surprising that people like Alva Rogers dislike and even fear the hippies. The hippies, most of whom come from middle-class homes, have gone through the American public school system, have taken a long look at the America of Alva Rogers, with its 65-billion-dollar defense budget and associated wars, its chromium-plated gadgets, sexual hypocrisy, four-TV-set houses, and the rest of it, and have said, "No thanks." And they have retreated to enclaves like Berkeley, Haight Ashbury in San Francisco, and East Village in New York, where they mainly ask society to leave them alone.

But society will not leave them alone. It is not just that the Alvas of our society disapprove of the dress or personal deportment of the hippies. It is more of a fundamental intolerance for the hippies and everything they represent, as if their mere existence were an affront and threat to all the Alvas among us and to the middle-class way of life. Thus they are usually not satisfied that the hippies, like anyone else, can be prosecuted if they violate the law (almost always a drug law; almost never a violent crime); what many middle-class Americans want is that the city officials, and especially the police, should harass the hippies until, like a bad dream, they go away.

Thus, while a variety of pressures are brought to bear against the nonconformity of the New Left, one of the main means used to harass the hippies is the police. Here we have something new: The police are now being used, not just to enforce the law, but to harass those who deviate from the mainstream of American culture, true to the wishes of those middle-class citizens who pay the policemen's salaries. Alva ridicules charges of "police brutality," and we do not have to go into the question of whether or not the police are actually "brutal," in the strict sense of the word. But they are well-versed in the art of the gratuitous arrest (which stigmatizes an individual for life, even if the arrest is subsequently thrown out of court), the unnecessary (and unlawful) search, and similar techniques.

And the hippies and political activists of the New Left are not the only ones who feel that the police are hostile to those who do not conform to middle-class standards. An article in the New York Times for 30 April, quoting a report of the President's National Crime commission, finds widespread hostility to the police among various minorities, resulting from "widespread oral abuse and harassment of citizens."

Along with several hundred University of California students, I had a firsthand chance to observe the way in which the police can intimidate those whose behavior they dislike, during the Free Speech movement of 1964. It was a common sight to see students picketing various entrances of the University in a perfectly legal effort to keep tradesmen and trucks out. The Berkeley police, who were not involved at that point in any official way, were nevertheless sending officers to "observe" the picketing, and to demand identification from the pickets, and to take down their names and addresses. No arrests were made, but the effect was clear: A certain number of students were afraid to exercise their right to picket, out of fear of the police.

Recently the city of San Francisco, afraid of a mass influx of hippies this summer, ordered its health department to go after the "hippy pads," some of which are run by an organization known as the Diggers, who give free food and lodging to anyone in Haight-Ashbury who needs it. Presumably the city expected a vast number of health code violations which would enable officials to close many of the "pads" down -- but all they got was a miniscule number of violations, less than that obtained in random housing inspections all over the city. But the important fact is that it was the Haight-Ashbury district which was selected for this attention. The hippies are well aware that the city administration is out to get them.

Similar things go on in almost every city where there is any sizable number of hippies. Old cars containing occupants of questionable appearance, which have been stopped because of minor traffic violations or mechanical defects, are customarily searched. What hippy has the money to fight such unlawful police action?

A pattern emerges from all this. The police are no longer just the enforcers of the law; they have become also the enforcers of middle-class standards of dress and behavior, and groups who deviate -- Negroes, hippies, communists, student activists -- are to be subjected to ever-

increasing amounts of harassment until they conform. It is a sad commentary on a country that was founded by victims of governmental persecution, who came to the New World to find greater personal liberty.

-- BOB CHAZIN

THE SQUARE AND THE TRIBE

Or, Alva Rogers Ought to Meet Bill Donaho

ALVA ROGERS in Asp #7, February 1967 (published by Bill Donaho)(!):

"...Today I live with my family in an upper-middle-class suburb in a fairly large and comfortable house with the familiar chrome, stainless steel, and enameled gadgets and appliances that help to take some of the drudgery out of housework for Sid. We have three cars... We have four TVs... We also have books, a stereo, and a couple of FM radios. Availing one's self of the products of our technology and industry seems only natural to me, especially if it makes living a little easier. And if I want to be intellectual I can be just as intellectual in comfort and surrounded by good things as I can in more austere digs."

BILL DONAHO in Habakkuk, chapter II verse 3, February 1967:

"On Saturday, January 14th at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco was held the first Gathering of the Tribes, the Human Be In as it was called. Such notables as Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, Dizzy Gillespie, Al 'Jazzbo' Collins, Mario Savio, Jerry Rubin, Dick McClure, Lenore Kandel, etc., were there. The Hell's Angels were milling around.... I arrived in my red robes and soon had various accessories pressed on me. In one hand I carried a long stalk of papyrus grass and in the other several sticks of incense. Behind one ear was a sprig of eucalyptus and behind the other, a daisy.... It was delightful."
