

Introduction to THE MOVEMENT

By Terrence Cannon & Joseph A. Blum

The era of democratic rebellion, mass resistance, and social change, which we now call "The Sixties," lasted almost twenty years. From the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott to the last major anti-Vietnam War demonstration of 1972, millions of Americans became involved in the diverse struggles collectively known as "the movement". Thousands were arrested, beaten, and jailed. Some died. The times were defined vividly by rallies, demonstrations, and teach-ins, marches, sit-ins, strikes, and mass arrests, uprisings and riots: the outward forms of popular resistance. No less an upheaval was the challenge to traditional systems of belief. By the end of the era, few centers of authority had escaped critique: the state, the governing and social elites, the military, industrial, and educational systems, the dominant culture, the press, parents, men: in short, the system.

For six years during that era, a small-circulation newspaper, THE MOVEMENT, was published each month in San Francisco and distributed nationwide. At its peak, it produced a 25,000 copy press run with 2,500 paid subscriptions. Of the many "underground newspapers" that flourished during this period, it is appropriate that THE MOVEMENT should now be posted on the web (Farmworker Movement Documentation Project), reproduced in facsimile (Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers Project), and the originals archived at San Francisco State's Labor Archives and Research Center).

There can be no sustained rebellion or resistance without organizers. No militancy can be effective without that core of people who compile lists, knock on doors, call meetings, argue, convince, fail to convince, return, call other meetings, hand out leaflets, write, talk, and take risks. Some become visible as public leaders. Most remain unknown.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was remarkable in that it was essentially an organization of organizers. The vast majority of the staff worked in the South, where, beginning in 1960, they led the sit-in movement, spearheaded voter registration projects, and organized Black communities at the grassroots level. Some SNCC field secretaries established offices in the North and West to raise funds and generate publicity and political support. Many of these offices became centers of community organization and political activity.

In 1964, SNCC Field Secretary Mike Miller established the San Francisco Friends of SNCC office. He asked Terry Cannon, a twenty four-year-old writer who had helped him launch a community-organizing project in the

Fillmore District, to set up a newsletter that would keep West Coast SNCC supporters in touch with activities in the South.

Cannon -- who edited THE MOVEMENT until he left to organize Stop the Draft Week in 1967 and face trial in the Oakland Seven conspiracy case -- transformed the mimeographed bulletin into a newspaper, expanding coverage along the lines of SNCC's projects, interests, and contacts. Thus, the July 1965 lead story covered efforts to organize day laborers in the Mississippi Delta, while a related report described the farmworker organizing drive in Delano, California. An editorial attacked Lyndon Johnson's nomination of segregationist J. P. Coleman to the U.S. Supreme Court. Depositions challenging the election of five Mississippi Congressmen were excerpted, and U.S. business connections to South African apartheid exposed.

The sources for most of these stories were the organizers themselves. This established THE MOVEMENT's signature approach: its heart lay in organizing, its strength in reports from the field. Early staff members spent as much time trying to block shipments of boycotted grapes as they did covering stories; over the next several years, however, the paper built a network of organizer/correspondents who reported and debated throughout its pages. They generated information available almost nowhere else. This approach led *Radical America* to write, in 1968: "Over the last four years THE MOVEMENT, published monthly in California, has been the best single source of information and commentary from the New Left."

There was a pressing need for this information. The sheer expanse of the United States and the extent of the movement made face-to-face meetings among organizers difficult and communication expensive. People had trouble just keeping up with their own region. Activists were largely young and mostly isolated from the previous generation of radicals by the political repression of the fifties. (The organizers of the lunch counter sit-ins, for example, were amazed when they later learned of the sit-down strikes by rubber and auto workers in 1936-37.) They needed a publication that would tell them not only what was happening, but how it had been done.

How do farm workers conduct a strike where there are no factory gates? How can GIs be contacted and organized outside the military bases? How do you create an independent Black political party? What are student strikers facing on other campuses? The answers were nowhere to be found in the mass media. The corporate journalists who peered into the invariably "shabby offices" of radical organizing were interested in maintaining the status quo, not in aiding a rent strike or a boycott on grapes. From the start,

THE MOVEMENT defined itself as the medium for events and issues the mass media tended to trivialize or ignore.

Despite this political core, the paper valued art, poetry, music, and drama. Frank Cleciorka's artwork charged covers and feature stories with a graphic line that made his wood-engraved clenched fist a radical icon of the era. Poems by Worth Long, Diane DiPrima, and Judy Grahn, music reviews, stories about community theater and dance companies, and reports on innovative cultural projects were all seen as part of the act of political creation.

How was THE MOVEMENT staff able to accomplish what it did? The location helped. As one of the epicenters of the movement, the San Francisco Bay Area was distinguished by a radical past and present. San Francisco was still a "Labor Town" that proudly recalled the 1934 General Strike; labor militants blacklisted in other parts of the country were welcomed on the San Francisco docks. Elements of the Old Left, wounded by McCarthyism but still active, maintained a fairly nonsectarian and helpful attitude toward their New Left counterparts, many of whom were their children. Large, politically sophisticated Black communities were active on both sides of the Bay. A few hours away, hard-fought campaigns to organize agricultural workers in the Thirties were reawakened by Cesar Chavez' United Farm Workers Association. U. C. Berkeley, long a center of progressive politics, was joined by campuses in San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland. A broadly liberal middle-class provided political and financial support. People, resources, and contacts were accessible.

THE MOVEMENT staff spent a lot of time maintaining direct contact with the field. A typical month's schedule might send two staff members out of town for several weeks, often across country, to attend meetings, report on major events, or organize. A ten-day editorial frenzy of writing, editing, layout, paste-up, printing, and shipping capped the month. There was no institutional funding. Money was raised through a network of sustainers, periodic fund-raising events, and mailings. Most staffers were volunteers; others lived on subsistence pay. (During one insolvent period, a staff member kept the paper afloat by monthly visits to Reno, where he played successful system blackjack until invited to leave by casino henchmen.)

The editorial board that ran THE MOVEMENT aspired to be both democratic and collective, to break down the old distinctions between leaders and followers, between mental and manual work. It was a constant struggle. In the early years, men tended to write, women did the office work. Some intellectuals balked at having to bundle papers or type address

cards. But, in general, the staff took seriously the participatory democracy called for by the broader movement. Everyone knew they were expected not only to write, edit, and discuss, but to typeset, lay out, paste down, bundle, and ship. Otherwise, the paper could not have been produced.

Most important, it was the unique network of movement activists, organizers, and leaders -- in Chicago, New York, Atlanta, Seattle, Madison, New Mexico, Detroit, Austin, and Washington, D.C. --that gave THE MOVEMENT national scope and influence. The network widened after 1966, when a number of campus-based activists were added to the staff, including Joe Blum, who became editor in 1967. The staff included those with roots in both SNCC and SDS, who were involved in and trusted by numerous radical groups in the Black, white, and Latino communities, including the Black Panther Party, Rising Up Angry, Young Lords, Alianza Federal de los Pueblos Libres, the SDS/ERAP projects, and League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

As that network expanded, the paper began to fill with detailed analytical articles written by activists explaining to themselves and others how they understood their work and organizations. The editorial board maintained an extensive correspondence with the writers, framing and defining questions, discussing issues, sharing information that came from those in the field, shaping articles as they were written and revised. As debates over strategy and tactics became more frequent, the paper came to be seen as a forum where a lively diversity of ideological and political views could be aired, a place where organizers could describe how they grappled with everyday problems in their communities, while trying to build movements for racial equality at home and to end the brutal war abroad.

Many questions needed to be debated. Should anti-war organizers focus on large-scale demonstrations or less visible long-term work? Should demonstrations be nationally coordinated? How militant should they be? Should community work in the community focus on multiple issues or on stopping the war first? What should be the strategy in the northern Black ghettos: organizing in the community over police repression and control of local institutions or focusing at the worksite on jobs? Other debates concerned the relative importance of working-class organizing, the relationship among Blacks, whites, and Latinos within the movement, and the connection between the political movement and the counterculture.

THE MOVEMENT's bond to the Black, Latino, anti-war, and student movements made it the single source where one could read Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, Bobby Seale, and Huey Newton on Black Power, Rennie Davis' initial plans for mass demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic

Convention, Fannie Lou Hamer on the connection between the Black freedom movement and the Vietnam War, the response of poor whites in Chicago to the Black uprisings, a meeting with Vietnamese revolutionaries in Cambodia, radical Black unions in the auto industry, Mark Rudd's only published analysis of the Columbia student rebellion, the experience of French students in May 1968, and interviews with the Third World students leading the strike at San Francisco State.

By the end of 1969, THE MOVEMENT's strength -- that it was written by people engaged in the struggles about which they reported -- was becoming its weakness. SNCC and SDS no longer functioned. Much of the movement was in disarray, divided by factional disputes or destroyed by repression. As responsible dialogue diminished, the paper found itself without correspondents or a staff able to continue.

For six momentous years, however, THE MOVEMENT never let up: a political handbook on the run, committed, populist, democratic, and radical to the last page.