

student organizations and the antiwar movement in america, 1900-1960

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“No more war” has been an important rallying cry for the youth movement in the United States. This has been recently apparent in the student movement of the past decade in which opposition to the war in Vietnam played a crucial role. Even earlier the antiwar issue played a significant role in the historical development of student political activism. As early as the Civil War students participated in anticonscription campaigns. ROTC and militarism on the campus were denounced by antiwar students in the 1920’s and the antiwar issue provided the cement for the coalitions within the student movement of the Thirties. As in the 1960’s, antiwar spirit kept the student movement of the 1930’s alive. By the same token, the peace movement in this country owes a good measure of its vigor to student support.

The history of student anti-militarism and antiwar activism is rich in its diversity. From 1900 to 1960 a variety of student organizations engaged in the antiwar movement in changing historical climates, and they drew

The peace movement in the United States has derived a great deal of its vitality from student antiwar activism. In turn, an historical examination of the student movement indicates how important the peace issue was as a focus for student activism. The antiwar issue has had the power to draw together many different types of student groups into antiwar coalitions. During the period 1900 to 1960 a wide variety of student organizations, representing a spectrum of ideological perspectives, engaged in the antiwar movement.

A significant part of students’ antiwar ideology was shaped by their affiliation with “parent parties.” The youth affiliates of the Communist and Socialist parties provided leadership in student antiwar coalitions. During the periods of most intense student antiwar activism it was the radical political activists, not the pacifists, who supplied the leadership for the student antiwar movement. During the decades when radicalism was in a state of decline the pacifists attempted to provide leadership for the student peace movement, but were never able to restore the momentum that more radical leadership had been able to maintain.

The antiwar movement has attracted only a minority of students. This minority has been further reduced in effectiveness by its fragile leadership and the tension of competing ideological allegiances. Its existence has been significant, nonetheless. It has been a vehicle for the increasing self-consciousness of young people and it has provided them with alternative policies and perspectives when civilization has been tested by war.

their antiwar feelings from many ideological perspectives. As in the general peace movement, the ideological basis for student antiwar activity had a multi-dimensional character.

The Beginnings of Student Antiwar Activism: 1900-1920

Less than four percent of college age youth attended an institution of higher education in 1900. The class composition of the student population was relatively homogeneous. Upper middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestants constituted most of the college and university enrollments. Student life of the early 1900's has been characterized as politically apathetic and generally escapist. Conventional national patriotism was all but universal.¹ Somewhat ironically, it was in this climate that more politically conscious student groups first emerged and took up the antiwar issue.

Between 1900 and 1915 both the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS) and the Young Peoples Socialist League (YPSL) were founded. The ISS, the first president of which was Jack London, the naturalist author, was founded in 1905 by a group of non-students to promote the discussion of socialism among college students. By 1917 it had attracted approximately 2,000 members, mostly middle class collegians.² It was not affiliated with the Socialist Party and ideological views varied greatly within ISS campus groups. In 1913 the YPSL became the official youth group of the Socialist Party. The majority of its membership were of working class background and most were of Jewish immigrant parentage. Most of YPSL's collegiate members also attended city colleges in New York and New Jersey. Its ideological position was clearly that of the Socialist Party. By 1917 the YPSL claimed a membership of nearly 10,000.

When the entry of the United States into World War I seemed imminent, both the ISS and the YPSL were forced to take stands on the war issue. The ambivalence of the ISS reflected the group's composition and its lack of commitment to any particular political position.³ The study of militarism, its cause and effect, had not yet been made a special course of study and discussion among the ISS chapters.⁴ There was considerable disagreement among members on the war issue at the organization's 1916 convention and summer conference.⁵ The ultimate result of this was that in order to accommodate the variety of views of its members and to prevent the organization from splitting apart, the ISS took no official position on the war. It did go on record opposing the introduction of military training on college campuses and continued to discuss the pros and cons of pacifism.

It is clear that an antiwar position had not become a central part of the Society's concept of socialism. The ISS declared that its purpose was the study and discussion of socialism; it emphasized even more strongly that it was not "an anti or pro-militarist, anti or pro-war, anti or pro-conscription organization."⁶ In fact, an examination of the *Intercolle-*

giate Socialist, the official publication of the ISS, during the war years indicates evidence of some super-patriotism and some real unfriendliness toward the Socialist Party's position on the war. J. G. Phelps Stokes, the President of the ISS until 1918, struck up the call for patriotism:

In the midst of war the non-resistant attitude may be the most selfish and immoral imaginable. . . . From the earliest days of this republic the obligation of universal service, in emergencies, has rightly been incumbent upon all who are physically capable of serving. . . . Individual rights must be subordinated to public needs. . . . Every American should put his services at the disposal of the President, the ablest and wisest leader of the whole people available at the present time.⁷

By contrast, the Young Peoples Socialist League came out vigorously opposing war, adopting the revolutionary socialist position of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg that wars only serve to kill off the working class. Beginning in 1914, the *Young Socialist Magazine*, the YPSL's official organ, devoted a great deal of space to warnings about the horrors of war. After United States entry into war, convention resolutions put "yipsels" on record opposing all wars, denouncing the war as a crime against humanity and opposing conscription. Some YPSL members even resolved to consider participation in the Red Cross movement as supporting the government and advocated that any member volunteering for such work should be expelled from the organization.⁸

Beyond some strong antiwar statements the members of the YPSL do not appear to have been engaged in much antiwar agitation outside their own circles. After 1914 the local and state organizations continued to report educational lectures, social gatherings and essay contests instead of energetic antiwar activity. In large part this reflected the Socialist Party's attempts to keep the YPSL away from direct political action. However, some anti-militaristic action was directed by the YPSL at urban high schools in New York and New Jersey. YPSL's Inter-High School Anti-Militarist League was created to offset "the military hysteria of the Boy Scouts." The League promoted a few strikes against compulsory military drill in high schools. Some direct contact with the police was experienced in the summer of 1917 when YPSL antiwar meetings were broken up and declared illegal. Even minimal agitational activity by youth was considered threatening by authorities.

From 1900 to 1917 many peace groups were active among less politically oriented students. The American School Peace League was founded primarily to promote the cause of peace among younger students at the primary and secondary education levels. An official National Education Association endorsement indicates that the League's peace activities were not considered threatening although the American Legion objected to this endorsement. At the college level the Intercollegiate Peace Associ-

ation, the Collegiate Anti-Militarist League, the Christian Students Federation and the Cosmopolitan Clubs were all engaged in promoting internationalism and peace. Much of their work took the form of lectures and discussion meetings. None of these groups viewed war in the political and social terms that the young Socialists did. Nor was pacifism a requirement for membership. When in 1916 many elder pacifists and churchmen rejected the proposals for a general arms embargo and in the next year were won over to Wilson's "war to end all wars," their student counterparts followed in large number without much apparent disillusionment.⁹

The largest Christian student group in existence prior to the outbreak of World War I was the Student Christian Volunteer Movement (SCVM). The participation of some Christian students in settlement house work helped to bring concern for social problems in the United States to the organization. Even so, most of its activity in the first two decades of the twentieth century was directed toward overseas religious mission work. In 1917 the SCVM through its official organ, the *North American Student*, took a pro-war position and carried many articles on valuable war services performed by students.

The climate on American campuses during World War I was filled with the patriotic spirit of wartime mobilization. Institutions of higher education responded readily to the call for war. College curricula were mobilized willingly in response to requests by the United States Bureau of Education which conjured up frightening images of "Bad Kaiser Bill," and the Bureau's bulletins served as constant reminders of the dangers of unpreparedness. Scientific research was oriented to war needs in most institutions. At Yale a new three year "military course" was cited as an alternative to the regular course of studies and at little Reed College in Oregon the college catalog contained a twelve page supplement for "war studies."¹⁰ It was hardly a milieu for antiwar thoughts or actions.

The Red Scare and the Palmer Raids of 1919-1920 quickly singled out many of those who had been prominent antiwar activists and especially inhibited the Socialist movement. Those who did continue outspoken opposition to government policies did so at the risk of having their remarks labeled seditious. Added to this atmosphere of political repression was the beginning of the "Roaring Twenties" which seemed to mute concerns about war at the turn of the decade.

The various student groups concerned about peace before the war might have had a greater impact on the campus had the various groups been able to appeal to larger numbers of students and, perhaps even more important, been better able to cooperate more among themselves. However, the antiwar issue was not able to draw students from their various ideological perspectives into a common cause. Of course, many of these groups were neophytes to debate about war or were still building

membership when war broke out in Europe; but in any case, no attempt was made to formulate a united call to resist. Like the traditional peace movement most student groups were able to rationalize the existence of war. Little radical pacifism was evident among the religious student groups. This was of significance since more students were affiliated with religious organizations than other types of organizations. Strong opposition to the war from their ranks might have had political impact. Ironically, the youth group that remained firm in its antiwar stand was the YPSL which had the smallest collegiate following. The young Socialists, however, made few attempts to convince others of the correctness of their position. Except for a small group of steadfast pacifists, they remained alone in their adamant opposition to the war. In short, a viable peace movement did not exist as yet among students.

Peace Concern Among Students: the 1920's

If the war had dealt a devastating blow to the cause of peace, its aftermath, the Roaring Twenties, seemed to hold up the speakeasy and the college campus as great places to escape from the serious cares of the world. Yet college students of the Twenties have perhaps been too hastily stereotyped by the gay abandonment of the flapper. In 1935 James Wechsler noted two major trends of revolt among students during the 1920's: a revolt in morals and manners, escapist in character, and a serious desire to remake America out of the ruins of World War I.¹¹ H. L. Mencken, denouncing the masses as well as the "booboisie," provided an ism for those involved in the former. Devere Allen personified the latter. Later a prominent figure in the peace movement, Allen's pacifism was nurtured while a student at Oberlin. His ideas were developed during wartime while the editor of Oberlin's *Radical Patriot*. In 1919 Allen was instrumental in organizing Young Democracy and became editor of its magazine. He attempted to take pacifism out of the realm of the merely personal religious commitment of students, more typical of the pre-World War I era, and to put it in new terms of a social and political critique of American society. Along with other student groups, Young Democracy viewed the League of Nations idea as a bright ray of hope for the future of peace.

New organizations grew out of this decade, but it is also important to note that the war and the Palmer raids did not totally destroy the groups that had been active before the Twenties. The YPSL was most devastated by the raids and it was not until about 1925 that it began to recoup its strength. By the late Twenties the YPSL was calling for the release of political prisoners who had resisted the war, condemning once again the military hysteria of the Boy Scouts, and demanding an end to ROTC on the campus.¹² However, except for strong antiwar resolutions and an antiwar rally sponsored by the YPSL in New York in 1927, most of its energies were devoted to the more mundane problems of bringing the

organization back to life. The Intercollegiate Socialist Society also survived and became the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID) in 1928. ISS chapters were active but found it difficult to sponsor liberal pacifist and radical speakers on campuses because of the reluctance of college administrations to have them.¹³

While the more radical and politically oriented groups struggled to recover from the repression brought about by the Red Scares, the Christian student groups seemed more vital than ever and perhaps paradoxically leaning more to the left. Student pastors and YMCA leaders became important figures in the struggle against campus militarism. The YMCA and YWCA in particular were quite active in campaigning against militarism. At the annual National Conference of Christian Students in 1927, jointly sponsored by the YMCA and YWCA, increasing radicalism and anti-militarism were in evidence. A majority of the delegates voted that the economic system of the United States based on production for profit was wrong. On the question of war 327 students indicated that they would not support any war, 740 voted to support only some wars, 356 were uncommitted, and only 95 students voted to support any war declared by their country.¹⁴ Earlier in the decade, at a Student Christian Volunteer Convention, approximately 700 students took a strong pacifist stand under the leadership of the Fellowship of Youth for Peace, a group which later affiliated with the Fellowship of Reconciliation.¹⁵

Among the new groups appearing on the scene were the National Student Federation of America, the Young Communist League and the New Student Forum. Of these, the New Student Forum (NSF) concerned itself most with the antiwar issue. The NSF was the product of a merger in 1922 of the National Student Committee for the Limitation of Armaments and the Intercollegiate Liberal League. Under its auspices the *New Student* was published. Although certainly not radical, it was nonetheless an important weathervane for concerns of more politically and socially concerned students during the Twenties. It devoted a great deal of coverage to peace issues and pacifist views, seeing war as part of America's scientific spirit with no moral purpose. The *New Student* became the voice of student opposition to campus militarism and to the ROTC and encouraged students in their activities against it.

Amidst the more publicized fad of goldfish swallowing, these groups helped to keep anti-militarism alive on the campus. Major campaigns against compulsory military training in the colleges occurred in the Twenties. At large midwestern universities thousands of students voted to abolish compulsory ROTC and in the East similar protests took place.¹⁶ Students who refused to participate in ROTC training were expelled. ROTC commandants recommended the dismissal of faculty and staff encouraging unpatriotic behavior on the part of students. The American Legion acted as patriotic watchdog. In one case American Legion officials boasted that they had brought about the dismissal of two

professors because they had supported the right of the student Liberal Club to criticize "American military imperialism in Mexico and Nicaragua."¹⁷

Important to the future of the antiwar movement among students were the numerous conferences that placed many different kinds of student groups in contact with one another. At these interdenominational and intercollegiate conferences students from a wide variety of ideological perspectives had an opportunity to discuss militarism on the campus.¹⁸ One such meeting was the conference of the American Federation of Youth held in 1927. It provided a forum for approximately fifty youth organizations. Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University, called upon the delegates to resist being "drafted as cannon-fodder for future imperialistic wars." The groups attending went on record favoring a nationwide program to combat compulsory military training, militarism and imperialism.

In the prosperity of the late Twenties it might have been predicted that concerns about militarism on the campus would atrophy. The *New Student* had lost much of its reforming fervor by 1928. Although there were some active student groups, there is no evidence that a student movement with a large base of support existed. Yet this decade would be separated from the next not by a war and the Palmer Raids and their effect of promoting patriotism, but by an economic depression. The combination of that depression and the rumblings of another war in the Thirties helped to build and sustain a student movement of scope and intensity previously unknown in American society. It would not have been easy to predict the political radicalization of students during the 1930's from the vantage point of 1928, and yet seeds of discontent were planted prior to 1930 in the form of increased criticism of "the system" among student groups. These organizations reflected to lesser and greater degrees a growing awareness of the political role of youth in the United States.

Students and the Antiwar Movement of the Thirties

The depression was the spawning ground of the student movement of the 1930's. The economic crisis became a social and political crisis which affected all segments of the youth population in the United States. In 1930 approximately one-fourth of the unemployed were between the ages fifteen to twenty-four. This helped to foment an unprecedented amount of discontent among students. The depression had the effect of economically disinheriting college graduates and made the future dim for those studying toward degrees. The membership of the Communist and Socialist youth groups increased substantially and pacifist student groups moved further to the left. Because students were so active in the 1930's, that decade has received far more attention by scholars and observers than those preceding or following it.¹⁹

A radical critique of war was central to the student movement of the Thirties. In their search for answers to the problems facing American society many students were attracted to solutions offered by radical political groups. The young Communists and the young Socialists stressed the idea that war was an outgrowth of the profit system. This critique pervaded many of the religious pacifist student groups. The climate on college campuses was distinctly antiwar. An analysis of the results of various peace polls conducted on college campuses revealed that of an approximately 22,000 students covered, eight thousand considered themselves pacifists and seven thousand would refuse to become part of an American Expeditionary Force.²⁰ A poll conducted by the Intercollegiate Disarmament Council in the early Thirties indicated that 92 percent of the respondents (24,345 students) wanted a worldwide reduction of armaments, and 63 percent voted for independent disarmament by the United States regardless of what other countries did. Devere Allen reported that the antiwar attitudes revealed by these surveys were so drastic that several institutions forbade their students to participate in similar polls of opinion.²¹ Clearly those organizations that could capture the growing antiwar spirit and radicalism of American students would play a leading role in the movement of the Thirties.

The groups that had been active in the Twenties grew and increased their activity in the Thirties. Among the most active in 1935 were the SLID and the YPSL, many of whose members held joint membership in both organizations.²² Religiously affiliated student groups such as the FOR and the YMCA and YWCA continued their activity. The Young Communist League (YCL) and the National Student League (the Communist Party affiliated national student group) were relative newcomers to student antiwar activity. They would play, however, a key role in the student movement of the 1930's. Aggressive fascism in Europe and the liberal politics of the New Deal paved the way for increasing cooperation among Socialist, Communist and liberal groups. In 1935 this cooperation was formalized in the Communist promoted "United Front," of which youth groups played an important part. It provided the impetus for the largest student antiwar coalition known in the United States before the Sixties.

Neither the Socialist Party nor the Communist Party had been much concerned with college students prior to 1930. Most of their youth work had been directed at young workers and high school youth. The Thirties, however, opened a new field of possibilities for organizing students. The Communists attempted to keep a fairly strict division between young workers and students. For this reason and to give the appearance of being a broadly-based organization, the National Student League was created. The Socialists, on the other hand, had a more complicated situation in the student field. The SLID had become more radical and now contained students committed to the Socialist Party's platform. Although student

members of the YPSL joined SLID chapters, the official youth position of the Socialist Party was still that of the Young Peoples Socialist League, not that of the Student League for Industrial Democracy. Even though many YPSL members had joined the SLID, the latter was not bound to follow the Socialist Party's directives. This situation tended to give the Communists an important edge.

During the Christmas holidays of 1935 at a convention in Columbus, Ohio, the NSL and the SLID created the American Student Union (ASU).²³ The ASU more than its New Deal counterpart, the American Youth Congress, provides a forum in which political positions and the antiwar concerns of student groups in the 1930's can be viewed. The NSL was following Communist Party directives to create United Front organizations. Many members of the SLID tended to be somewhat skeptical of the Union. However, young Socialists, such as Joseph Lash, the Executive Secretary of the SLID, became convinced of the need for unity and swung the SLID to the United Front position. The disunity in the 1935 gathering could be seen in the existence of strong factions on the war question. The young Communists held separate meetings each night during the convention and developed strategy to get the ASU to endorse a collective security position. But many YPSL and SLID members remained hesitant about the Union for this reason. About 500 delegates attended the first convention and nearly half of them were neither Socialists nor Communists. The National Student Federation of America (a conglomeration of college and university student governments) and some pacifist groups had representatives at the Convention. The concept of collective security troubled the pacifists and the Socialists, and the antiwar position of pacifists and Socialists disturbed the Communists. The Union rested on a tenuous blend of the anti-fascist concerns of the young Communists and the antiwar spirit of the Socialists and pacifists.

The NSL and the SLID clearly provided the leadership for the Union at its inception, but both tried to keep questions of ideology at a minimum in deference to their desire for a broad coalition. The young Communists in particular were willing to make many accommodations in the interest of an anti-German alliance, and they cooperated in making the ASU an antiwar organization in order to please the other factions. Nevertheless, suspicions among the political elements of the ASU remained. The young Communists viewed the young Socialists as propagators of "treacherous pacifist dope." In turn a strong faction of the YPSL felt that the Socialists must form a left opposition committed to revolutionary antiwar principles to which they felt the young Communists were not committed.²⁴

Two tactics seem to stand out in the student antiwar struggle of the Thirties: the Oxford Movement and the antiwar strike. In 1933 the Oxford Student Union, reflecting the strong pacifist currents in England, passed a resolution stating that under no circumstances should one fight

for King and Country. The ASU picked up the resolution, adapting it to America's needs as a means of involving large numbers of college youth in the antiwar movement. Between 1936 and 1938 the Oxford Pledge was administered to thousands of students across the United States. In taking the pledge American students refused to support the United States government in any war it might conduct.

The antiwar strike became an increasingly popular tactic. In 1934 about 25,000 students participated in the first nationwide antiwar student strike. Three years later 500,000 students participated in the national antiwar strike coordinated by the United Student Peace Committee.²⁵ The strikes were of very limited duration, usually consisting of leaving classes for one hour. No all day student strikes were endorsed by the ASU. Even so, some university administrations acted quickly and forcibly against the strikers: at Berkeley, for example, twenty students were arrested in 1935 for handing out announcements calling for a student strike. "Peace Assemblies," more acceptable to college administrations, also took place on many campuses as ASU sponsored events.

By 1936 the marriage of incompatible elements began to disintegrate. The central issue of the ASU convention in that year was peace. The young Communists in their desire to support "the anti-fascist struggle" in Europe continued to be annoyed by the "stubborn pacifism" of the Socialists, Christians and liberals. Those groups in turn accused the Communists of attempting to undermine the ASU's antiwar program. In 1936 the YPSL sponsored an anti-collective security resolution that was almost adopted. The convention, to avoid an irreparable split, finally voted to leave out any specific reference to collective security. However, by 1937 the Communists had gained control of the ASU through the defection of Socialists (SLID members) on the Executive Committee to the Communist collective security position. At the 1938 ASU convention the Oxford Pledge was dropped as a program plank. The young Communist strategy now was that of outright cooperation with New Deal policies at home and abroad. The discontent of the pacifists and antiwar Socialists with this new direction was summed up by the "yipsels":

The American Student Union, founded as the agency of American students to combat war, war preparations and militarism, was converted, at its third congress, into an agency to support war when it comes, to justify war preparations and to condone militarism. This change, brought about largely by the Communists within the Student Union, foreshadows a campaign by the united jingoists to sweep the campus into the war camp, as was done in the pre-war months of 1916-17.²⁶

The anti-militarism and pro-peace orientation of the ASU was its unifying force. In 1938 the ASU claimed a membership of 20,000. By late 1938 many of the YPSL and SLID members had left the organization. However, the fatal blow for it was the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact.

The young Communists, firmly in control of the ASU, discarded collective security and defended the Soviet attack on Finland. By 1940 the ASU membership had dropped to less than 2,000 youth. Socialist and pacifist students had been important components of the Union. They had supplied it with a strong antiwar basis which had attracted thousands of students.

It was the youth group of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) which attempted to fill the vacuum created by the demise of the ASU. The YPSL and the SLID were plagued with factions in the late Thirties. The FOR urged students to participate in the antiwar strike of 1939 which had been abandoned by the ASU. Christian pacifist students had not had the commanding hand in the coalitions of the student movement but they were a very important element. The Methodist youth group was the most radical denominational group, and some of its national executives belonged to the YPSL. The YMCA and YWCA also were important to coalitions. In attempting to provide leadership among antiwar students, the FOR youth secretary thought that those students disillusioned with the ASU would be new recruits for pacifism and would turn to the FOR. Its youth section was tireless in its door to door campaigns and literature distributions. However both the young Communists and the young Socialists viewed the FOR and other religious pacifist groups somewhat contemptuously as religion and reconciliation oriented without a solid radical critique of society. Although its leadership among Christian pacifist groups was important, the FOR had only a small sympathetic audience and was unable to pull the liberals and the Socialists who had left the ASU into a renewed antiwar campaign.

The Student Movement in the 1940's and the Cold War Era

The entry of the United States into World War II dealt the final blow to the student movement of the 1930's. It placed the peace movement in a general state of confusion. By 1942 pro-war sentiment had captured the American campus. The draft and volunteer enlistment cut into the male population of the college campus and colleges mobilized for war preparations in the early Forties. "Higher Learning" was again sacrificed to war-time efficiency. About 440,000 students were enrolled in Engineering, Science and Management War Training courses set up by the Army and Navy. Even before Pearl Harbor two hundred youth leaders signed an appeal for a declaration of war.²⁷ The Student Defenders of Democracy was formed in New York in January of 1941 and claimed about 5,000 members after one year of existence. It resolved to aid the allies, to oppose isolationism, to encourage foreign people to support exile governments of their overrun nations, but to work for a just and lasting peace after the defeat of the aggressors. During the war colleges and universities had Student War Councils to organize student activities in war services. All of this served to reduce the antiwar movement to a murmur.

The two decades between 1940 and 1960 had very negative effects on left wing student politics in the United States. The young Communists and the young Socialists lost their hold on the campus.²⁸ For example, a post-war convention of the SLID held in 1946 was attended by only forty delegates from twelve schools.²⁹ During the early Forties the FOR was instrumental in organizing the Youth Committee Against War. The second annual meeting of the Committee held in December of 1940 was attended by 400 youth, many of whom were FOR members. It passed an eight point program to keep the United States out of war and upheld the right to conscientious objection. The Committee also made the Oxford Pledge part of its program.

The FOR youth section claimed an increase in membership of 1,400 members in 1941 and carried on an array of activities. It remained active during the war years. Under the leadership of A. J. Muste the FOR staunchly supported an anti-conscription campaign.³⁰ Nonviolent civil disobedience was a topic studied in many of its campus groups. Sporadically FOR groups on campuses sponsored antiwar activities and pacifist retreats.³¹ Nevertheless, it was unable to revive the broad student antiwar movement of the 1930's.

A small number of peace-oriented student groups sprang up after 1945. One such group was the Youth Council on the Atomic Crisis whose negative reactions to the Japan bombings caused it to dedicate itself to the peace-time use of atomic power. As the League of Nations concept excited the imaginations of some students in the 1920's, so did the idea of a world government appeal to some peace oriented students in the late 1940's. The United World Federalists (UWF) caught up this spirit. By the end of 1948 the UWF claimed about 40,000 members. However, the junior wing broke with the UWF because of some generational frictions. Some students felt that the UWF's goals were too esoteric while others felt the adult members were businessmen who viewed world government as a business operation.

The American Youth for Democracy (Communist) and the Wallace campaign diverted some student activity but generally the tone of student politics in the late Forties and early Fifties was set by liberal, anti-Communist groups such as Students for Democratic Action and the CIA-financed National Student Association. The largest of these, the NSA, reflected the post-war desire for international cooperation. The NSA, however, was very much a product of the Cold War and it grew from a solidly anti-Communist base.

By the 1950's the college campuses reflected the impact of the veteran, growing conservatism and the beginning of serious red-baiting. Applicants for Navy ROTC were asked to identify any persons they might know who had been associated with "subversive organizations." As a counterpart to McCarthyism, right wing student groups such as Students for America began to appear, and the climate was right for the emergence

of the Young Americans for Freedom in the early Sixties. The increased military prowess of America was important to all these groups.

Although rightwing and liberal anti-Communist groups were prominent in the Fifties, the student populace could not be labeled pro-war. A poll taken in 1953 suggested some antiwar spirit among students. Of those who responded 26 percent indicated they were strongly opposed to the Korean War and 36 percent indicated that they had reservations.³² Even with evidence of these feelings, the student peace movement continued to suffer a decline in the 1950's. The War Resisters League was reduced to a small core of supporters and the membership of the FOR dropped by about 3,000 members. The college section of the FOR under the direction of Bayard Rustin conducted peace caravans through the United States, but attempts to bring youth together in large antiwar conferences similar to those of the 1930's were not very successful. The conferences that did occur were confined primarily to religiously oriented students and did not attract large numbers of participants.³³

Nevertheless, the FOR did survive the apathy of the Fifties as did other leftist student groups. The Socialist groups, the YPSL and the SLID, continued to function with small memberships of two hundred each. The Communists changed the name of their student group from American Youth for Democracy to Labor Youth League (LYL), reflecting shifts in Party policy. The LYL maintained a small number of chapters during the Fifties, mainly on metropolitan campuses. But it was the religious pacifist groups like the FOR who were responsible for keeping the peace issue alive.

Along with already established pacifist organizations, the newly emergent National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and the Student Peace Union (SPU) created a more vitalized peace movement in the late 1950's. The student affiliate of SANE was founded in 1958, and although it included many left wing students, it generally followed SANE's liberal politics. Its major focus was on ending nuclear testing. The Student Peace Union was founded in 1959 by a combination of pacifists and Socialists in the midwest. For a period it was the largest radical student group in the United States with a national membership of about 5,000. The SPU, more radical than SANE, took a "third camp" position, favoring neither the militarism of the Soviet Union nor the United States.³⁴ It proclaimed itself as "a bold new effort to tear away at the apathy which enshrouds our campuses today," but reached its height in about 1961 and declined after that. An SPU-inspired campus event which attracted students was the anti-military ball. Creative antiwar skits and folk songs were an integral part of these social functions. Atmospheric weapon testing was an important demonstration focus for both SANE and the SPU. When the Soviet Union and the United States signed the atmospheric test ban treaty in 1962 the peace movement found itself devoid of an important central issue.

As the Twenties helped to lay some of the foundations for the antiwar movement of the Thirties, so the Fifties offered a legacy to the Sixties. Nonviolent civil disobedience as a protest tactic was developed by FOR youth section leaders whose ideas would be important to the Sixties.³⁵ The horrors of McCarthyism often tend to overshadow the fact that a peace movement did begin to emerge on the college campus in the late Fifties and that it too contained the non-violent sit-in as a protest tactic. Similarly, the attempts of the Student Peace Union to develop an ideological framework not dictated by any parent party would have fundamental relevance to the politics of the New Left.

For all its indebtedness to the past, the student antiwar movement that formed around the Vietnam War in the next decade displayed some important departures from the previous fifty years of antiwar student activism. Tidy comparisons often lead to gross oversimplification. However the new trends in the Sixties offer discernible contrasts. For instance, the movement that emerged then was not as dependent on "parent groups" for direction as were earlier movements. In almost all instances during the period 1900 to 1960 the antiwar activities of students were a direct outgrowth of close affiliation with such groups as the Communist and Socialist Parties or the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The "anti-war heroes" of the earlier period were older men like Eugene Debs and A. J. Muste. Except for the incipient revolt against the older generation in the 1920's and the SPU's attempt to define its own position, the period 1900 to 1960 can be characterized as a movement seeking direction from older antiwar advocates. A new group of young "anti-war, anti-heroes" such as Tom Hayden and Abbie Hoffman emerged during the Sixties.

The nature of the antiwar tactics employed also distinguishes the Sixties. The tactics employed from 1900 to about 1960 were non-violent and legal direct action. Prior to the 1930's the YPSL was the only student group which had employed the strike as an antiwar tactic. The anti-ROTC campaigns of the Twenties were carried out principally through petitions and campus votes. Even during the Thirties the antiwar student strikes and demonstrations were of short duration and non-violent. The Sixties marked the era of the "obstructive demonstration" and a new tactical approach of "violence for violence" to counter war-making efforts.

Finally the war in Vietnam did not induce the patriotic reactions that earlier wars in the century had induced. Sending troops into combat therefore did not weaken student protest, but rather invigorated it. Most important, the antiwar movement among students in the 1960's had more significant political impact than any of the earlier movements.

In retrospect it seems somewhat ironic that pacifist students have not had the principal leadership position in the student antiwar movement in the United States. Student pacifists waged no real opposition to World War I. A few liberal pacifists were sympathetic to the antiwar position of the YPSL in 1917, but like the elder pacifists few challenged Wilson's

war to end all wars. During the two most intense periods of student antiwar activity, the 1930's and the 1960's, leftist political groups commanded the direction of student antiwar activism. The role of pacifist groups during the Thirties strongly suggests that pacifist groups were conveniently manipulated by more politically oriented student groups. Pacifist groups certainly have made major contributions to the cause of peace among students, but their role has been more subtle than that of leftist antiwar groups. It was only when the more radical elements were unable to function in the Twenties and Forties that the pacifists stepped into the leadership and valiantly attempted to sustain the peace movement of the campus.

It is clear that antiwar student protest has been most intense and far-reaching when led by radical political groups. During these periods the antiwar issue has been connected to other social problems. When war has been tied to other social evils it has tended to radicalize more students. Certainly this has been true in both the Thirties and the Sixties. In the former the dynamic combination was the depression and an impending war and in the latter it was the ferment of the Civil Rights movement and the war in Vietnam. In these decades when radical groups provided antiwar leadership a pervasive critique of American society was set forth and broad coalitions could be formed. This brought less radical students into contact with leftist politics; but it also meant some compromise, both ideologically and tactically, on the part of more radical elements.

The major problem which has plagued radical student groups that have participated in the antiwar movement is their suspicion of one another. This was quite evident during the Thirties. Because of their commitment to the ideological position of their parent parties the young Socialists and the young Communists remained mutually hostile to one another in the midst of apparent cooperation. The hostilities among leftist political groups resulted in shaky antiwar coalitions. Also, because ideological agreement within each of these groups was of great importance, factions were far more debilitating, so that the leadership of the student antiwar movement was very fragile leadership.

War and the antiwar issue have also been important in intensifying generational differences. Karl Mannheim in his *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* cites war as a critical factor in the shaping of generations. Simply stated, war precipitates the political and social crises that have the capacity of molding the world view of a generation, distinguishing it from the next generation. This has yet to be empirically tested, but if the milieu in which one comes of age has anything to do with one's outlook, then antiwar protest must have a significant impact on youth still in the process of developing their perspective on the world. Just as wars have produced unifying bonds of patriotism, so too antiwar spirit has united those of divergent backgrounds and interest under a common cause. The antiwar movement of the 1930's for example had the effect of bringing

together anti-imperialists, a variety of anti-militarists, pacifists and radicals on domestic issues, and challenging their values and conceptions of society. It has been discovered that the parents of activists of the past decade are decidedly more liberal in political outlook than others of their social status.³⁶ These parents received their college education in the Thirties, a time of political ferment on the campuses. They graduated to the call to arms in World War II. Although it is not possible to calculate precisely the effect of the war and antiwar sentiment on them, or of the carryover to their children, it is worthy of serious consideration.

Militant patriotism has mobilized vast numbers of citizens, young and old. The antiwar movement has attracted a small minority. The minority of antiwar students has been further reduced in effectiveness by its fragile leadership and the tension of its competing ideological allegiances. Its existence has been significant, nonetheless. It has been a vehicle for the increasing self-consciousness of young people, and it has provided them with alternative policies and perspectives when civilization has been tested by war.

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footnotes

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1. Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, 1965), 278.

2. The group of "young rebels" who founded the ISS contained Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Clarence Darrow and Morris Hillquit among others. The origins of the ISS are discussed in Harold Lewack, *Campus Rebels: A Brief History of the Student League for Industrial Democracy* (New York: Student League for Industrial Democracy, mimeo, 1953). The early issues of the *Intercollegiate Socialist* are an important primary reference for the early development of the ISS.

3. A questionnaire sent to the ISS membership in 1913 showed that some members considered themselves non-socialists and even anti-socialists. Those who did view themselves as socialists represented a gamut of positions.

4. A. T. Trachtenberg, "The ISS and the War," *Intercollegiate Socialist*, 3 (October-November, 1914), 19.

5. For a more detailed account of the Convention and Conference proceedings of 1916 see Harry W. Laidler, "Intercollegiate Socialist Society Convention," *Intercollegiate Socialist*, 4 (February-March, 1916), 12-21 and "ISS Summer Conference," *Intercollegiate Socialist*, 4 (October-November, 1916), 4.

6. "The Coming Year," *Intercollegiate Socialist*, 6 (October-November, 1917), 4.

7. J. G. Phelps Stokes, "Universal Service in Peace and War," *Intercollegiate Socialist*, 6 (December-January, 1917-18), 12-15.

8. The convention resolutions on the war of various statewide and citywide YPSL units are reported in *The Young Socialist Magazine* (June, 1917).

9. Good general accounts of pacifists during this period can be found in Merle Curti, *Peace or War: The American Struggle 1636 to 1936* (New York, 1936), chapters 6 and 7; Charles Chatfield, "World War One and the Liberal Pacifist in the U.S.," *The American Historical Review*, LXXV (December, 1970), 1920-1938. It should be noted that pacifism before World War I for the most part meant a desire for international cooperation. Under the pressure of the war the definition narrowed to indicate complete opposition to war. See Chatfield, 1920. Pacifism will be used in the latter sense for the remainder of this paper.

10. For a fuller discussion of the role of militarism on the college campus see Arthur A. Ekirch, *The Civilian and the Military* (New York, 1956).

11. James Wechsler, *The Revolt on Campus* (New York, 1935), and Mollie C. Davis, "Quest for a New Order: Ferment in Collegiate Culture, 1921-1929" (unpublished manuscript used with permission of the author), offer good accounts of student outlook during the Twenties.

12. "Resolutions Passed by the Inter-State Conference of the Young Peoples Socialist League," (Pamphlet of February, 1929). A copy of this is in the Duke University Socialist Party of America Collection, YPSL files.

13. For example, at the University of Wisconsin the administration attempted to prevent the visit of Red Kate O'Hara. John Nevin Sayre and Kirby Page were also regarded as "dangerous speakers."

14. For detailed reports of the convention see "YM and YW Conferences," *New Student*, 6 (January 12, 1927), 1, and Kirby Page, "National Conference of Christian Students," *The World Tomorrow* (February, 1927).

15. "Student Volunteer Convention," *New Student*, 3 (March 15, 1924), 2.

16. "Anti-ROTC Campaigns," *New Student*, 1 (May 23, 1925), 1.

17. Wechsler, *Revolt on Campus*, 130-131.

18. In 1926 the LID Intercollegiate Conference and the Interdenominational Student Conference both went on record opposing militarism on the campus.

19. For example, see Wechsler, *Revolt on Campus*; Hal Draper, "The Student Movement of the Thirties: A Political History," in Rita Simon, ed., *As We Saw the Thirties* (Urbana, 1967); or George P. Rawick, "The New Deal and Youth" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1957).

20. Frank Olmstead, "The Significance of the College Peace Poll" (mimeo, War Resisters League, 1933). This is the text of an address on a nationwide hook-up under the auspices of the National Student Federation, May 15, 1933. A copy of this is in the Duke Socialist Party Collection, YPSL files.

21. Devere Allen, "The Peace Movement Moves Left," *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science*, CLXXV (September, 1934), 154.

22. A motion was passed by the YPSL in 1935 directing its college members to join SLID chapters. By 1935 the SLID had moved considerably closer to the Socialist Party's political position.

23. There are numerous accounts of the founding of the American Student Union. The publications of all the student organizations involved in the ASU carried reports; see also Wechsler, Draper, Rawick, *op. cit.*

24. A discussion of YPSL attitudes toward cooperating with the Communist students can be found in "Trends in the Student Movement" (Report of the National Student Secretary, YPSL, April 10, 1935), Duke Socialist Party Collection, YPSL files.

25. The United Student Peace Committee consisted of the American League Against War and Fascism, ASU, AYC, Committee on Militarism in Education, FOR, Foreign Policy Association, United Christian Youth Movement, Methodist Youth, WRL, NSFA, YWCA and YMCA. It was the ASU's attempt at a larger "united front" for strike planning.

26. Al Hamilton and Alvaine Hollester, "Left Jingoism on the Campus," *Socialist Review*, 6 (January-February, 1938), 9.

27. "The Tempo Quickens," *New Masses* (November 4, 1941), 5.

28. The Communists formed the American Youth for Democracy in 1943, but it had no significant impact on student politics.

29. Lewack, *Campus Rebels*, 17.

30. See the pamphlet, "Why We Refused to Register" (New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1941).

31. *Fellowship*, the FOR journal, indicates that FOR groups were active at such large campuses as the University of California and the University of Michigan where rallies were held and where antiwar petition campaigns were waged. Some small religious affiliated institutions actually witnessed antiwar strikes in 1941, but these were rare.

32. Edward Suchman, Rose K. Goldser and Robin Williams, Jr., "Attitudes Toward the Korean War," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 17 (1953), 173, 182.

33. "Christian Youth Conference on War," *Fellowship*, XVIII (June, 1952), 20.

34. For a general discussion of the politics of the SPU see Ken Calkins, "The Student Peace Union," *Fellowship*, XXVI (March 1, 1960), 5-7.

35. In the late Fifties the FOR listed among its youth section leaders James Farmer, David Dellinger and Bayard Rustin.

36. See Richard Flacks, "The Liberated Generation: An Exploration of the Roots of Student Protest," *Journal of Social Issues*, 3 (1967).