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# GETTING BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

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## GETTING BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

by Barbara Haber and Al Haber

**T**he Radicals in the Professions Conference was a response to an essentially personal crisis that is widespread among people in the movement: the crisis of remaining radical beyond the college or graduate school years, or beyond the two year initiation period into the movement.

This is not to say that the crisis is politically insignificant. The New Left has mobilized a large number of people over the past five years. But the work of building a radical movement that can be successful is far from done. It cannot be done only by students serving two year hitches, or by a hundred or so "thirty year men" struggling on in organizational bureaucracies or urban ghettos.

The personal crisis and the needs of the movement intersect. The movement is the focus of moral reference for post-college radicals, and must therefore be a part of their personal "salvation." And the movement has a large number of unspecified tasks to do over the next decade. So far it has not been able to use its available pool of people to do those tasks. The result has been an undereffective politics and a growing number of movement people in private crisis: moving into establishment positions and cynicism; trying to

do isolated and peripheral acts of radicalism inside or outside of professions; or clinging to the ghetto with a diminishing sense of political meaningfulness.

But while it is clear that the problems of the movement and the crisis of the individuals are connected, it is not yet clear whether a solution can be found that encompasses both. The Radicals in the Professions Conference was the first collective attempt to seek such a solution.

The official focus of the conference was of course political. Partly this focus is a ritual of legitimization. Partly it indicates a recognition that the personal hangups cannot be solved in non-political terms. Partly, but only partly, it reflects the honest priority of the participants in the conference. Yet, if the conference is measured in terms of political accomplishment — new analysis, new strategy, new organization, new program — then its success must be judged as minimal. Most of the participants, however, seemed to think the conference was a good, even an excellent one. What the conference did was to expose the common need of the participants, to change it from a private half-admitted thing to a shared articulated experience. Its most important accomplishments were that it created an embryonic sense of comradeship, established a minimal form of ongoing communication, raised the level of commitment, and reduced the sense of isolation.

The people who came to the conference were of many kinds and many histories: radicals who work in professions or plan to; non-professionals who are no longer sure what to do outside of mainstream institutions; people whose career choice was made on non-political grounds and whose growing political concerns create a schism between work and self; people who chose professions because they thought they could be politically effective within them and are now at various stages of struggle or disillusionment. There were doctors, lawyers, social workers, teachers, planners, clergymen, journalists, intellectuals and movement organizers. Most of them were in their late twenties or early thirties: trained but not yet established.

But regardless of background, most of the participants expressed a common set of questions and mood of frustration: "It's hard to be radical for long — nothing happens. How shall we live? Where is the revolution? How do we measure and aid its coming?" They were people who had by themselves or in groups, been seeking, answers for a long time, but had not found any; people who felt to some degree that they were failing and who were anxious not to fail; people young enough to change but perhaps too rooted or uncertain to change by themselves. There was a deeply felt need to be politically effective. And among the bona fide professionals, at least, there was a great deal of guilt: for having "opted in"; for wearing a suit; for having given up some of the badges of opposi-

tion; for making a living; for having had too little success as radicals-within-professions.

The sense of crisis that people brought to the conference comes out of real conditions of their lives. On the one hand, many of us can no longer tolerate psychologically the demands of orthodox jobs or the training they require. Radical consciousness has produced a painful awareness of the personal emptiness and social evil of most traditional career patterns—even those not directly involved in making and administering policy for government, the military and industry. The movement has created a generation of people who expect their work to be what most jobs in our society are not: radically relevant; personally challenging and expressive; free from bureaucratic control; open to spontaneous innovation.

On the other hand, once we recognize the unviability of an orthodox career line, we are left in the cold. The alternatives which have been created by the movement, and by radical generations before us are too narrow, too limited and too unsuccessful. There are three action alternatives open: we can take establishment jobs and seek other outlets for our human and political needs; we can "drop out" and work for the movement; or we can try to transform our professional roles from ones supportive of the status quo to ones that use their location to undermine it.

The first alternative, to take a non-political job and become avocational radicals, we have learned is a dead end. Politics cannot be sustained if they are not expressed in what we spend most of our time on. We cannot be radicals on weekends and evenings if all day, five days a week, we function as hacks or cynics or apologists. Either we will be constantly at war with our jobs or constantly at war with ourselves. Which means that either we get fired or our politics change and we learn to "fit in".

But the second alternative is even more problematic. **Working directly for the movement** has great psychological attractiveness: it is uncompromising; seen as legitimate by those whose opinions we most value; provides a maximum of camaraderie; is encumbered by a minimum of formality and financial potentiality. But it has not worked. For most of the people that the movement has reached and changed the movement has created too limited a range of jobs, using too limited a range of skills; and providing too limited a range of personal satisfaction and financial support. If we work for the movement — as now defined — we can be organizers, usually in an urban ghetto or low wage job setting; we can work in an organizational office; or we can be "principled amateurs" or freelance intellectuals and charismatic leaders. Only a tiny fraction of those who have been active in the New Left are able to remain in these roles for more than a few years.

Organizing simply burns people out. Working in ghettos

requires a dogged perseverance and a faith in its political effectiveness that few people have able to sustain. It also requires skills and preferences that few of us have or seem to be able to get on-the-job, while it does not use many of the skills and preferences that we do have. People working for the movement in ghettos shove the discontents and questions under the rug for as long as possible, then crack and leave.

Office work, on the other hand, is menial and boring. It is the movement work that most resembles the stereotype of the bureaucratic box, with is after all what most of us are rebelling against. For a time comradeship and power compensate, but when friends disperse and power is lost then bureaucrats depart.

The third movement role is perhaps the most satisfying — at least for some. It comes closest to the personal ideal that many of us share with artists and hippies: it is autonomous, yet responsive to a group of comrades; it is self-defined and therefore matches personal inclination as perfectly as any job ever can; it can change as sense of political need or personal preference change; it allows peripheral participation in office and organizing work which means that it avoids identification with middle classness. It provides a kind of financial and status gain that are most rewarding to movement people, and at the same time most morally acceptable: income remains low, life style bohemian, but there is paid travel; royalties from books and articles; opportunities to teach and to speak; entry into the rooms of the powerful of the left and right. Most people in the movement would probably choose this over all lives. But most have come slowly and painfully to realize that they do not have the qualities to make a go of it. "Principled amateurism is the luxury of the brilliant," one conference participant put it. The principled amateur life in the movement, as the life of the artist, is a viable possibility only for those with extraordinary talent, intelligence, self confidence, sense of opportunity, autonomy, and self-mythologizing ability. In addition, it is open only to those who are able to get personal satisfaction from leadership, writing, being a public representative, and travelling.

The combined effect of these three role possibilities within the movement is to create a model of the radical life that most radicals cannot emulate. People at the conference were in essentially that position. They had been part of the movements often as avocational radicals while pursuing student or post graduate work, and now when long term vocation has become an issue they could not fit in. They were struggling with the third "career alternative": to enter some kind of professional role, something that they could feel would be personally viable, and to seek to transform that work and relate it to the movement, make it into a political vocation.

The struggle is complicated by the fact that people who cannot find a role within movement possibilities often feel worthless, bitter,

defensive; and those who do function in movement roles often have a self-righteous arrogance toward other radicals.

The point that must be insisted upon, and which often has not been, is that people caught in the bind between the limited jobs of the movement and orthodox careers are often as dedicated and as "radical" as those who are more successful at "making it" within the movement.

As discussion progressed, two major barriers to the solution of this vocational bind became evident. The first was the problem of language, of the moral connotation of words which has developed on the left. We lack a vocabulary in which to define our problems and our position in the movement. The vocabulary we have is too narrow, seems continually to put us outside the movement, to force a division and antagonism between our political commitments and our personal needs. The second problem was one of analysis and strategy. It is simply not clear what to do, what constitutes radical politics over the long run, what is relevant. Movement political thinking is too abstract or underdeveloped as a guide for action and life choice, and our own thinking is still too personal and pragmatic to produce a more adequate view of strategy within which we can direct our work.

## II

### THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

The movement is the source of our moral and political vocabulary. But the experience of the movement — the post 1960, mostly student, mostly white, New Left — has been too limited to provide us with an adequate vocabulary: The struggle out of the middle class and into political opposition has been defined and circumscribed through programmatic focus on issues of poverty, material deprivation, and by identification with "third world" guerrilla revolutionaries, in the hills or the ghetto.

The white movement has been a student movement of people with few personal, private responsibilities, no families, no children; people for whom subsistence living constitutes no lasting sacrifice; people who have no expertise outside of the movement role situation, but who would be able to attain it easily at any time in the future; people whose participation in politics has been mobile and episodic; people who are very young. The language created by this movement has been the language of political conversion and of young people breaking loose from society.

The people at the conference represented the first generation of New Radicals faced with the problem of creating a language that will define terms in which to grow older and persevere without returning to the slots that have been reserved for us. The current language of the movement keeps us from solutions because it limits the terms of issues, deals with situations not like our own, often sets up false definitions, associations, cleavages.

1. In movement vernacular, "middle class" is a broadly inclusive epithet. It defines everybody who earns more than subsistence and works within "the system". Professionals are automatically termed middle class. Social location and income are assumed to determine absolutely a life style that is careerist, acquisitive, status climbing, and consumption oriented. And it is assumed to determine a political style that is reformist, compromised, liberal. This vocabulary prejudices the efforts of radicals working in professions to create new definitions of life style, professional goals and values within social locations traditionally identified as middle class; who are trying to demonstrate that radical work can go on in professions and that an ongoing functional participation in a radical movement can be maintained by people working in established institutions.

The experiment may prove that being a professional makes no sense for a radical, but is an important experiment and should not be precluded or impeded by a biased vocabulary.

2. The movement has created a definition of "ideal political man" which serves the binding function of myth in the radical community. For "political man" choices are based on a calculation of political utility — he puts himself where he is needed; he gets his rewards only from the movement; he is pure of all material and personal needs that cannot be met by the movement. While nobody would take this ideal-type literally, it plays a crucial role in defining the expectations, obligations, commitments, terms of comradeship that make political activity existentially meaningful.

The problem with the current notion of ideal political man is that although it seems to work as a means of unifying personal rebellion and political opposition for young people just entering the movement, it creates dysfunction among the older people in the movement. After the initial conversion period the myth ceases to correspond to the experience of people. As personal limitation, inclination, passion, and talent reassert themselves, and as the practical problems of living on thirty dollars week intensify, radicals find that they are forced to explain natural behavior and worries as though they were exceptions, departures, aberrations.

The movement has no language to give legitimacy to the problems of people preparing realistically for the long haul. The myth of the ideal political man places growing numbers of radicals outside of the movement and hence outside of the political community. It creates radical "push outs" just as the school system does. People who are unable to approximate the ideal type see themselves, and are seen, as backing down from an earlier commitment; becoming less radical less a part of "the movement."

3. The movement definition of "political work" is narrow. **Political work is work that fulfills a strategic purpose.** Yet the definition of "strategic" is a crude one. The movement does not have a broad systematic view of tasks necessary to a movement of radical change. In the absence of strategy work priorities tend to be justified either by a direct confrontation with a key part of the power structure, or by highly militant style expressive of opposition.

Nobody disputes the importance of direct political confrontation or symbolic opposition, though the substitution of style for strategy is problematic. But direct confrontation is not a sufficient basis of justifying radical work. The movement needs, and movement people are doing, many jobs whose value is not primarily that it produces direct confrontation: they are creating models of good practice; analysing the social reality; procuring information; providing service to the movement; reaching at various levels potential constituencies. Much of this work goes on outside of **organizations**. It is sometime contained within the practice of a profession itself, and often it involves a great deal of individual rather than collective effort.

The problem is that the language of the movement tends to denigrate such efforts; to see their practitioners as "second-class radicals". This implicit stratification undercuts the sense of comradeship which is the basic cohesive force of the movement.

4. The movement has a narrow purist view of "motivation", a view which equals the desire to work in a profession with the orthodox careerist motivation. There is no doubt that "professional careerism" is a weapon of the status quo to confuse and coopt opposition.

Middle class children are taught to value "success": wealth, security, status, order, propriety, and carefully selected forms of achievement. And they are taught to fear the opposite. Anxiety over success-concerns it a bulwark against radical consciousness and action. Most whites in the New Left were raised to hold these aspirations. It is valid that we be suspicious of our own motivations in pursuing professions.

But "middle class aspirations" are not the only reasons why people want to teach, practice medicine, do intellectual work, be artists. There are "good" reasons for wanting to develop a particular skill, or practice a particular craft. And even if the initial selection of a career and acquisition of skills was "contaminated" there is no reason to assume that motivation cannot be transformed and that skills once acquired cannot be put to important social use.

The response of the movement to the idea of profession, or craft, or specialized skill, is so often to regard it simply

as an opting for privatistic gain and fulfillment, and as an abandonment of radical commitment.

There is little recognition that decent motives toward professions exist and that the attempt by radicals in professions to invent and act out modes of practice that are infused with radical purpose is both valid and valuable.

The effect of this response is to inhibit communication with people practicing in a profession and to undermine the process of giving political definition to professional work.

5. The word "poverty" also creates a problem for radicals in professions. The experience of the movement is one of voluntary and involuntary poverty. Money is an important distinction between those in the movement and those who are greedy or have been bought. Radicals who earn more than subsistence share material identity with the ambitious and have sold out. And because they do not share the state of poverty they are outside the psychological community that the mystique about poverty has created in the movement. Poverty is thus a de facto prerequisite to full status in the radical community.

It has become difficult to talk about money in the movement. The mystique of poverty creates a defensiveness and withdrawal among those who are not poor and who are reluctant to be poor, and a self righteousness and suspicion among those who are poor. There is no easy solution to the very real problem of allocation of available resources. But it would be unfortunate if viable solutions were to be blocked because we are unable to demystify the political sanctity of poverty.

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The language problem creates a psychological oppression that makes it difficult to see our way through the vocational bind. There is no easy way to get rid of this obstruction to problem solving. Language is rooted in experience. Until our experience and the work we do becomes more central and relevant to the movement, language will remain a problem for us.

The psychological oppression that the movement has inadvertently created is not the central problem facing radicals. But it is the major obstruction to finding creative solutions to what is the central problem: namely how to function effectively as a radical over a long haul. "Self fulfillment" of individual radicals is not the goal the movement must strive for: finding ways to use people to create a movement of radical social change is. That will mean, inevitably, that as radicals we will often have to do things we are not good at, and do not enjoy. It means that we ourselves cannot be our final worry. The tension between self and community is inherent in our politics. We are part of a community of political purpose to which we have major obligations.

But it is fruitless to ask people to focus their lives on obligations that they cannot fulfill well, that do not give them self fulfillment. And it is a delusion to expect that abstract political discipline will substitute for existential satisfaction in the long run. Political strategy and the demands of the community upon the individual must be the guide toward individual choices. But the present stalemate of so many radicals demonstrates that one element in any strategy and any set of community demands has to be an acceptance of individual needs and idiosyncracies. When a political movement tries to objectify its members, to deal with only a part of them, or a mythical version of them, then the members become fragmented, cracked.

### III

#### THE PROBLEM OF STRATEGY

Beyond breaking down the irrational barriers to problem solving, what is most needed is an overall picture of how the political changes we seek might come about. We can give political meaning to personal choices only if we have a sense of the political context in which we are operating. Actions, however exciting, innovative, creative or expressive, are important politically only when they are carried out with a view to some broader strategic purpose, only when they are designed to lead to something, to make possible further acts. What the important acts are and what leads to what are questions of strategy.

By the second day of the conference, participants were beginning to shift from subjective concerns to these more political questions. How will the revolution happen, if it is to happen at all? Where is it important to be? What is it important to do? How do you choose among options? The difficulty in dealing with these questions is simply that the movement does not have a commonly understood and accepted strategy, and that people working in professions for radical change have done little strategic analysis of their work. Thus there were really no criteria in terms of which to talk concretely about political vocation in the professions.

The conference was not structured to deal with strategy, hence assumptions about strategy tended to remain implicit in suggestions for action projects, rather than to become the explicit basis of deciding on action projects.

In the conference discussion, underlying program proposals and occasionally stated explicitly there seemed to be three rough models of strategy that operated:

**Model One: The "New Working Class". Teachers, technicians, certain professionals are seen as having key roles in maintaining the economy. They are an exploited class, alienated from the end product of their labour, their skills prevent-**

ed. They are key because their skills give them the power to stop the economy, and because the objective conditions of their work create the precondition for subjective radical consciousness. They will form the basis of a revolutionary party (as the old working class was to do in the classical Marxist revolution).

Professionals should work within key professions to organize political unions making radical demands that cannot be met within the existing structure of society. The character of these demands — for control of the work situation — will coalesce these unions into a revolutionary party. The criteria for choosing key professions remain unclear: which professions actually do have essential, irreplaceable economic functions and which are irrelevant; are the only "essential" functions directly economic? But the role of the radical professional is clear: to organize an opposition union and raise demands that cannot be met without a massive political upheaval.

Model Two: Economic Crisis. The revolution will occur through an inevitable breakdown of the economy. Key agents of change will be the underclass and majority sections of the working class who suffer deprivation and exploitation or who are caught in the squeeze and are no longer able to maintain an on-going role in the collapsing system.

Political education is the central job of the radical. Either through rigorous ideological education, or a more open-ended process of learning-through-doing, the role of the radical is to organize self conscious political cadres by raising radical consciousness among those whom economic theory predicts will be the victims of the collapse of capitalism.

Intellectuals, professionals can have central vanguard roles, but only insofar as they locate themselves within the under- and working classes as organizers and educators. Otherwise they are fellow travellers having supportive roles: providing services, funds, protection, acting as buffers, neutralizing attacks on the movement. In these support roles, the tempo of need is set from the outside, by the core movement. The professional is to be in readiness when needed. His politics have no strategic importance in directing the main line of his professional work.

Both of these models assume that "the revolution" will be the product of some kind of "class struggle" led by a self conscious, unified political movement of total opposition. Their strategy is to organize in the key areas that intersect the key contradictions of the political economy, to exacerbate those contradictions until they lead to a general economic and social crisis in which a massive shift of psychological allegiance takes place from the old order to the

new. On the basis of this shift of allegiance, a revolution in political power will be achieved.

Both models focus theoretically on two problems :

1. Identifying the key areas for organization and the key agents of change: e.g. the black ghetto, the white underclass, the industrial working class, the new working class.
2. Identifying the key issues or contradictions to exacerbate: e.g. poverty, exploitation, imperialism, alienation.

Once a transfer of power is accomplished institutional transformations in all social locations will be brought into being through democratic decision. Reformist, experimental, communitarian, utopian efforts at institutional change, innovation prior to the revolution are bound to fail. At best their gains will be peripheral and more likely their struggles will lead to a narrowing definition of objectives, co-optation and abandonment of the central radical task of building political opposition.

Model Three: Pluralistic Revolution. This view stands in contrast to the class struggle models. It sees no present basis for class revolution: the adaptive, co-optive, ameliorative, manipulative, repressive powers of the system are too great. Nor does it see economic breakdown in the international capitalist system as inevitable or even likely. The revolutionary situation, if it does occur, will be created slowly, without a single decisive struggle and transfer of power: by mobilizing small enclaves of radicalism in a variety of social locations, by changing people's consciousness, by creating alternative ways of living, by extending people's definitions of the possible. This model is characterized by agnosticism about the precise criteria for choosing social location, the form the revolution may ultimately take, and the constituencies who could form the basis for a revolution.

Disaffection will be on issues of quality of life and work as well as economic deprivation and political disenfranchisement. Life-style issues even when accompanied by affluence, are seen to be legitimate concerns of a radical movement. The role of the radical is to create programs which lead people beyond their subjective experience of discontent toward a radical analysis of society and into struggles for root changes. Such struggles will not be successful until there is enough strength on the left to change the whole system at once. But the escalating confrontation with power around a variety of issues in variety of social locations is seen as the major tool for drawing isolated problems into radical focus, and for radicalizing new constituencies. Eventually a number of disparate segments of movement will have to

coalesce. But how and when that will happen is not foreseeable.

Within this view the range of jobs radicals is wide and partially undefined. Certain central tasks are accepted: direct organizing and office work for the movement. Beyond that is a large area of possibility in terms of what profession a radical should choose, and what strategy he should develop within that profession.

The problem is not to decide definitively among these three models or any other alternative. None of the models is sufficiently developed and rooted in the present empirical reality to provide an adequate or convincing basis on which to decide the priority of tasks or the relative importance of different professions and social locations.

The problem is how to make tentative choices, how to build a bridge between models, to allow diversity while doubt persists, to amass new experience and analysis that could make tighter theoretical formulations possible.

This requires a commitment to experiment: not meaning everyone-go-do-his-thing. An experiment is a controlled venture: with clarity about intended political purpose; based on stated assumptions; testing hypotheses; having explicit criteria of evaluation; arriving through experience at confirmation or disconfirmation of theory; making results public to comrades; seeking criticisms and help, eventually limiting the possibilities and building theory.

There is already too much unanalysed, unshared experience. Projects are carried out without evaluation. Work proceeds on impulse, vague formulations, romantically hopeful projections of the improbable. A non-cumulative, atheoretical, astrategic pragmatism is perpetuated. We are basing too much on hope that we will stumble into a revolution, that our intuition will be sufficient to show us the way to a decent world.

#### IV

#### A RADICAL IN A PROFESSION

The failures of the movement — to develop a convincing line of action and to be sensitive to human need — are real and do interfere with the solution to our problem. But they are not decisive failings. It is too easy and too common for individuals to use these failings as a dodge for their own unwillingness to confront, in a tough minded way, the consequences of their abstract political commitment. Radicals who are in professions are often unwilling to make any significant commitment to the movement or make any

concrete effort to change their lives to accord with their politics. Movement suspicion is not entirely unfounded: there are enough examples of former activists trading on a "left wing analysis" and cloaking fairly standard careers with the aura of movement idealism.

One of the important accomplishments of the conference was that people began to lay out the rudiments of an orientation for radicals working in professions: guidelines of how to function, how to see our work, how to define the meaning of political vocation in the professions. This orientation did not rest on preconceptions about strategy but was seen more simply as a kind of operational expression of what it means to be a radical.

The first principle of orientation for a radical who chooses to work in a profession is that he is different. He must reject and separate himself psychologically from the commonly held social definition of his work. He must substitute an agenda of his own: a set of short long run objectives that derive from a tentative view of strategy and that are pursued as political experiments.

This view has several implications:

1. The movement must be seen as a utility — which helps us define what we do and without which our work loses political relevance. This means we must pay our dues. The dues include financial support. And they include support both of action programs and of the "radical wing" in emerging social conflicts. Thus we have to anticipate the possibility of helping deserters, risking jail, supporting rebellions, and other highly illegitimate, non-professional things. If our personal aspirations or professional work precludes our doing things that are not safe or respectable, then we are kidding ourselves about our politics.

2. A radical cannot have an orientation toward professional "success". If we function as radicals high status and respect and rewards in the professional establishment are foreclosed. We must expect job instability, the likelihood of getting fired periodically, the danger of increasing difficulty in finding jobs.

3. A radical cannot see his loyalty as being to the profession, or institution in which he works. Our loyalty is to our political comrades and to the political aims for which we are organizing. Obviously this presents a moral difficulty because others will assume we have traditional loyalties; and we will, in fact, be playing a two faced game, knowing that we ill "betray" them when difficult issues arise. But then, that is what being a radical is about and the question is whether you betray your professional colleagues or your political comrades.

A corollary of political loyalty is that we can criticize movement policy and actions among "the brothers and the sisters", but not to outsiders. We are not intellectuals above

it all who say the truth to whomever will listen or asks: we are partisans who support the movement against the outside world, whatever our private criticisms might be.

4. Radicals cannot accept without reservation the code of ethics and responsibility of their professions. Ethics are not abstract ideals. They are sanctifications of certain types of social relations, purposes and loyalties. Conventional ethics entrap us into support of things which we do not support politically and into loyalties which conflict with our own values and politics. We must develop both a critique of established ethics and a counter code which squares with our values. This means, for example, that we should have no "ethical" scruples about providing "cover" to movement people; using politics as a criterion in giving recommendations, references, jobs; that we will make professional resources such as equipment, supplies, travel funds, expense accounts, available to movement people under the guise of professional expense; that we might not respect the confidential status of documents, meetings, privileged information if their contents would be valuable to the movement. Again, this presents moral problems, which require, at least, that we must be honest about our politics and values, so that people do not expect us to automatically conform to "accepted standards."

5. Radicals must break the link between expertise and authority. In our movement and our professional work we must break down the notion that "experts" and "specialists" are best equipped to make political decisions, a notion that is sponsored by the establishment and is anti-thetical to democratic participation. We must relinquish that private view of ourselves as "superior" to our comrades and constituencies which leads us to act as though we have much to teach and nothing to learn.

6. There is no such thing as an isolated or secret radical. Action is strategic only if it is part of a broader design, only if it is planned in concert with others with whom we are politically interdependent, only if it contributes to what others are trying to do. We must participate in groups that make strategy decisions. We must strive to develop our own work in a way which supports others. We must maintain relationships with the movement outside of our profession.

7. Radicals in the professions must avoid provincialism. Intraprofessional issues are generally important only as they lead to consciousness or action on issues of national policy, power and institutional change. Without that perspective, the organizer is more likely to be professionalized than the profession organized. Even more centrally, we must keep in focus that the primary struggle for radical change of this point involves blacks and poor whites and students. Our

work may not always parallel these movements, but it must not conflict with them and we must stay close enough to those movements so that local and national coalition can eventually be forged.

These "rules of orientation" are beginning formulations. Some of them are certainly problematic and require refinement. But the basic point is: which side are we on? If we fail to define and make explicit our opposition orientation, we will fall easily into accepting establishment ethics, norms of practice, and procedures of change — all of which function to support the status quo we are trying to destroy.

## V

### AREAS OF STRATEGIC EMPHASIS

Given a general radical orientation, the problem remains of how radicals can actually work in professions in the absence of a widely shared conviction about strategy. In general people at the conference talked about four kinds of strategic emphases which work in the professions could serve.

1. to organize political struggle against the power structure of the profession or institution in which we work.
2. to try to transform the way in which the profession is practiced and the content that it contains.
3. to fight the social control functions of the profession or institution.
4. to recruit more people into the movement.

What the confrères were not able to do was to analyse the conditions, if any, under which each of these make sense, what the limits of their value are, and the dangers they pose. The answers to these questions await further experiment and debate on overall strategy. One of the jobs of radicals in professions is to help develop such analysis based on their own experiences.

But the value of outlining various kinds of tasks is that it suggests that a strategic view of work may include a wider variety of functions than is now usually accepted within the movement.

1. Organizing political struggle is the most widely recognized function of radicals in professions. This means setting up independent political unions or organizing causes within professional groups to develop and fight for a set of radical demands within the profession or institution: control of work situation; shift in political role; change in standards of membership and recruitment, etc.

2. Transforming the practice and content of the profession is one of the most problematic functions of radicals. It often involves creating "counter institutions" to serve as models or creating a small space within the system in which

to practice more or less, as we wish. The political value of such work tends to be underrated in the movement. This is because so often counter institutions become a substitute for direct challenge. But they have also the possibility of aiding direct challenge. The creating and acting out of models is an important way of re-forming sensibility and creating the consciousness that confrontation is necessary.

There are people in the movement who are gifted at creating such models. Their skills should not be rejected. The failure to make use of the imaginative aspect of political consciousness has often split radical movements into two parts: one narrowly political, the other irrelevantly utopian. A task that the New Left faces is to create a strategy that can keep the two parts together so that image retains political meaning and politics retains human imagination.

3. Fighting the social control function of the profession is one of the goals of a radical union. But it may also be a function for small groups in underorganized professions to play, at least in the short range. Radicals in professions may see their job organizing groups to block the effectiveness of "cooling out operations", such as riot control; practicing in a way that directly defies authority and professional standards, such as refusing to grade.

Such acts, if militant enough, carry a high penalty of job loss. They also may interfere with long range organizing efforts. But, then again, they may serve as models of behavior that spark organizing. Here the special value of professionals acting to "stop the machine" is that they usually don't, and hence may break into the circle of safety of middle class America. In planning activities the movement should consider making concrete demands of such interference on groups of professionals. Mean while one of the jobs of professionals might be to develop analysis of what social control functions the profession plays and how these could be undermined.

4. The initial recruitment of people into the movement is a function many professionals are well placed to do. Recruitment is never an end in itself independent of other strategic goals; but it may be worth emphasizing in some cases, even to the sacrifice of direct confrontation or interferences. Many professionals, particularly teachers, have as one of their chief political assets an opportunity for intensive communication with potential constituencies. Recruitment is not the same as direct confrontation with power. While direct confrontation may be a means of recruitment, it is not the focus of recruitment campaigns. Nor is it the only important element in recruitment. More than any other facet of political work, recruitment of people requires "dram-

atic" skills: the radical organizer's job is to live out his politics, to embody an alternative. Again, there is a special "talent" or inclination that the movement often fails to see as legitimate; a certain emphasis of action that is often underrated.

## VI

### A FEELING OF ISOLATION

There should be no illusion that the political functions one can undertake as a radical in a profession are easy. One problem that people at the conference spoke about with concern was the "time bind", particularly for people in "fee-for-service" professions but to some extent for all professionals. Professional practice takes up time. There are basic things you must do in order to survive: for example, a lawyer cannot earn a living if he does only movement work. In addition, much of the obligation work of an in-the-system job drains energy and produces inertia. But when practical demands of profession come first, the political work is shoved onto a sideline and often it drifts out of the picture altogether.

Perhaps a more substantive problem that was identified is that it is very hard to practice differently. It is difficult to define new standards of effectiveness, to invent and implement new ways of doing things. Most things that we try fail — and often not because of the oppressive power structure, but simply because they are difficult and original and most of us have limited capacity. Self confidence is difficult to maintain and it is easy to slide into the standards of the establishment out of sheer demoralization.

The most pervasive problem expressed was the feeling of isolation from the mainstream of the movement. Many people described difficulty in finding emotional sustenance for political activism. They felt they were going dry, losing perspective. Political argument was becoming formalistic; conviction was floating away. Taking risks and being a marginal man was losing its reason. Signs of middle age stodginess were overcoming them. The movement people were remote physically and psychologically. Without adequate sources of spiritual support the dangers of cooptation are imminent. Professionals have access to many rewards. Under the best of circumstances, these may lead to abandoning the tough requirements of the political role.

The themes of isolation and cooptation dominated the professionals conference. In a sense they were the real issue: how to stay sane and how to stay honest, while trying to be effective. On the last day, especially, solutions began to be suggested — concrete things that people could do if they were serious in wanting to "change their lives": things which did not depend on perfecting theory, agreeing on strategy, winning political victories, or building new organizational superstructures.

What is needed is a network of comradeship that can serve as

a reference group outside of the professions for radicals working within established institutions. Such a network would help break the barriers of isolation and create pressure against copping out. It would form groups in which people might plan their political agendas and evaluate their work and it would give people facing risk material and spiritual support.

Basically the problem must be met where people live. One workshop began to build a picture of a "commune" designed to help radicals sustain themselves and attain effectiveness.

The idea is simple: we must be close to our friends and we must help each other survive, stay honest, be effective. Our professional colleagues and random neighbors cannot be our reference group. Nor are mechanistic alternatives such as news-letters sufficient.

Structurally the commune means that people live within walking distance of each other and take on certain explicit obligations to each other.

The commune is not seen as a utopian ideal, but as an instrument preserving individuality and privacy while fulfilling certain politically significant functions. Beyond the fulfillment of those functions members would decide how much or how little they wanted to link themselves to the commune.

The following functions were seen as essential:

1. The commune helps people define and evaluate their work: weekly meetings describe, criticize, evaluate what members are doing politically.
2. The community would take on some kind of joint political activity to insure that participation in politics extended beyond a professional work setting. This could be centered around the neighborhood, the war, etc.
3. The commune takes on clear responsibilities to provide services for the radical movement as a whole: such as helping with education and research; acting as a center of hospitality for movement travellers.
4. The commune has economic responsibilities: Professionals make money, and as radicals they have an obligation to support the movement. Professionals tend to escalate their standard of living until they fear economic risk and can no longer function as radicals. What we need is a formal means of getting our money to the movement before we get used to spending it and become corrupted.

The community might meet its financial obligation to the movement through a "tithe" whereby, for example, ten per cent of all income over \$4,000 per family would be put into a fund that would periodically be allocated to action organizations or movement projects.

The community might also protect its own members through a "community strike fund" or "war chest" that would be a cushion against economic risk as well as a tangible sign of group support for risk-taking as a necessary part of political activity.

5. The commune would establish a collective child care arrangement that would give responsibility for children to both men and women. This is a practical necessity to allow all members of the commune to participate equally in political life, and other non-domestic activities.

6. Beyond these basic functions the commune might seek ways to create more desirable alternatives to individualistic consuming patterns: for example cooperative buying; sharing capital goods, such as cars, washing machines, tools.

It should be stressed that the purpose of the commune is not to create a counter community into which radicals can retreat, or on which they can lavish their attention. Rather it is to create a communal life style that is supportive of increased political activity outside of the community. Certainly a commune is no panacea for the problems of radicals in professions or out. But it may be a necessary framework within which to develop ways to bridge the gap between personal need and political effectiveness.

If we do get by, it will be with a little help from our friends.

