

WARNING -- RYM may be Hazardous to... the People

by Norm Daniels, Tufts

Jared Israel, NIC

At the June SDS convention, the old national leaders (calling themselves the 'Revolutionary' Youth Movement, 'RYM') led a minority (about 1/3) walkout, then declared that the Progressive Labor Party (PL) and Worker-Student Alliance caucus (WSA), as well as many others, had been 'expelled'. The clear majority, including hundreds not in any caucus, repudiated any attempt to split SDS and avoid the political struggle which, it was evident, the 'RYM' leaders had been losing all last year and at the convention. 'RYM' leaders walked out to maintain as much legitimacy as possible. To cover their opportunist maneuver - which threatens the existence of the anti-imperialist student movement - they whipped up some principles. Perhaps key among these was the fact that PL, most WSAers and many other SDSers have sharp disagreements with the Black Panther Party. Having lost politically, 'RYM' leaders used this, maintaining that the Panthers' hostility to PL and others was grounds for 'expelling' the majority. But within a month the Panthers' leaders had denounced 'RYM' as 'National Socialists' - nazis! 'RYM's' leaders had used the Panthers in a completely racist way -- to 'get' their opponents. And the two 'RYM' factions (they call themselves 'RYM I, or 'Weatherman', and 'RYM II, the better to communicate with ordinary people), which had united all year to 'get' PL and WSA, have been at each other's throats for two months, calling each other 'running dogs of imperialism'. Their 'principled' unity and that between 'RYM' as a whole and the Panthers has crumbled into a scramble for position since they walked out -- or, as they claim, expelled everyone else.

'RYM Strategy: Serving the Rulers

In the past, many SDSers have opposed 'RYM's' ideas and practice. We argued that 'RYM' is terribly arrogant towards most people - especially working people - and has a thoroughly elitist, self-building notion of how to organize. They've advocated 'small group' or 'exemplary' actions, going 'wild in the streets' for the purpose of psychological self-liberation instead of organizing masses of people into REALLY militant struggle against imperialism. 'RYM' always denied that, but their practice since the convention has more clearly than ever shown that our analysis is right.

The owners of this country and their government and press love to paint SDS as a bunch of vicious rich kids, out for kicks, fanatics, fascists-on-the-left ready to kill any who won't mouth insane slogans.

Articles in the 'RYM' paper show that by posing workers as the enemy, by attacking the people, 'RYM' is trying to live up to that lie. The government can smear SDS with 'RYM's' practice!

Death to all Passengers!

Consider the picture below.

SDS new left notes
all power to the people

BRING THE WAR HOME!



The caption reads: 'WITH A DEFINIT SMILE, 5-YEAR OLD MARI-ON DELGADO SHOWS HOW HE PLACED A 25-POUND CONCRETE SLAB ON THE TRACKS AND WRECKED A PASSENGER TRAIN.' The newspaper, which 'RYM' calls 'NEW LEFT NOTES', has no connection with this 'New Left Notes'. It's issued in Chicago by the group that splintered from SDS at the convention.

What is the message of this picture, which appears on the front page of 'RYM's' paper on August 29? 'BRING THE WAR HOME!' is 'RYM's' slogan for their October action in Chicago. So this is an illustration of that slogan! The war, we are told, is the fault of the American people -- most of whom are exploited working people. The 'RYM' leaders aren't putting forward a too-militant approach. They aren't proposing 'left-wing' terrorism. To blow up a train carrying millionaires would be terrorism against the rich -- who alone gain from the war and are responsible for it. That would be a bad mistake, given the effect it would have. But THIS train is identified only as a PASSENGER train! So 'RYM's' line is that American working people gain from and caused the war, that they must be fought -- must be attacked and destroyed! What need newspapers do to convince most people (except suicidal maniacs) that SDS is their deadly enemy? Just reprint this picture!

We could go on talking about this picture, but the point is clear. 'RYM' is TRYING to LOOK LIKE the enemies of the people.

'RYM Practice: Fighting the People

That's bad enough. But 'RYM' puts its theories into practice. They haven't yet reached the stage of the 5-year old, but they've already done tremendous harm. Their attacks on the people are like something the Green Berets would think up, something they would hire Vietnamese finks to do, disguised as Vietnamese revolutionaries to turn off the people.

'RYM Attacks Detroit...

In the August 29 'RYM' paper an article boasts that in Detroit 'about 30 cadre and people starting to work with us swept the beach in a line distributing Chicago leaflets and carrying a red flag.' After planting the flag, the 'RYMers' told the people 'that it's a political world and that they have to deal with that. The main contradiction is between those who have it (auto workers?) and those who don't -- between white America and the colored nations.' People on the beach, seeing a bunch of dangerous nuts, attacked the 'RYMers. But 'RYM' was heroic. They 'fought the attackers (the people!) to a standstill and left the beach chanting.' As the excerpt below from 'RYM's' paper notes, they're studying karate. Why such half-way measures?

We've become fighters this summer. Our study of karate makes us strong, and our practice makes us real to young people. Fighting understands winning. Our words have content because they are backed up by a growing base of power. Opening a new front here at home can only be achieved by striking blows at the enemy and building a movement that understands that to aid the Vietnamese and blacks we must develop a white fighting force that FIGHTS!

Why not just shoot down the people and be done? What will those people think if they hear some REAL radical say that not we but the rulers are the people's enemy?

A group of female 'RYMers' (the Motor City 9, as 'RYM' calls them) barricaded a class taking exams and attacked two men (using super-duper karate) when they tried to leave.

McComb Community College is located in an all-white working class community and trains the local white youth in the skills necessary for lower managerial jobs, positions that objectively oppress black people. By busting into a classroom during final exams, and by talking to people about what's happening in the world, we confronted them with their dual position in capitalist society. They are oppressors because of their acceptance of privilege, and they are oppressed because of their objective relationship to the ruling class.

'RYM' calls this an 'exemplary action' raising the 'consciousness of women's oppression and male supremacy in the context of world revolution'. In reality, this was an attack on all the men and women present. The point wasn't, say, that the students were striking, and this was an attempt to win others to the strike and shut the place down completely. The administration wasn't even focused on. Instead, the students (for reasons unknown to them) were presented with a raving, surrealist visitation and told: accept or die!

Was 'RYM' self-critical? Indeed! They noted that 'we didn't look over the area thoroughly before our action, we didn't have getaway routes planned, and that resulted in a bust.' In the same vein, their criticism of the beach episode was that their retreat was 'disorderly' -- 'it became obvious that the danger of somebody becoming isolated and left behind, with the resulting immobility of the whole group, had to be overcome.' Real radicals and revolutionaries defend the people, try to change themselves so that we can serve the people. We try to fight self-righteous attitudes on our own part and while trying to explain what's wrong with pro-imperialist ideas - like racism - which most people (including us) hold somewhat, we always try to differentiate between the people - working people and students - and the rulers, who are the enemy. That's what being 'a fish in the sea of the people' means. But for 'RYM' -- fearing the people, self-righteously despising them, hating workers, attacking them like spoiled brats and (of course) antagonizing them -- for 'RYM OF COURSE' it's dangerous to remain among the people! Like the Green Berets, 'RYM' knows -- you can't rely on the native population.

and Columbus...

'RYM' activities aren't confined to Detroit. In Columbus, Ohio, they criticized themselves as follows:

Our correct fighting instincts led to a few fistfights when the men's chauvinist baiting reached an unbearable level. Such fights led the men to take us more seriously at first, but because they were in the context of no practice, the political content of such struggles became more and more unclear.

Aside from the weird sound of 'our correct fighting instincts' -- aside from the paragraph itself, what was 'RYM's' solution? To redirect their 'fighting instincts' against working women. Some working women, in desperate need of money and unable to leave their homes, are tricked into working for Stanly Co. Giving parties at home, they sell Stanly household products to their friends and get a small commission. Instead of uniting with these highly exploited saleswomen against Stanly, 'RYM' accepts Stanly's lie that they are 'sales representatives' and attacks! Going to a 'Stanly party', 'RYM' puts forth its politics. Afterwards, again, they are self-critical:

It was the first time we had really organized around women's liberation, and we made lots of mistakes. We were too liberal and we didn't put the women, particularly the representative from the Stanly company, up against the wall.

Not only the saleswomen, BUT ALL THE WOMEN PRESENT needed to be 'put up against the wall'. 'RYM' won't let these 'imperialists' off so lightly next time, they promise!

And, indeed, overcoming their 'liberalism', Columbus 'RYMers' began charging through the parks with an NLF flag, leafletting and rapping... And in job after job, racists were put literally up against the walls. One can imagine the local rulers trembling... with glee!

and Pittsburgh

Shouting the slogan 'jailbreak', a large number of 'RYMers' charged into Pittsburgh's South Hills High School at lunch recess, shouting 'Ho Lives!' After sporadic fighting with cops, 34 were arrested. Completely unrooted in any work being done at the school, and in any case, on its own, pretty crazy, this action is supposed to represent the essence of the 'RYM' march on Chicago, planned for October. Take heed.

Building on Decay

These actions are so clearly geared to isolating radicals from the people that it's clear cops are influential among 'RYM' leaders. (One 'RYM' attack on the people is worth more to the rulers than a thousand editorials against SDS!) But why do these guys have any following? Clearly, some honest people get tricked.

'RYM's' attraction comes from ideas most students hold to some extent -- that the 'insensitive' (working) people are to blame for what's wrong in America. 'It is THEIR bad traits which are the problem, it is THEY who foment racism and wars like Vietnam. The answer is for us (who've never exploited anyone and are free of wrong ideas) to form in-groups and fight the people. We should run down the streets very militantly, ferociously in fact -- shout at people until they change and act like us revolutionaries. We'll teach those insensitive bastards to go to work every day and sweat their asses off and thus be part of 'the machine' -- we'll teach their sons to go and die in Vietnam!'

That sort of thinking is just an hysterical variation of the old liberal moral witness strategy, the idea that by confronting people with our moral superiority, we can change things. This strategy only helps the rulers. By attacking the people, 'RYM' is a tool in their hands, to use as they want to against the anti-imperialist movement. And, indeed, if one opposes the people, who does one have really left to ally with?

The very selfish and also mystical thinking that 'RYM' appeals to comes out in Detroit 'RYM's' leaflet for their Chicago demo -- the leaflet is called 'TAKE THE BLUES TO CHICAGO'. It reads: 'People all over the world will feel the blues in that city. The mass march on Saturday - October 11 - will be everything; all the reasons for our anger crystallized in our love for the people of Viet-Nam, the NLF, and joy at the strength of their will. It will be as real and as pure as we can make it. Come and help us organize, sing the blues loud and strong; for these days in October, and for our future.' 'RYM' appeals to the worst in people -- in all of us -- the desire to get together with the 'other good people' and squash everyone else with-in striking distance.

'RYM II

As we said earlier, 'RYM' is rife with factions. There isn't room for a complete discussion here. But let us discuss 'RYM II, briefly. This faction is of minor significance, very small numerically. To a certain extent it criticizes 'RYM I, the main faction, accusing it of being 'adventurist'. This is actually both hypocritical and wrong.

Hypocritical -- because all last year Mike Klonsky and Les Coleman, who lead the 'RYM II' faction, worked hand in hand with 'RYM I' leaders. In fact, Coleman/Klonsky were first to put forth 'wild-in-the-streets' as a 'serious' strategy for SDS. Klonsky was National Secretary of SDS last year, and from

WARNING

from p. 5

that position he and his friend and co-'R'YMer Coleman pushed the anti-working class notion of 'discontentism' -- that by some unexplainable catharsis of violent street action, whose goals were incommunicable -- by some such process people's discontent would become revolution. Coleman and Klonsky tried to put that into practice somewhat last fall. Mark Rudd and Bill Ayers, who presently control 'R'YM headquarters, are merely perfecting Coleman/Klonsky's old ideas. SELF-CRITICISM is therefore what is called for.

Wrong -- because 'R'YM I is not adventurist. They aren't pursuing good goals too quickly. Their approach is to attack the people. They see the people as the enemy. If that's someone's outlook, what's the difference what speed you use? 'R'YM II only objects to the OPENNESS of 'R'YM I's approach. They see 'R'YM I's tactics as too vividly anti-working class. They desire greater subtlety.

Coleman/Klonsky have other bad reasons for criticizing 'R'YMI. One is that they are jealous -- the 'R'YM I faction has control of 'R'YM facilities, and 'R'YM leaders are above all fierce careerists. Moreover, Coleman and Klonsky are linked to the thoroughly discredited 'Communist' Party. They therefore want 'R'YM to rely more on forming united fronts with the 'C'P and with liberal elements among the rulers. (There isn't space to discuss this question fully. It is just as much an attack on the people as 'R'YM's 'exemplary actions'. For more discussion of the 'C'P's 'united front' approach, see the July 30, 1969 issue of NLN. The article, entitled 'Report on Oakland United Front Conference', is available in pamphlet form from the SDS National Headquarters.)

'R'YM attacks the people and discredits serious radicals and revolutionaries; in addition, the 'R'YM leadership is trying to split SDS. These parasites must be rejected.