

What's Left . . .

. . . by bob ginn

I don't know where the term "New Left" came from but like most generic terms especially those in the field of political science, they are better left undiscovered. Today there is a new thought on the left. It is an amalgamation of idealism, participatory democracy and violent insurrection. It differs from the Traditional or Old Left, the democratic socialists and humanists, mainly in its acceptance of violence as a viable political tool. The ideology is the same but the styles differ. The new style is reflected in the new symbols.

Che Guevara, Bonnie and Clyde, Malcolm X are the new christ figures. They are the symbols of the new style of life. The young activists as well as the young radicals, a differentiation I'll explore later, are both willing to lay down their lives, socially, economically and sometimes literally for the cause of a new society, a new humanity, the American dream of democracy for all and the Judeo Christian dream of universal brotherhood. Thus changes in thought and action have occurred on the left but the term New Left is too limited to really portray the scope of change.

What is generally termed the New Left, is really a massive noncoalition of four groups: 1) radicals; 2) activists; 3) liberals; and 4) moderates.

The radical feels that violent revolution is the prerequisite for the new humanity. They see reconciliation with the current American structure of society as a trap, a way to tame the discontented masses in America without any real change in the structures and hence in basic relationships. In other words, reconciliation is only another name for appeasement within the context of the existing structures of society. Needed are new structures which the radical feels can only be created by revolution, probably violent. The radical rejects working within the system as a viable way to opt for change. Insurrection becomes the number one political activity because in his eyes violent revolution is the catharsis step to true humanity and eventual brotherhood. He doesn't ponder what will come after the revolution because a revolution does not need goals. His cosmology tells him that the revolution in itself will produce needed change automatically, naturally.

Difference

The significant difference between the radical and what I call the activist is that the activist has not rejected using the system to change the system. The activists participates in the radical's insurrections at Columbia, Fort Hood and Berkeley but always has a plan so to how to use best the efforts in political pressure plot or publicity campaign. The activists are the majority of the New Left as I best understand the usage of the term. The radicals must also be included because the activist will use radical violence to further his more pragmatic goals.

The liberals are also opting for social change but do not want to risk anything. The radical and the activist will give up their careers, upper middle class status, and many other social and economic creature comforts to "die" for the revolution. In the civil rights campaign many died literally. The liberals support what the radicals and activists are doing with contributions and subscriptions to some of the many radical-activist journals and even in some cases with participation in socially sanctioned marches where no trouble is expected. They also participate in the pleasures of Socratic debate and the writing of columns like this one. They have the same ideology as the radical-activists including the accepting of violence as a viable tool. Liberals are also deeply involved in the political party system supporting McCarthy and Kennedy.

The Moderates are usually activists who haven't decided to be activists. They have bumped up against the reality of America in the twentieth century. A reality of rats, poverty, violence, hatred, divisiveness and death. They recognize the need for social change yet hate to leave career plans askew while off fighting the revolution. The reason I include them in a discussion of the New Left is that often show up in minor-league insurrections especially after some traumatic national tragedy like the death of Martin Luther King or Bobby Kennedy. They also, like the liberals, were forced to get into the fight at Columbia when the police with tin-foil over their badges started clubbing faculty and student dissidents. They knew something was happening there that was wrong and decided to get involved without the support of principles or long range goals.

Misinterpretation

The reasoning behind this rather long polemic on the composition of the so-called New Left is that many people are misinterpreting the size, experience and effectiveness of new young leftists. The New Left is not an organization, it is disorganization. The Students for a Democratic Society claim only 12,000 members in 200 chapters and are far and away the largest organizational expression on the Left. Most of the organization of the New Left is in small but numerous ad hoc committees on this or that, and a few strongly-titled but thinly-populated groups like Allies of Black Liberation or Radicals for a Revolutionary University of Nebraska.

On the other hand the typologies of the New Left are having to account for more and more experienced radicals and activists. Effectiveness is on the increase too. A small but dedicated group like ABL or a single SDS chapter has done much with disciplined practical insurrections.

Again though not many, the New Leftists are noisy. The Underground Press Association boasts a membership of 60 offset tabloids most of which appear regularly each month and are printed professionally. There are three or four nationwide radical-activist journals. Ramparts, Evergreen, Guardian, and New Left Notes (an SDS organ). A few Old Left journals also carry New Left writers: Dissent, The Minority of One, The New Republic.

This has been an effort to define the New Left, not defend it or damn it. Nebraska is definitely within the context of New Left thought. Carl George Davidson attended the graduate school here and is perhaps currently the most quoted spokesman for the SDS and New Left radicals (remember the typology). Lincoln has an underground paper, The Rag, currently very underground. Omaha boasts two underground alternative papers, The Buffalo Chip and The Asterik. Allies of Black Liberation in Lincoln plan to open what looks to be a sophisticated and effective Freedom School in the Fall. The Nebraska Draft Resistance Union is still alive and will have a Chicago trained counselor in September.

Next Week: What the Old Left Is Up To.



'We Interrupt This Movie For An Unpaid Political Message'

Anti-war demonstrators need not picket "The Green Berets" — their feelings are generally well-known and would only add hostility.

BUT... Every mother, father, wife or sweetheart who has someone in Vietnam should gather up signs and head for the Varsity Theatre with indignation.

If this is supposed to be THE movie which is to bring America to its senses, which would mould support in the current war-effort to stop Communist domination of the world, well, it deserves to be protested.

I left the movie after a scene in which a restroom (at some special forces training camp stateside) is named "Provost's Privy," honoring one of the film's heroes killed during the climactic battle scene. Provost had noticed upon arriving at Da Nang that the air fields, commissaries, etc., were named in honor of war dead. He was worried throughout the movie that his name would not sound right in front of some type of building. On his deathbed, nestled in the arms of his leader John Wayne, he whispers a final request and dies with a smirk on his face.

Wayne unveils the nameplate and says "it really sings," in familiar johnwayneese, meaning of course, that "Provost's Privy" is euphonious. It, like the movie, is malodorous.

That little episode came 146 minutes after the indoctrination period on "why we're there." Aldo Ray and a black Green Beret (there are all of three black soldiers in the company dramatized, a gross misrepresentation in itself) explain to scores of interested Americans touring the training camp just what a Green Beret is. "I'm just a little 'ol housewife" one woman says while she jumps to her feet, "so please tell me what it's like."

Well, it isn't easy for the soldiers. There happens to be a dovish newspaperman in the foreground, who keeps saying "there are a lot of Americans who don't think we should be there." Mouldou (Ray) replies "you could fill volumes of what isn't printed in the newspapers" about this war. So Beckworth the journalist joins the group heading for duty to see it like it is. Predictably, he leaves Vietnam to tell Americans "what it's really like" even though he may lose his position with the anti-war newspaper for which he worked.

Well, the war Beckworth faces is the standard model that Hollywood has dishied out since the Japanese introduced the kama-kazi. There is the plifering sergeant (straight out of "The Great Escape") which can manage to get anything from any branch of the service.

Then there is the cute little waif who buries his dog during the height of the V.C. siege.

And the commander who gets killed the night before leaving for home.

And the rough-and-tough career man with a wit straight out of Man's Adventure and a heart of gold.

But a new character has been added for dramatic effect: the Vietnamese soldier from Hanoi who will "return home after every one of those stinking V.C. are killed."

Then there's "charlie" — he's the bad guy. There must not have been enough orientals stockpiled in California for the extras needed for the battle scenes . . . charlie is seldom seen with a face and

often he looks like a greased up caucasian. (Not unlike the cowboy-and-Indian movies of a decade ago.)

After charlie takes over the camp and raises the V.C. flag, two U.S. bomber pilots radio in that they are in position to take care of the matter. Wayne orders them in on the target: "It'll only take a minute," one of the pilots says, with an impish grin on his face. And there ensues one of the more vicious blood-baths in the history of screen violence.

The most disturbing part of this sequence is the peals of laughter that arose from the youth-dominated audience when the V.C. are shown standing with their backs to the camera, bullets riddling through their bodies. Of course, there had been many horrible and disgusting atrocities of the V.C. But, in the movie, we just see the after-effects of their bloodletting, not the splendor of clothing giving way to lead, bodies hanging on barbed-wire after being napalmed.

Just a healthy way for Americans to leave the living room, tired of "Garrison's Guerillas," to enjoy a harmless night of entertainment.

—Larry Eckholt

It's Not Broadway, But . . .

By Kenneth Fellow
NU Department of English

For theatre-lovers, this is the most exciting summer on the campus ever — University Theatre is presenting three full-scale dramatic productions, plus an opera. Two of the three "plays of protest" — all contemporary — opened their repertory runs during the past week. The two are Eh? by Henry Livings (originally produced in London in 1964), and The Hostage by Brendan Behan (1958).

Eh?, the lesser-known of the two, opened the summer season here, under the direction of William Morgan. In several ways, this is a very Shavian play, especially in the delineations of some of the characters: the English clergyman, for instance, and the scheming "boss" of the bleach-and-dye factory in which the play is set. But Livings employs much more of a farcical touch than Shaw would be apt to, though his range of satiric subject-matter is just as great. Given plenty of ironic treatment in this play (as Fielding's Mrs. Slipslop says "treated with ironing") are: Western industrialism, Mods and moderns, establishment religion, welfare-minded governments, unwellfare-minded governments, industrial psychology, and transcendental meditators. Mainly, however, the jibes are aimed at all things and persons that contribute to the "impersonality" of mid-twentieth-century life.

For the most part, though, Eh? is just frantic fun. It is not in the least didactic; indeed, it is frequently "pointless" — that is, has no particular axe to grind. About all it "proves" is a point that perhaps doesn't really need proving: that humor is its own raison d'etre.

The outstanding features of Morgan's production are timing and tempo; paradoxically, these constitute both strength and weakness. The line-to-line timing and the matching of lines to blocking and action are excellent. However, in attempting to maintain the rapid-fire comic tempo, the actors sometimes run away from their dialects — words that would, at best, be difficult to understand become almost impossible to catch. Yet, this play can survive even without some of its lines, so perhaps slowing the attack for the sake of enunciation would not be a worthwhile alteration. In any case, the problems with dialect constitute the production's only major shortcoming.

One of the joys of attending Eh? is in seeing the return to Howell Theatre of Frank Vybral, whose comic abilities are outstanding. As Aly, the Pakistani coal-shoveller, Vybral's "Oh, joy!" line, late in the show, is a near show-stopper. Equally entertaining, in a much larger role, is Bill Lacey, as Price, the factory owner. Dana Mills, who had already shown considerable ability in a serious role (his Gloucester in King Lear was one of this year's best University Theatre performances), demonstrates a flair for comedy also, as the Reverend Mort, a latter-day proponent of "muscular Christianity" (among other things).

The show's two female roles are also well taken care of. Roni Meyer is excellent as the kooky young Betty (a well-developed, sweet-young-thing type), the sweetheart — and later the wife — of the main character, Valentine Brose. Roni's pantomiming, in the scene in which she and Brose engage in a session of "sex-think," is especially fine. In addition, she maintains the character of the wide-eyed, unworried bumpkin very consistently.

Although Cheryl Hansen is perhaps one of the best young actresses to show up on this campus in several years, comedy, it seems, is not her forte. As Mrs. Murray, the factory's resident social-scientist, Cheryl is in perfect command of her character in the calm, controlled scenes; she is perfectly successful in suggesting the element of strong, latent sexuality of Mrs. Murray. Cheryl's outstanding single talent is her voice, which would do credit to a professional performer of much greater age; but in her "flustered" scenes, when the well-

modulated voice is not usable, she does not move comfortably enough, or confidently enough, to offset the loss her greatest strength. There is every indication that she will learn more about stage presence, however. Certainly she is in the kind of company that aids learning.

Despite the strength of the supporting roles, this show belongs to the lead, Bill Szymanski. Bill, who seems to get better with each new role, "owns" the stage whenever he is on, not only because of his garish Mod get-up, but because his physical mannerisms — stances, movements, body positions — command attention even before he has said anything. Nor do his comic talents end there: he has a complete mastery of gag delivery. His sense of burlesque is magnificent! And this play — in all its "non-preachy" satiric fun — is an excellent vehicle for actors with such sensitiveness for the comic.

Since Eh? makes practically no "point" at all, it's difficult to imagine a play with less "meaning". Yet, this is what Brendan Behan has left us, in The Hostage. If it's hard to take Livings seriously (woodjoooblew the pun was unintentional?), it is almost impossible, at times, not to take Behan seriously. After all, people die in Behan's plays. And if the "causes" for which they are willing to be killed are ridiculous ones, the threat of death is none the less imminent. But wait! Just as we begin to sense the seriousness of this play, who is that we see leering at us from the wings? That's right, it's "laughing boy" Behan (were he still alive and were this New York, he would probably literally be up there), reminding us that this is, after all, a play. It is not serious; it is not meaningful. Come to think upon it, says the playwright, neither is life! Consequently, even the seriousness of death (which, of course, might make life "meaningful") is undermined by "Brendan the leering leprechaun."

As Eh? is primarily Szymanski's show, The Hostage appears to belong to Denis Calandra in the title role. The show is considerably stronger in the second and third acts, partly because the first is given over to exposition (a complete anti-traditionalist Behan ain't!), partly because the latter two have brighter songs and livelier dances, but mostly because Denny "takes charge" and sparks the entire company. He manages to make the young English Private, Leslie Williams, a warm, lovable buffoon who is — in spite of his buffoonery — the most sane character in the play.

Calandra gets great support, mainly from his wife. (Question: if she steals a scene from him, can he sue for non-support?) Mrs. C., the former Jean MacLaren, is marvelously zany (though perhaps a bit too drunk in the drunken scene) as Mrs. Gilchrist, the "sociable worker." Both Szymanski and Lacey repeat the quality of their comic roles in Eh?, Lacey as a dedicated officer of the I.R.A., and Szymanski as a dedicated F-A-I-R-Y. Andy Backer and David Clark draw upon experience to give dependably strong performances; Backer's rendition of "The Captains and the Kings" (sung by the ancient I.R.A. zealot who momentarily forgets that he's not really English?) fully lives up to the judgment made of it by another character: "Well, that's brought the show to a standstill."

Barbara Bowman is a properly naive Teresa, in addition to singing well and dancing excellently. And one more show-stopper is supplied by Steve Baines, an I.R.A. volunteer assigned to guard the hostage. His "Spanish dance" sequence with the equally staid-looking Mrs. Gilchrist is an evening's entertainment in itself! In fact, perhaps the quality of this production is best indicated by the casting of such capable vets as Gaines and Clint Jakeman in minor roles.

There are the usual technical problems in The Hostage which Howell Theatre gives any large-cast show with songs and dances. The acoustical-engineering marvel of the nineteenth century swallows up some of the songs before they get anywhere near the audience.

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