

VIETNAM: *Teach-Ins*

Louis Menashe and Ronald Radosh, eds., Teach-Ins: U.S.A., Reports, Opinions, Documents, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1967, 349 pp., \$1.95.

By Leonard P. Liggio

The first teach-in developed at the University of Michigan. It was held on March 24, 1965 in response to the sustained bombing of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam by the US government. This teach-in was organized by the students and faculty at the University of Michigan and Professor Anatol Rapoport, one of the organizers, has presented this description of it:

The first teach-in was a demonstration, not a debate. To be sure, the meeting had the format of academic discourse, and, needless to say, the whole gamut of opinion found expression in the night-long discussions. But there was no question about the basis of discussion. The point of departure was our conviction that the present U. S. policy in Southeast Asia was dangerous, ineffective, illegal, and immoral. No Government spokesman and no apologist for the Administration's policy appeared on the "faculty" of the "Free University of Michigan." Whatever opposition was voiced was directed at us from the floor, not from among us. To the critics of this procedure we replied that the Administration had its own channels of communication and its own apparatus of influence. Our task was to establish a counterforce to the engineering of consent.

The "Free University of Michigan's" "faculty" ranged from such long standing critics of US foreign policy as Professor Kenneth Boulding, to such then unrecognized commentators as Carl Oglesby. Kenneth Boulding has summarized the motivation of the teach-in as follows:

It began as a movement of pure protest and outrage. The motivations which inspired it were no doubt

various. They included a genuine fear of escalation into nuclear warfare; they included also a sense of moral outrage at the use of such things as napalm and the "lazy dog," and the appalling sufferings which we are imposing on the Vietnamese in the supposed name of freedom and democracy.

Professor Boulding has suggested the illusions that were revealed in the teach-ins. Often there were pleas for the US to resume a peaceful role in the world, as though the US government has not been an aggressor throughout its history. This meant that the teach-in needed to instruct the students, i. e., faculty and students, in the reality of American history and in the reality of aggression, neither of which is taught in American universities. As Professor Boulding said: "We are not, and never have been, a peace-loving nation; we are not only ruthless and bloody but we feel no shame about it." Similarly, Professor Christopher Lasch's commentary on the teach-ins indicates the potential role of education which has been rejected by the universities and its professors:

The real subject that needs to be "taught" is the history of the Cold War and of the relation of the American Left to Communism. The Left needs to reconsider its own history, as a patient therapeutically reconstructs his past . . . These are subjects --as distinguished from "alternatives" in Vietnam--worth teaching. Until the teach-ins begin to teach, they will be politically useless and intellectually boring. It will be interesting to see whether the failures of higher education--the confusion of education with expertise, the idea that students are a needless obstacle to "research"--will now repeat themselves in the political agitation to which teachers find themselves so unexpectedly committed.

The relationship of the origins of the Cold War and the failure of the American Left are really the same subject in that the ability of Liberal Corporatism, centered in the New Deal-Fair Deal, to co-opt the American Left and make it the spokesman of US imperialism against domestic and foreign anti-imperialists insured the existence of the Cold War - the modern expression of US imperialism. Lasch notes:

Things would be different if the American Left had not long ago committed itself to outdo the Right in its anti-Communist zeal; but, once the Left itself

accepted anti-Communism as the sine qua non of political respectability, it became the prisoner of its own immediate success, surviving the postwar hysteria only to find that hysteria had become a permanent feature of the political scene.

The postwar hysteria resulted from the prewar hysteria which the Left engendered to aid US imperialism's intervention in World War II. The teach-ins provided a beginning for exposing the limited range of difference that has passed for a left or a right in America - that both have alternatively merely been instruments for cooption by Liberal Corporatism. Such a role is revealed, for example, in a comment on the teach-ins by the new-rightist, Russell Kirk: "Fancy Dr. Staughton Lynd, or a professor of the Birchite persuasion, as Secretary of State." What Kirk indicates is not merely the similarity of the anti-Establishmentism of the New Left and the Birchites, but also the frequent identity of their criticisms and conclusions, especially their neo-isolationist analysis of US imperialism.

Echoes of the earlier domestic anti-imperialist critiques were to be found from the beginning of the teach-ins at Michigan, and increased with the constant assertion by supporters of US imperialism in Vietnam that the domestic opposition was a resurgence of the American isolationism which opposed US aggression in 1898, 1917, 1941 and 1950. At the Michigan teach-in, Arthur Waskow, of the Institute for Policy Studies, appears to have initiated the insight when he raised the cry: "stop neo-isolationism." Perhaps as a historian he recognized the essentially Left and revolutionary potentialities of isolationism - the domestic opposition to US imperialism. Liberal Corporatism requires a range of imperialist instruments to achieve its goals, but the most important over the long-run has been the foreign aid program. The conservatives in the Liberal Corporatist Establishment - Fulbright, Kennedy, Morse, etc. - wish to rely on the tried and proven mechanism of imperialism, foreign aid (military and economic), rather than on the aggressive forward strategies of Johnson, Rusk, McNamara, Bundy, Rostow, etc., which raises threats to the existing exploitative system. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his speech to the National Teach-in, quoted Senator Robert Kennedy to emphasize the crucial role of increased foreign aid to achieve the desired objectives of US imperialism, especially in Vietnam. Similarly, Arthur Waskow, to emphasize his opposition to the American neo-isolationism of the New

Left, proposes increased expenditure for the major instrument of US imperialism, foreign aid. Waskow's Michigan teach-in attack on neo-isolationism summarized that opposition to US imperialism as follows:

There are some Americans who have responded to their own horror over the means we are using in Vietnam by denouncing the use of any means at all, who have responded to the difficulties we have discovered in the way of accomplishing our official noble ends in the underdeveloped world by condemning those ends as irrelevant to, or undesirable for, the underdeveloped world. They have responded to the new American arrogance with what, at first glance, looks like a new American humility: the humility that says we have nothing useful to offer the world.

From the University of Michigan the teach-ins spread to many campuses and some had important repercussions by raising a number of fundamental issues which had remained unresolved beneath the surface of the previously unexamined American society. For example, the teach-in organized on April 23, 1965 by the Rutgers University SDS chapter played the role of raising such issues for the university as well as for the state's electorate. At the teach-in history professor Eugene Genovese declared: "I do not fear or regret the impending Vietcong victory in Vietnam. I welcome it." This statement as well as its repetition by political science professor James Mellen of Drew University, at a Rutgers teach-in in September, became the major issue in the New Jersey gubernatorial campaign; Gov. Hughes was re-elected on his support for academic freedom while Professors Genovese and Mellen were ultimately removed from their academic posts by the subtle means used by university administrators.

The National Teach-in held in Washington, May 15, 1965 departed from the basic nature of the teach-ins, for it was developed and operated in cooperation with the Administration in order to give respectability and distribution to the Administration's position among the uncommitted. Professor William Appleman Williams, who addressed the National Teach-in, noted the ability of the Administration to manipulate it so that "Deutscher's assault on the assumptions of American policy, and Morgenthau's laying bare the dangerous unreality of officialdom's so-called realism" were blunted. (It is unfortunate that Isaac Deutscher's address was not able to be included in Teach-

ing: U. S. A.) Williams indicates that the failure of the National Teach-in compared to the teach-in movement lay in the absence of students in determining its activities. Williams says:

The first and crucial thing to understand is that the students largely supplied the initiative and power behind the entire movement . . .

They are young men and women who are intelligent and perceptive enough to learn from their elders without making all the same mistakes. They have had enough of hipsterism as well as of the jet-set, and of the Old Left as well as of the Establishment. And they are aware that emancipation involves men as well as women, and that it concerns something beyond changing patterns of sexual behavior and beyond the freedom and the opportunity to hustle their wares in the marketplace.

They are morally committed to the proposition that the American system must treat people as people, and that the system must be changed if that is necessary to achieve that objective. They are deeply angry about the double standard of morality they constantly experience.

In contrast to the students, the faculty who were the organizers of the National Teach-in were, according to Joan Scott's perceptive observation, "confused about whether they loved the existing system or the enduring principle of American democracy."

The most productive teach-in was the Berkeley Teach-in (May 21-22) which led to major political activities in succeeding months. It was addressed by the most significant American critics of US aggression in Vietnam as well as by international figures such as Isaac Deutscher and Bertrand Russell (by tape). Professor Staughton Lynd's speech contained the important contribution to radical politics in America that coalition politics "means coalition with the Marines." Lynd concluded his speech with a call for a revolutionary analysis of the meaning of imperialist war for American society. He said to the government of the United States:

And if you are worried that the natives all over the world are restless, we want you to know that the natives here at home are restless too, and maybe there should be a contingency plan to keep some of the Marines here to deal with us.

From this there developed the International Days of Protest which were the response to the activity and leadership for the Berkeley teach-in group. Focusing on the support of American opposition to US imperialism, international teach-ins were organized in major world capitals. A teach-in against US aggression in Vietnam was held at the University of Puerto Rico in which the independence movement of Puerto Rico drew the parallel between "Puerto Rico's struggle for liberation and that of the Vietnamese people." From London to Tokyo (where recently-elected SDS president Carl Oglesby spoke) the response to the Berkeley group's call for international solidarity with the American anti-imperialist movement contributed to the education of the radical movements in many countries. In the Paris teach-in an orthodox Marxist speaker was "reminded that the French working class, largely led by the Communist Party, had never struck for peace in Algeria; he may have begun to understand what a real teach-in might be: the examination of assumptions - even one's own."