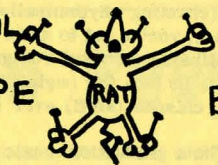


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Reserve Liberal Training Corps (a play) and Suggestions for Building a Guerrilla Theatre Group

by **RADICAL
ARTS
TROUPE**  of Berkeley
sds

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Dramatis Personae

four liberals: professor, chancellor, hippie, student
commanding liberal
ROTC leader, and bomber
Vietnamese
radical
Ron Yank (Berkeley sds prof fired for supporting TWLF strike winter quarter)
Arthur Jensen (tenured Berkeley prof who proved 'scientifically' that blacks are inferior to whites)
students

Scene One: AT THE TRAINING CENTER

commanding liberal: Forward march! (leads the four trainees in march to gain attention and gather an audience) Company halt! (trainees halt) Right face! (to audience) The Radical Arts Troupe of Berkeley sds presents--

first liberal: R!

second liberal: L!

third liberal: T!

fourth liberal: C!

commanding liberal (pacing): The Reserve Liberal Training Corps. (to first liberal in super-military tones) Are you a liberal?

first liberal: Love me, I'm a liberal (military yell).

commanding liberal: Do you feel like a liberal?

first liberal: Love me, I'm a liberal.

commanding liberal: You have chosen to serve your country, free speech, motherhood, checks and balances, in short, truth, justice, and the American Way!! Your RLTC training has been rough, but after all, becoming a skilled liberal is not easy. Today is your final exam. The first test takes us to the strife-torn rice paddies of Vietnam.

ROTC: (acts like a bomber, arms spread, making plane noises. Zooms around a sitting Vietnamese

and bombs him. Vietnamese falls back as if shot. Scene freezes.)

commanding liberal: And what is the correct liberal response?

second liberal: Good. This is an excellent example of brute force met with moral fortitude. (all liberals nod approvingly)

Vietnamese: Moral fortitude my ass! (shoots ROTC bomber, who sputters and crashes)

commanding liberal: The correct liberal response?

first liberal: We feel concerned.

second liberal: It's all so irrational.

third liberal: We cannot condone violence by any party.

fourth liberal: In fact, we deplore the violence of both sides.

commanding liberal: Both sides?

all liberals: (pointing to Vietnamese) Both sides!

commanding liberal: A plus! You have mastered the art of double deploring. Now we test your ability to use that one word every liberal must know. You start (to first liberal).

first liberal: Getting into Vietnam was certainly a mistake--- (liberals all flash cards at the audience, reading in sequence B-U-T-I)

all liberals: But!

second liberal: Getting out is no solution. (all liberals hide cards behind their backs)

third liberal: Minority groups are underrepresented on campus---

all liberals: (again flashing cards) But

fourth liberal: They're dumb... uh... unqualified.

commanding liberal: Ah yes, brilliant butology. And the last speaker brings us to the troublesome problem of the neg.. bla... rac... the colored difficulty. Listen to this extremist.

radical: Exploitation of Third World people is no slogan; it's a brutal fact. (points to chart with graphs) Third World high school graduates earn less than

white high school drop-outs.

third liberal: But this is all so one-sided, Let's see what the government and corporations are doing for these people. (enthusiastically turns back side of chart to audience; it is blank. He looks down, embarrassedly mumbling)

radical: What the government is doing for Third World people is sending them to fight and die on the front lines in Vietnam and terrorizing their communities with police and other minions of law and order.

fourth liberal: Four hundred years ago these people were savages, a hundred years ago they were slaves. Change takes time.

all liberals: (chanting rhythmically) Slow down, you move too fast, you've got to make the morning last.

commanding liberal: Groovy! You guys are outstanding liberals. In fact (he begins to cry) this is one of the best classes (sniff) ever to graduate from RLTC.

all liberals: (hum graduation music and march around in a circle until lined up facing the c.l. They wait to receive their diplomas)

commanding liberal: (to first liberal) You will serve your government as a faculty member. Here is your diploma (hands toilet paper to liberal), your tenure, and the keys to your home in the suburbs (hands keys)

first liberal: That sounds like a viable alternative (walks solemnly to the other side of the stage)

commanding liberal: (to second liberal) You will serve your country as a professional hippie. Here is your degree (hands toilet paper to liberal)...

second liberal: Man, these diplomas give me bad vibes. (throws paper away)

commanding liberal: ...and your utility belt (hands liberal a rope with a plastic bag tied to it. Bag contains grass -- literally)

second liberal: A new belt, far out. (walks to other side of stage)

commanding liberal: (wiping eyes with flag, in emotion) Son (to third liberal), a great responsibility weighs on your shoulders. You will be a student power advocate! Here is your diploma, and the latest copy of Time magazine. (hands third liberal toilet paper and a Time magazine)

third liberal: (walks to other side of stage with fingers in 'V' salute) Be sure to vote.

commanding liberal: And last but not least, you (turns to fourth liberal) will serve the system as a Chancellor. Here is your diploma, and book of university regulations. (commanding liberal hands toilet paper and a large book)

fourth liberal: (holding up paper) Has it gone through the proper channels? (sniffs toilet paper) Ah yes! (walks to other side of stage) (telephone rings)

commanding liberal: Hello, RLTC emergency service department. A riot, I see... Calling ROTC racist and imperialist, oh dear! We'll send our very best liberals immediately! (turns to liberals) We've got an assignment. We're going (hesitates; liberals listen expectantly) to Harvard!

liberals: Woe! Harvard! We're off to Harvard! (assemble in formation and ride off, as if horses, driven by the commanding liberal. Lone ranger music)

Scene Two: AT THE UNIVERSITY

(students stand on one side of the stage, while ROTC, c.l., and liberals stand on the other)

ROTC: By Schlesinger, we're saved. The liberals are here!

radical: The liberals will try to mislead our struggle against ROTC.

ROTC: We train 70% of the officers for the US Army.

radical: ROTC trains 70% of the officers for the US Army.

ROTC: We risk our lives to defend the American Way of Life all over the world.

radical: Half the ROTC graduates in Vietnam die protecting the economic interests of a few.

ROTC: We also handle riots at home.

radical: They also suppress black rebellions.

ROTC: Therefore, ROTC must stay!

radical: Therefore, ROTC must go! Smash ROTC!

students: Smash ROTC!

commanding liberal: (to student power liberal) Promise them anything, but save ROTC.

student power liberal: (rushes at students) Look, I agree we must purge our university of such evils as ROTC, but ROTC is just symptomatic of a larger ill. As Time Magazine says (he reads), 'Harvard is a large impersonal institution with a faceless administration. The answer is to restore democratic governance on the campuses.' What I'm talking about is student power. (takes out strings and gestures to student to come forward) If we fight hard enough, we can get this trustee here (the commanding liberal) to share some of his power with us. (ties student's hands with string and gives string to c.l.) For instance, a student-faculty senate to run the university. (now ties up legs and gives string to c.l.) And with power like this, you can do anything.

student: But what about ROTC?

student power liberal: Well, not quite anything. Here, have a federal grant (stuffing money in student's mouth)

student: (spits out money and breaks strings) Smash ROTC!

all students: (cheering) Smash ROTC!

second student: Go play in your sandbox!

commanding liberal: (to student power liberal) Go play in your sandbox, kid. They didn't go for you, but surely they'll respect the opinion of a faculty member.

liberal faculty member: (walks towards students, reads from student newspaper) 'ROTC is not only antithetical to the ultimate purposes of higher education, but contrary to basic pedagogical principles as well. Its course materials are blatantly propagandistic and cheaply moralistic.' So in order to re-assert the sanctity of academia, we propose a seven-year plan to gradually take credit away from ROTC.

radical: ROTC with credit (ROTC shoots machine gun at the audience; everyone makes the noise of a gun) ROTC without credit. (ROTC again shoots machine gun at the audience; again, everyone makes noise of a gun)

students: Smash ROTC, thoroughly, wholly, resolutely, and completely!

liberal faculty: But what about academic freedom?

radical: Academic freedom at work---

Jensen (see dram. per.): Hey boss, guess what I found? Third world people are dumb, and you're smart!

commanding liberal: You get tenure!

Yank (see dram. per.): Guess what I found out: You oppress Third World people, and we must unite against you!

commanding liberal: You're fired!

radical: Academic freedom is a fraud. Let's take university hall!

liberal faculty member: Oh, you poor idealistic, misguided youth. (wailing) Someday you'll understand what I'm trying to tell you. (exits)

commanding liberal: (wringing hands) This has been a bad, bad day for academia. (turns to liberal hippie) But certainly, our professional hippie can recapture their spirit! Blow their minds, baby!

liberal hippie: Look, man, this isn't where it's at. You talk about revolution, I can't relate to that. You gotta free your mind instead. It's gonna be alright.

ROTC: It's gonna be alright.

liberal hippie: Let's go groove in the park. (offers students a joint)

students: (reject joint) Getting stoned won't smash ROTC! (liberal hippie floats away)
 commanding liberal: What a bummer! (turns to Chancellor) You're our last chance, Chancellor.
 Chancellor: (scowls but suddenly bursts into enthusiastic smile) Hi gang! Come on in! (motions them toward him) I've been meaning to get down and meet each of you personally but I've been too caught up in this damned bureaucratic paper work. Gee, if only you had gone through the proper channels, this mess would have been cleared up long ago. But that's okay because I agree with much of what you say... After all, we're all revolutionaries nowadays! Now come on, let's stop this strike business and get the ball rolling.

all students: (chase him off stage) Smash ROTC! No expansion!
 Chancellor: (reels back but returns wearing pig mask and beats students) Police! Police! Oink! Oink! (all students fight back and chase C. away again. All liberals sneak into audience)
 student: Is this the end of the liberals?
 radical: No, we haven't seen the last of those fiends. (turns to audience) People, BEWARE, when last sighted, they were headed towards... Berkeley!

A plea for contributions is made at this point. Liberals are in audience whispering 'student power... free your mind... academic freedom... rules and regulations...' etc.

Build RAT and Serve the People

Start a guerrilla theater troupe! It's a good way to get the politics of SDS across in an entertaining, non-rhetorical fashion to masses of people. (Besides, it's fun.) Here are some suggestions gathered by RAT (Radical Arts Troupe) from experience at Princeton and Berkeley.

Politics

Politics is primary. This means that the political purposes of RAT are more important than the artistic; though the better the artistry, the clearer the politics will be to the audience. Our plays are designed primarily to spread SDS ideas and only secondarily to entertain. For instance, male chauvinist jokes must be excluded, no matter how funny they may appear to some (and no matter how popular they can be expected to be). RAT is not Hollywood, and politics is not a popularity contest.

In particular, we must fight the tendency towards opportunism -- 'we know that liberalism is just as bad as conservatism, but most students don't, so let's not mention it, and we won't alienate them.' If our ideas are correct, we should be able to convince large numbers of students. Theater provides us with a forum which appeals to everybody and allows us to present our politics in a principled way. For instance, the Berkeley RAT play 'RLTC' (Reserve Liberal Training Corps) was criticized at first by some members of the chapter as 'sectarian' and 'isolating'. Once it was performed, the audience understood and enjoyed it.

It is sectarian to attack an idea without explaining what's wrong with it. In the 'RLTC' play, for instance, an incorrect way of attacking student power would be:

Misleader: Hooray for student power!

Leader: Down with student power!

Masses: Yeah! Down with student power!

It is also sectarian to attack people who hold wrong ideas instead of attacking the ideas themselves. Example:

Some students: Let's have student power!

Leftists: Get lost, counter-revolutionaries!

Style: Less Talk, More Acting

Still another incorrect approach is to have lengthy dialogue. Experience shows that after about twenty seconds of speech without action, an audience will begin drifting away. Shun the 'reading from leaflets' and 'three speakers for, three speakers against' formats.

Illustrate your points. For example, Berkeley's Chancellor Heyns is a director of Hunt's Foods. A high school radical theater group exposed Hunt's racist exploitation of Chicano tomato-pickers with the following scene: one of them mimed tomato picking while Heyns was sucking his blood through plastic tubing, and spitting it in a Hunt's Catsup bottle. A third character poured the Catsup on a fourth character's hamburger. The fourth character: 'This isn't catsup, it's blood!' All actors were mechanical, like well-oiled machines. The scene was repeated several times, and was really powerful.

Keep it simple: Avoid cluttered, complicated stories requiring subtle acting and elaborate props. It will only detract from the value of the play. Eliminate all superfluous lines and gestures. Instead, rely on good politics, simple jokes, and sight gags.

Stock characters will emerge after a few plays -- the fat, avaricious businessman, his various lackeys,



deans, profs, pigs, etc., and on the other side the people and some leftists. An effort should be made to identify those characters with some symbolic costume (Uncle Sam hat, play money, pig mask). If this is impossible, it may be necessary to wear signs.

Use music and other noisemaking to add to your dramatic effects. Anything will do. Tambourines, bongos are easy to borrow. Kazoos are cheap. Voices can be used, too, and all sorts of simple instruments can be improvised (fill an empty coke can with pebbles and shake it, for example). Again, keep it simple. Background music can create an atmosphere (e.g. military fanfare) and smooth over transitions from one scene to the next. Finally, a good song is always appreciated by the audience.

Useful gimmicks:

- plots based on a parody of well-known stories and plays. We've used Hamlet, Little Red Riding Hood.
- commercials. (e.g. the play is interrupted for a word from the sponsors: 'Be the first kid on your block to kill a communist with the new Mattel toy gun. War may be hell, but with Mattel, it's swell!')
- flashbacks, instant replays, plays within the play.
- court scenes in which the enemies of the people are tried (and convicted!) of their crimes.
- the 'machine' view of the world: having a few people do some interrelated actions in a mechanical fashion, as though they were cogs in a machine -- often a highly effective way of describing the working of society or of an institution. (e.g. students standing in line, turning pages and nodding, while a dean or professor keeps up the cadence by screaming rhythmically 'Read! Read! Learn! Learn! Learn!')

Putting the Play Together

Casting: Our plays have had 6 to 12 'actors'. The fewer actors, the more flexibility and mobility you have. Avoid type-casting. Fight racism and male chauvinism by not casting according to sex or race. Casting should be decided upon primarily in terms of building the troupe and the play. That is, new people should take key parts to develop aggressiveness and responsibility; a girl struggling against male chauvinism should take the part of a left-wing leader. Avoid building up stars -- RAT is a collective of radicals struggling together, not a road to fame or an ego trip.

This does not mean that available talent should not be used. There is always someone around who is particularly able to make good jokes or puns. There is always someone who has had some experience in bourgeois theater, or someone who can play some musical instrument. But beware of the tendency to rely on the 'specialist'. 'Ordinary' people will display greater creativity.

Collective creation: Avoid having one person write, direct, and star in the plays. The whole troupe should collectively discuss the politics of the play. This serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it will provide for political struggle with new recruits; quite a few people become committed SDSers through RAT. On the other hand, a clear understanding of the politics helps enormously in figuring out scenes.

Combine spontaneity and discipline. Usually most ideas and jokes in a play originate by ad-libbing during the first meeting (or outside the meetings). An occasional ad-lib during a performance will keep everyone's spirits high and improve the acting. Good

performances are only possible with a spirited, enthusiastic troupe but avoid chaos during rehearsals. One experienced member of RAT (not necessarily always the same one) should direct each rehearsal. It is often helpful to write out the script, but it is essential always to have at least a clear outline in mind. Be flexible in removing from and adding to the play.

Fight defeatism. RAT is hard work, and the play won't write and perform itself. Experience shows that the first production of a troupe is the toughest -- so don't get discouraged, especially by rehearsals that seem to fall flat. Remember that your performance will almost invariably be better than the rehearsals.

The Performance

Start with a bang to attract an audience. In one play in which we tried the Chancellor for his crimes, we started with the whole troupe chasing him around Sproul Plaza, screaming and yelling.

Experience shows that a run-through before each performance is important for ensuring RAT's success.

The play itself can last any length of time (ours usually last 7 to 15 minutes). The only limitations are imposed by the time you want to spend working on it. Bigger chapters can afford longer plays and a greater variety of productions than smaller ones.

You can perform anywhere, anytime -- during classbreak, at demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins, take-overs, etc. -- whenever and wherever a lot of people will gather to watch. Performing before a seated audience is more difficult than performing before passers-by because a seated audience will expect a higher degree of technical proficiency.

Different audiences will react differently to the same scene. For example, in one play, striking students drown a scab. When we performed this on the Berkeley campus, the response was rather weak. But when we performed it for striking oil workers at a union meeting, we got an enthusiastic reception. After many performances, a few people will come to congratulate you -- try to recruit them! And ask the audience for donations.

In performance, always remember the purpose of RAT -- to communicate the politics to the audience -- and that this purpose must outweigh our fears of performing before the public. Try always to reach out to the people!

Toward People's Art

The basic difference between guerrilla theater and 'regular' theater is a class difference. Specifically, guerrilla theater seeks to serve the people. It draws its inspiration from the struggles of oppressed peoples, not from the visions of an alienated poet. Our plays come from 'ordinary' people with political consciousness, not from 'gifted' actors and directors who are in a hurry to get away from the people.

A director in RAT is responsive and responsible to the troupe and the public. A director in bourgeois theater is often a despot. A guerrilla theater actor is in it to build SDS and the left in this country; an actor in bourgeois theater is on an ego trip. Our plays are intended to reach hundreds and thousands of people, most of whom never 'go to the theater'.

People's art has an enormous potential for growth in this country. If we build our commitment to serve the people, it will reach rarely attained heights. New Left Notes can be a good vehicle for discussion of these ideas. Chapters and individuals should send in articles about their experiences in radical art, along with scripts, posters, poems, etc.

