

by Elizabeth Tornquist



"Don't trust anyone over thirty" is now so common that even the radicals in the middle class have a good deal to offer the growing movement on the left. They are not much for taking the long chance and risking their place in the world; but they are wise in the ways of the world. They have talents, skills, contacts and money, and they approach politics with a commonsense developed over years of trying to fit hard facts into ideal visions. All this is reason enough for trying to involve more of them in the "movement." But there is another, perhaps more important reason: if the movement is not to stagnate, it must extend outward and begin to draw these people into its ranks; and only active use of their talents will draw them in. Scholarship money will not do it.

"OVER 30"

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It would like to start with the campus; though there are just as many potential radicals in the academic profession as in most other areas. The students who are going to extend the movement now.

NSM could play an important role here, by establishing a permanent field representative wherever it has contacts. The NSM representative would keep in touch with all radical student groups; with information from them from newspapers and from campus gossip, he would set up a permanent file, which might read thus: J.J. Smith, prof. of history, made three speeches against the war in Vietnam to women's clubs; B. Bush, M.A., wrote the local newspaper condemning the United Fund's support of segregated institutions, declined to take part in mobilizing students against the war in Vietnam; Jane Doe, faculty wife, telephoned a list of people to picket in support of striking school employees, etc.

This kind of information is important for several reasons: 1) unsolicited political acts by older people often go unrecorded and the people receive no credit; if records were kept they could be called on for other causes; 2) students leave the campus and take their knowledge with them, and the new radicals coming in must waste time and energy trying to locate radical faculty members; with a permanent file, this would be simple; 3) a record of acts by members of the general community could serve as a bridge between the radical segments of the community and the academic world; 4) a record of political acts shows the kind and degree of commitment a man feels; it is so easy to know what to ask of him and what to avoid asking; 5) the file can be used by NSM campus travelers, who needable time and energy locating faculty radicals through their personal contacts with students.

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The objection to the paper work involved seems to be to the time involved in making and maintaining contacts informally, through friends and friends of friends. As for the "social" objection, unless one keeps incriminating records, this seems ridiculous.

A non-partisan, non-activist political discussion group is a good way to bring campus radicals together and show their responsibility for making

OVER THIRTY

by Elizabeth Tornquist

"Don't trust anyone over thirty" is now so common that even Harper's is quoting it. But it is also common knowledge that the "older" liberals and radicals in the middle class have a good deal to offer the growing movement on the left. They are not much for taking the long chance and risking their place in the world; but they are wise in the ways of the society, they have talents, skills, contacts and money, and they approach politics with a coherence developed over years of trying to fit hard facts into ideal visions. All this is reason enough for trying to involve more of them in the "movement." But there is another, perhaps more important reason: if the movement is not to stagnate, it must extend outward and begin to draw these people into its ranks; and only active use of their talents will draw them in. Conscience money will not do it.

I do not have the answer to the question "how?"; I only have a few specific suggestions based on experience. I see two main problems: finding the potential radicals in the middle class and finding the right things to ask of them.

It seems wise to start with the campuses; though there are just as many potential radicals in other professions, the academic profession is most accessible to students, and it is the students who are going to extend the movement now.

SSOC could play an important role here, by establishing a permanent student representative wherever it has contacts. The SSOC representative would keep in touch with all radical student groups; with information from them, from newspapers and from campus gossip, he would set up a permanent file, which might read thus: J.J. Smith, prof. of history, made three speeches against the war in Vietnam to women's clubs; H. Nash, M.D., wrote the local newspaper condemning the United Fund's support of segregated institutions, declined to take part in mobilizing sentiment against the war in Vietnam; Jane Doe, faculty wife, telephoned a list of people to picket in support of striking school employees, etc.

This kind of information is important for several reasons: 1) unsolicited political acts by older people often go unrecorded and the people remain unknown; if records were kept they could be called on for other causes; 2) students leave the campus and take their knowledge with them, and the new radicals coming in must waste time and energy trying to locate radical faculty members; with a permanent file, this would be simple; 3) a record of acts by members of the general community could serve as a bridge between the radical segments of the community and the academic world; 4) a record of political acts shows the kind and degree of commitment a man feels; thus it is easy to know what to ask of him and what to avoid asking; 5) the file can be used by SSOC campus travelers, who now waste time and energy locating faculty radicals through their personal contacts with students.

The objection to the paper work involved seems to me to fall apart when this work is compared to the time involved in making and keeping contacts informally, through friends and friends of friends. As for the "moral" objection, unless one keeps incriminating records, this seems ridiculous.

A non-partisan, non-activist political discussion group is a good way to bring potential radicals together and show them possibilities for action.

The Durham discussion group asks professors, graduate students and members of the community to speak on such topics as Textile Organizing, Politics and the Novel, Cuba, China, Keynesian Economics, etc. The group is unstructured and has no commitment to any projects; but people who come for the talk meet others who are involved in action, and they often get involved themselves as a result.

Another way to bring people into "the movement" is to keep them informed through a monthly newsletter about the progress of all liberal and radical political activities in the area. If the newsletter is distributed to the whole campus, many people--who would otherwise remain ignorant--will discover that there are projects they would like to help with, and they will come forward without solicitation. (A striking example of the effect of a newsletter is the recent report to the Duke faculty by the union of non-academic employees. Many people who before were quite unaware of what was going on immediately offered their support to the union.)

Once you have contacts, the question is how to approach them and what to ask them to do. I can think of several do's and don'ts which are well known to radical students but are not always practiced by them. 1) Never ask anybody beyond undergraduate school to attend a meeting unless you know exactly what you mean to do at that meeting; it is important not to waste the time of busy, uncommitted faculty in fruitless discussions and long hashings over strategy. 2) Don't ask faculty members to form an organization. They already belong to too many committees and groups, and the less organization there is, the better they like it. 3) Don't ask a man to do busywork until he is thoroughly committed. And even then, try to give faculty members the impression that you are responsibly square like them. They are very quick to suspect that student radicalism is merely a form of adolescent rebellion, and it's wise to calm those fears. 4) When you ask a man to do something, try to let him do it his way, if that is not going to defeat your cause. The more responsibility you offer him and the more you accept his ideas about strategy and tactics, the more likely he is to get seriously involved. Older people feel a real psychological difficulty in accepting the leadership of students; try to keep your control over project developments subtle and flexible. 5) Ask older people to get involved in something that is already going; don't ask them to initiate a project for you. Few of them have the time or the desire to get involved in the mess of starting; they are cautious; they want to see that it's real before they commit themselves. At the beginning it's often helpful and always good politics to ask them for ideas and strategy; don't ask for action until the action is prepared for. 6) Never suggest that older people get involved where there is no chance of victory. They get very tired of hearing young radicals say, "You could take over the League of Women Voters." They've been in these organizations all their lives; if you can't find more hopeful projects, you will not get them on your side. 7) Never force people away because they aren't radical enough. If you say "We don't want anybody who's unwilling to go to jail" (as a civil rights leader in Chapel Hill once did), you merely alienate people who might become more radical through involvement.

It is my impression that success in organizing Negroes and the poor has come in part from following these do's and don'ts. All I am saying is that in spite of their money and status, the middle class academic world has a similar political psychology, and to organize them you must use the same patience, skill and subtlety as with other unorganized and politically powerless groups.

The specific projects you ask people to work on must of course depend on the situation in their area. Duke faculty members and graduate students have in the last year become involved in a number of projects which were suggested or encouraged by radical undergraduates. They have raised money for civil rights workers, held a teach-in on Vietnam, formed an ad hoc faculty committee to rally support for the union of non-academic employees and investigate administration positions on the union; attended union meetings and advised the

social committee and the organizing committee; aided the formation of a union newspaper and offered a reporter's clinic to teach writing; raised money for the non-official campus newspaper, The Real World, and contributed articles; supported (and picketed with) the striking school employees; and circulated petitions opposing the speaker policy at state schools; in addition they have done political work which has no connection with students, like raising money for the congressional campaign of a local liberal.

There are many other projects possible here: it is easy to take over the precinct organizations of the Democratic Party by organizing support before the precinct meetings; a civil rights movement could be started in nearby Chatham County, where the citizens are ready and willing to work; a weekly liberal newspaper on the model of I.F. Stone could get financial backing and contributions of articles. One can think of dozens of things. And there are many people who are willing to work on all such projects, as organizers, researchers, speakers, fund-raisers, and writers. The problem is finding a full-time person to organize and run the project. All the things faculty people are working on now are run by someone else, either a student or a union organizer. Faculty members do not have the time to do it all themselves; they have other roles to fill. But their talents often go wasted simply because there is no full-time person to organize a project and tell them specifically what to do. (A civil rights movement actually got started in Chatham County last summer and folded because the faculty and union people who supported it were unable to find a person to live in Chatham County and work full-time, even though they were able to get the money to support him.) It seems to me that SSOC might be some help here; if SSOC had a representative on campus to tell them about possibilities and problems as they come up, the organization might be able to supply the cash to start a project or find a full-time person to take it over. That would get rid of major obstacles to further radical involvement of faculty members, graduate students, and members of the general community.

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