

LIVING THE MOVEMENT: LIBERATION NEWS SERVICE, MONTAGUE FARM,  
AND THE NEW LEFT, 1967-1981

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## Abstract

BLAKE SLONECKER: Living the Movement: Liberation News Service, Montague Farm, and the New Left, 1967-1981  
(Under the direction of Professor Peter G. Filene)

This dissertation uses the Liberation News Service (LNS)—the Associated Press of New Left underground media—and Montague Farm—a commune created by former LNS staffers—as a lens through which to trace the evolution of the American New Left after 1968. The establishments of underground newspapers—often organized as work collectives—and communes were two of the most ubiquitous and emblematic gestures of the late 1960s and early 1970s. For this reason, LNS and Montague Farm serve as ideal subjects to reveal how institutions founded on the ideals of late-1960s activism adapted their politics to survive in the adverse political culture of the 1970s. By tracking these two groups, this dissertation grounds the events of the 1970s in the legacies of the 1960s. Along the way it explores the divergent aspirations of the communal counterculture, the evolution and demise of the New Left, and the quotidian challenges of *living the Movement*. Both groups drew from their political worldviews in order to shape their daily lives, creating new divisions of labor, new social arrangements, and new personal politics. With these trends in mind, this dissertation extends the chronological breadth of “the Sixties,” rethinks the relationship between political and cultural radicalism, and explores the relationship between diverse social movements. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that *living the movement*—through emphases on personal liberation and

egalitarianism—became a central institutional survival strategy amid the demise of the New Left and the emergence of an adversarial national political culture. LNS accomplished this goal by continually revising its collective work structure; Montague Farm did so through communal living, antinuclear activism, and alternative energy organizing. This entwined institutional history suggests that the New Left's endgame was significantly more drawn out and complicated than defeatist New Leftists and triumphalist conservatives would have us believe. Indeed, both LNS and Montague Farm maintained a broad vision of Movement activism through the dusk of the 1970s.

To Andrea, for your love, support, and weekends.

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\* \* \*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AEC	Atomic Energy Commission
AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COINTELPRO	Counterintelligence Programs
CWLU	Chicago Women's Liberation Union
CWP	Communist Workers Party
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FCAEC	Franklin County Alternative Energy Coalition
GLF	Gay Liberation Front
GMPPF	Green Mountain Post Films
LNS	Liberation News Service
LNS/Montague	Liberation News Service, Montague faction (1968-1969)
LNS/NY	Liberation News Service, New York faction (1968-1969)
LSE	London School of Economics
MUSE	Musicians United for Safe Energy
NO Party	Nuclear Objectors Party
NOPE	Nuclear Objectors for a Pure Environment
NU	Northeast Utilities
PL	Progressive Labor
PSCo	Public Service Company of New Hampshire
RMBB	Radical Media Bulletin Board

RYM	Revolutionary Youth Movement
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
SCN	Student Communication Network
UMass	University of Massachusetts, Amherst
USSPA	United States Student Press Association



## Introduction

### Living the Movement at the Dawn of the 1970s

On the morning of August 11, 1968, something unusual was happening in the Harlem basement of Liberation News Service (LNS)—“a guerrilla army version of Associated Press” for the New Left underground.<sup>1</sup> Even at the height of the tumultuous 1960s, even in the shadows of the Movement hotbed at Columbia University, even with LNS’s ever-expanding subscriber base of underground rags then numbering five hundred, the office was normally quiet on Sunday morning. But the group that cleared the printing equipment from the Harlem basement that particular morning was an atypical band of thieves. Among the crew, in fact, were the organization’s two founders—Marshall Bloom and Ray Mungo. While LNS was less than a year old, a deep ideological fissure had already developed between the organization’s founders and a set of upstart newcomers. After loading the press and other paraphernalia onto a borrowed truck parked on Claremont Avenue, the gang began the three-hour drive to Montague Farm, a commune they had secretly purchased in rural Massachusetts. The heist took place in broad daylight; their counterparts had slept in and stayed away from the office after attending a late LNS benefit showing of The Beatles’ *Magical Mystery Tour* the night before.

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Utne and Jay Walljasper, introduction to *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with Liberation News Service, at Total Loss Farm and on the Dharma Trail*, by Raymond Mungo (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970; and San Francisco: Houghton Mifflin, 1975; reprinted; New York: Citadel Underground, 1990), v.

In the following days, the New York faction followed a paper trail that led to the neighborhood post office where they discovered a forwarding address for Montague Farm. A group of New York staffers and friends immediately drove out to the farm to recover the equipment. They arrived near midnight.

Stories about what happened next radically vary. Did a group of crazy New Yorkers run around the farm yelling “we’re militants,”<sup>2</sup> hold the communards captive in their new home, and beat a “naked and limp” Bloom until “scarlet rivers [ran] down from his face across his chest and down his legs”<sup>3</sup> Or did “most of the ‘captives’ [join] their ‘captors’ in singing civil rights, gospel and folk songs,” with only a minimum of violence?<sup>4</sup> We will never know. Regardless, the New Yorkers failed to recover the press and soon returned to the city. But before long the New York faction acquired new equipment and each group continued to publish news packets, claiming to be the authentic LNS.

The LNS split sent one faction to a pair of rural communes and left another faction in the hustle and bustle of New York City’s Movement radicalism. But their respective histories had only just begun. Amid the complex and ever-shifting political and cultural terrain of the 1970s, Montague Farm and Liberation News Service continued to agitate for social change for the next thirteen years. The story of these counterinstitutions illuminates a fundamental shift in American political culture and has wide-ranging implications for the stories we tell about this watershed moment.

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<sup>2</sup> “Dear Friends,” LNS/Montague 100 (August 16, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Mungo, *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with Liberation News Service* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 178.

<sup>4</sup> “Dear Friends,” LNS/NY 100 (August 19, 1968).

Ultimately, we ask a simple question: How did institutions founded on the ideals of late-1960s activism adapt their politics to survive in the adverse political culture of the 1970s?

The tangled roots of LNS and Montague Farm allow us to follow two vectors of activism that shared a common heritage in the turbulence of 1968. By tracking these two groups, we will ground the events of the 1970s in the legacies of the 1960s. Along the way we will explore the divergent aspirations of the communal counterculture, the evolution and demise of the New Left, and the quotidian challenges of *living the Movement*—a goal common to both groups.

At first glance, the establishment of Montague Farm would seem to fit nicely into familiar narratives of the origins of the counterculture’s back-to-the-land movement.<sup>5</sup> The Bloom faction fled the city, established rural communes critical of the “technocratic society,” and eventually—albeit temporarily—settled into a strictly agricultural pattern of life. Many themes central to our understanding of the counterculture—including how communal arrangements impact sexual and gender identities, authority and leadership, and conceptions about family life—played out at Montague Farm.<sup>6</sup> But these rural communards did not consider their move to be an escapist retreat into isolation. They instead deemed the move to be a radical extension of New Left politics and an advance into a new mode activism for “the New Age.” In this way, the LNS split underscores that

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<sup>5</sup> The history of this movement is exemplified in Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Random House, 1984); and Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> For sex and gender at disparate communes, see Bennett M. Berger, *The Survival of a Counterculture: Ideological Work and Everyday Life Among Rural Communards* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); and Timothy Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). For familial relations at communes, see Berger, *Survival of a Counterculture*; and John Rothchild, *The Children of the Counterculture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976).

communes maintained a wide spectrum of ideological missions.<sup>7</sup> LNSers on both sides of the split conceived of themselves as members of the New Left and dreamt of a Movement that crossed divisions of race, class, and gender.

But what was the New Left? And did it ever really exist? Historians influenced by the work of Todd Gitlin, Maurice Isserman, and James Miller have used the term as a synonym for the white student vanguard led by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).<sup>8</sup> Folks at LNS and at the farms certainly fit into this mold. They were overwhelmingly white and boasted backgrounds in student and civil rights activism. But—and here is the critical distinction in discussing the New Left—regardless of whether the Movement existed in reality, it existed in the ideals, models, and dreams of virtually everybody who passed through LNS and Montague Farm. The understanding of the New Left as a collection of smaller movements, indeed a “movement of movements”—including civil rights and black power, antiwar and student, women’s and gay liberation, environmental and prison, and the full rainbow of racial identity

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<sup>7</sup> The most eloquent spokesperson for the myriad origins of communalism is Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999). For the repositioning of counterculture as vital to the period’s constellation of grassroots social movements, see the articles collected in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); and James Miller, *“Democracy Is in the Streets”: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). The publication of these three texts set off a firestorm debate over the New Left. For the most eloquent critique of Gitlin’s “New Left,” see Wini Breines, “Whose New Left?” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 2 (September 1988): 528-45. Historians’ persistent tendency toward organizational histories of Movement groups—including, but not limited to SDS—contributes to this compartmentalization. For classic organizational histories, see Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Council* (New York: Morrow, 1986); August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); and Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973). This charge could certainly be leveled against “Living the Movement,” but I have attempted to limit the telescopic tendency of the genre by tracking two distinct Movement groups with a common history. Furthermore, LNS’s position as a clearinghouse of Movement information facilitates grappling with the impact of disparate movements on a single institution.

movements—formed the very basis of the politically eclectic LNS packet.<sup>9</sup> LNS’s emphasis on serving a broad Movement blurred the boundaries between the white student left and other social movements, while contributing to the rising radicalization of the time.<sup>10</sup> Even Montague Farm’s later activism—without revealing too many plot points—furthered the 1970s trend toward single-issue movements at the same time that it attempted to build a diverse constituency.<sup>11</sup>

The underground press provides a revealing window onto the period’s political culture. Proliferating in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the underground provided a communications infrastructure for the New Left and the counterculture. But the underground’s widespread implementation of collective work structures formed a key

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<sup>9</sup> For “movement of movements,” see Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Gosse, *Movements of the New Left, 1950-1975* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005); and Gosse, “A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left,” in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 277-302. Some scholars have questioned the usefulness of Gosse’s characterization of the New Left as a movement of movements, claiming that it is too sweeping and does not adequately represent the contentious realities of the relationships between social movements. See especially Doug Rossinow, “The New Left in the Counterculture: Hypotheses and Evidence,” *Radical History Review* 67 (Winter 1997): 79-120; and John McMillian, “Locating the New Left,” *Reviews in American History* 34, no. 4 (December 2006): 551-56. Regardless of the *accuracy* of this concept, however, it nicely represents the hopes and dreams of many—mostly young and white—activists who aspired to create a movement of movements.

<sup>10</sup> For a classic account of the often tenuous relationship among New Left movements, see Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979). Recent accounts of cross-movement activism include W. J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Rossinow, “New Left in the Counterculture”; and Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). The finest account of political radicalization after 1968 is Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> For antinuclear activism, see Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Epstein, “The Politics of Prefigurative Community: The Non-violent Direct Action Movement,” in *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s*, vol. 3, *The Year Left*, ed. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1988), 63-92.

contribution to the period's grassroots activism.<sup>12</sup> Every day and in every facet of work and life, underground outlets were *living the Movement* through egalitarianism and participatory democracy. While not directly concerned with work collectives, historian John McMillian nevertheless uses the underground to illustrate how thoroughly participatory democracy imbued grassroots Movement life by 1968. Describing the underground press as "the New Left's most significant counter-institution," McMillian argues that "most of those who worked in the underground press in the late 1960s saw to it that their activism, and their lives, were all mixed together."<sup>13</sup> LNS exemplified this trend.

By the late 1960s, activists had entwined political and cultural radicalism to create a New Left counterculture. Underground newspapers played a key role in this development. In college towns and urban enclaves across the country, underground journalists created a distinctive brand of activism that encompassed all aspects of their lives. At the offices of Austin's *The Rag*, for example, local student activists and counterculture advocates created a hip scene that became the city's central symbol of

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<sup>12</sup> For the most thorough account of the underground's work collective trend, see Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985). For the underground media, see Robert J. Glessing, *The Underground Press in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970); and Laurence Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries: The Rise of the Underground Press* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972). For underground newspapers as literary texts, see Matthew T. Pifer, "Dissent: Detroit and the Underground Press, 1965-69," Ph.D. Diss., University of Oklahoma, 2001; and Maxine Ruvinsky, "The Underground Press of the Sixties," Ph.D. Diss., McGill University, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> John McMillian, "Smoking Typewriters: The New Left's Print Culture, 1962-1969," Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 2006, 211, 274. McMillian places LNS near the center of his analysis and utilizes the split as prime evidence of the underground's devotion to participatory democracy. McMillian is right: participatory democracy formed the crux of the LNS split. However, the split also represented a low-water mark for democracy at LNS. As we will see, LNSers identified 1969-1972 as the organization's "great democratization period," in which they leveled existing hierarchies and inequalities of power within the collective.

New Left counterculture.<sup>14</sup> But this entwinement was not confined to the underground. Food co-ops also emphasized alternative culture as part and parcel of the collective workplace. The concept of a New Left counterculture provided a convenient middle ground between political and cultural radicalism.

Cross-movement alliances of all kinds came under stress in the 1970s, however, as the American left transformed into a splintered collection of Marxist pre-party formations and single-issue identity movements. As the ideological inheritors of SDS's Marxist self-destruction, dozens of New Communist organizations fought to establish a revolutionary line appropriate to America's exceptional circumstances.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, co-op coalitions between political and cultural radicals established at the dawn of the 1970s grew ever more tenuous. In the Twin Cities, a 1975 "co-op war" between radical "Stalinoids" and a counterculture faction bore startling resemblance to the LNS split of 1968, prefigured conflicts that would emerge at LNS, and revealed how the rise of a New Communist Movement challenged existing New Left countercultures as the 1970s unfolded.<sup>16</sup> Any hope of establishing a coherent, singular, and radical Movement became seriously crippled by ideological minutiae. At the same time, racial and sexual identity politics pushed to the fore of American activism. Radical feminism, moreover, shared the

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<sup>14</sup> For *The Rag* and Austin's New Left counterculture, see Rossinow, "New Left in the Counterculture"; Rossinow, "'The Revolution Is about Our Lives': The New Left's Counterculture," in Braunstein and Doyle, *Imagine Nation*, 99-124; and Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*.

<sup>15</sup> For the New Communist Movement, see Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*.

<sup>16</sup> For food co-ops in the Twin Cities, see Craig Cox, *Storefront Revolution: Food Co-ops and the Counterculture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

New Communist Movement's propensity to split theoretical hairs and to divide into ever-smaller and narrowly focused pockets of activism.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, counterculture advocates discovered exciting new avenues of political activism throughout the 1970s. The antinuclear movement emerged as a single-issue movement that sought broad advocacy while continuing an emphasis on New Left counterculture.<sup>18</sup> Communal institutions played a central role in the growth of "no nukes" activism. The creation of gay and lesbian communes and the expansion of the Applied Technology movement represented two narrower activist avenues that the counterculture also pursued.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, tension between identity politics and broader Movement idealism ran through all of these movements.

Clearly, the relationship between political and cultural radicalism forms a critical element of how we understand the period from 1967 to 1981. But the political/cultural divide misrepresents in important ways what was often a conflict over how activists might go about *living the Movement*. Historian Wini Breines provides a theoretical apparatus more appropriate to analyzing the histories of LNS and the farms in her monograph, *Community and Organization in the New Left*. Breines's book is best understood as a study of the tension between "strategic" and "prefigurative" politics. Strategic politics aims to build "organization in order to achieve major structural changes

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<sup>17</sup> For 1970s radical feminism, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> For antinuclear activism, see Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*.

<sup>19</sup> Robert McRuer, "Gay Gatherings: Reimagining the Counterculture," in Braunstein and Doyle, *Imagine Nation*, 215-40; Andrew Kirk, "'Machines of Loving Grace': Alternative Energy, Environmentalism, and the Counterculture," in Braunstein and Doyle, *Imagine Nation*, 353-78; and Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).



in the political, economic, and social orders.”<sup>20</sup> Prefigurative politics emphasizes personal liberation and egalitarian values within social movements:

Prefigurative politics, by attempting to develop the seeds of liberation and the new society prior to and in the process of revolution through notions of participatory democracy, often grounded in counter-institutions, meant building community. . . . The central impulse toward community and democracy was precisely its political content.<sup>21</sup>

Prefigurative politics consists of the attempt to establish an ideal society based on democratic principles here and now. While the goals of prefigurative politics differed from those of strategic politics, these two political forms were intimately linked throughout the New Left and the counterculture.

The New Left posited a challenging vision of strategic politics that aspired to level hierarchies and to eradicate economic, political, and social inequalities. But all too often New Leftists failed to extend this vision to create organizations that prefigured the society they envisioned. Ella Baker—the quiet matriarch of the civil rights movement—found herself an “outsider within” key civil rights groups because of her “radical democratic vision” that largely consisted of prefigurative egalitarianism.<sup>22</sup> Female activists across the civil rights movement experienced this alienation. Likewise, SDS failed to perfect its prefigurative idealism during its Economic Research and Action Projects and its later radicalization.<sup>23</sup> The discrimination women faced in these movements helped spark the women’s liberation movement. But radical feminist groups

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<sup>20</sup> Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal*, new ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Breines, *Community and Organization*.

eventually succumbed to similar internal tensions.<sup>24</sup> By the late 1960s, activists created counter-institutions—including underground newspapers and communes—that placed prefigurative politics at the center of their missions.

Prefigurative politics rang true to activists on both sides of the LNS split, allowing us to probe the often messy relationship between Movement activism and Movement life. This is the central concept that will inform the chapters to come, as we trace LNS and Montague Farm growing into mature institutions from the divisive seed of the 1968 split.

The split has attracted historians' attention because it sheds light on a host of developments from the late sixties.<sup>25</sup> But the split is more important as a prologue to the vibrant, revelatory, and complex rearrangement of political values and lifestyles that swirled through LNS and the farms over the next thirteen years. The questions arising from the split came easily enough. But the answers remained an open book that would be written in the dirt and ink of everyday life.

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<sup>24</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*.

<sup>25</sup> LNS appears in passing in general accounts of the 1960s. When LNS does come up, the split figures prominently. Todd Gitlin portrays the split as one between hippies and Marxists, and describes the resulting New York office as an example of a collective “of artists-manqué-turned-revolutionaries.” *The Sixties*, 240, 405. Kirkpatrick Sale, meanwhile, describes the LNS split as one between “one group emphasizing culture and another more strictly political and more activist.” *SDS*, 269. Sale also cites the organization as evidence marking “the decline of reformism, and the start of revolutionary alternatives.” *Ibid.*, 488. LNS plays more of a starring role in the historiography of the underground media. The most thorough historical account of the underground is Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties*. Helpful contemporary accounts of the underground media include Glessing, *Underground Press in America*; and Leamer, *Paper Revolutionaries*. While typically dealing with LNS's internal debate over democracy, none of these accounts of the underground significantly challenge Mungo's original portrayal of the split as one between a “virtuous caucus” and “vulgar Marxists.”

## Chapter 1

### Prologue—Hello, Goodbye: The Liberation News Service Split

In an abandoned loft near Washington DC's Logan Circle, hundreds of news junkies representing dozens of underground newspapers from across the country gathered on the eve of the 1967 Pentagon March to listen to a sales pitch from Marshall Bloom and Ray Mungo. But amid the chaos of impromptu poetry readings and the barrage of bitter and often funny recriminations, it was well-nigh impossible to hear Bloom describe the goals of Liberation News Service. Had the horde been able to catch Bloom's scheme, Mungo later wrote, they would have heard about plans "to provide a link among the antiestablishment presses, to offer hard information to the Movement."<sup>1</sup> But Bloom did not protest too severely. There he was dressed in a navy Sergeant Pepper coat and contributing to the uproarious milieu by burning his draft card. Postmortems of the meeting generally agreed with Michael Grossman of the *Washington Free Press*: "What came out of the first gathering, was little more than the acknowledgement of the existence of LNS. . . . The community of papers that we hoped would develop, did not. . . . The scene was absurd."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the underground had acknowledged LNS's

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Mungo, *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with Liberation News Service* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Grossman, "Underground Press Joins Theater of the Absurd," *Washington Free Press*, November 23, 1967, 5.

existence. And the tumult of its first year would provide all the seeds of conflict and activism we will need for the coming chapters.

## Hello

From its beginnings in the fall of 1967, LNS sought to cover a swath of social movements and to distribute its news packets to the nation's burgeoning underground media. Its growth was swift and consequential; every component of its organization pushed LNS toward rapid expansion and increased circulation.

Marshall Bloom followed a circuitous route to the Pentagon March. His father sold furniture in Denver, Colorado, earning a comfortable upper-middle-class lifestyle for the family. And Marshall showed every sign of future success. A neat and trim youth, he was tirelessly energetic, naturally entrepreneurial, and a leader in the Rocky Mountain region of the Jewish service organization, B'nai B'rith. A self-identified Kennedy liberal when he left for Amherst College in 1962, his politics took on a radical bent as he ventured into civil rights and antiwar activism. By 1967, his hair had grown longer—eventually forming what he called a Jewish Afro—and the tips of his mustache slowly dropped into a fu Manchu.<sup>3</sup>

Mungo grew up in more modest surroundings. The son of working-class folks in the hardscrabble mill town of Lawrence, Massachusetts, Ray mustered his way through Catholic school on smarts and scholarships. He later boasted about his Stephen Dedalus coming-of-age. Slightly built, he liked his spectacles round and his hair wavy. Soon after

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<sup>3</sup> For the best account of Bloom's early life, see Hillel Goldberg, "Anatomy of a Suicide," *Intermountain Jewish News*, Literary Supplement, May 16, 1986.

arriving at Boston University in 1963—again on a hefty serving of scholarships—Ray self-identified as a “violent Marxist.” But he also tended toward aesthetic radicalism, as theater and dope became trademark endeavors of his college years.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these divergent beginnings, Bloom and Mungo shared backgrounds in student journalism, where both worked as influential editors of college papers in New England during the mid-1960s. Bloom headed the *Amherst Student* during the 1965-66 academic year. But his college activism was not limited to student journalism. In early 1965, he “went south” to Selma, Alabama, where he helped found the *Southern Courier*—an independent black newspaper—and researched his thesis on Jewish attitudes toward the black community during the civil rights movement. He later famously staged a walk-out at his 1966 graduation in protest of Robert McNamara’s commencement address. Mungo, on the other hand, edited the *Boston University News* during the 1966-67 academic year and controversially editorialized in favor of Lyndon Johnson’s impeachment.<sup>5</sup>

In the spring and summer of 1967, the two began an alliance that would eventually lead to the creation of Liberation News Service. In 1966, Bloom began advanced studies in sociology at the London School of Economics (LSE), where students elected him president of the Graduate Students’ Association. When Bloom led a protest against LSE’s appointment of a Rhodesian apartheid advocate as its director—during which an LSE porter incidentally died of a heart attack—he was suspended and deported. Back in the United States, Bloom won election as the general secretary of an organization

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<sup>4</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 1-4.

<sup>5</sup> Goldberg, “Anatomy of a Suicide.”

of college newspaper editors called the United States Student Press Association (USSPA). He asked Mungo to tag along.<sup>6</sup>

The impetus to create Liberation News Service came in the wake of the USSPA's surprising refusal to confirm Bloom as its executive director. Bloom and Mungo attended the August 1967 USSPA Congress in Minneapolis with the expectation that Bloom's election would be rubber-stamped. But Bloom and Mungo had recently penned and distributed a letter critical of the National Student Association (NSA)—an important USSPA sponsor. The letter—composed in the name of the USSPA, but without its permission—denounced NSA's connection with the CIA in the aftermath of *Ramparts* magazine's notorious March 1967 disclosure of an NSA-CIA connection.<sup>7</sup> Bloom later recalled the painful eviction:

I cared deeply and was deeply hurt and frightened by the eviction; and so involved subjectively that I couldn't get outside myself to make an objective strategy, and though I was in despair afterwards and languished for what seemed months, LNS was actually begun within a month. And instead of being a small time bureaucrat intrigued by the underground press and still alienated from the underground, we became its news service.<sup>8</sup>

On the evening of Bloom's ouster, fifteen newspaper editors walked out of the USSPA Congress to attend the Minneapolis meeting at which LNS was born.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Leader of British Student Revolt Speaks on Student Politics," *BU News*, April 26, 1967, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Sol Stern, "A Short Account of International Student Politics and the Cold War," *Ramparts*, March 1967, 29-38.

<sup>8</sup> Marshall Bloom, *The Last Journal of Marshall Bloom*, [August 1969], 75, Marshall Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folders 40 and 41, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library. Pages numbers for Bloom's Last Journal refer to the manuscript rather than the typescript. When Bloom's notoriously poor handwriting proved illegible, I cross-checked using the typescript document prepared by his literary executors.

<sup>9</sup> For a summary of the USSPA conference, see Austin C. Wehrwein, "Student Editor Ferment," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 21, 1967, 12.

Bloom had never been a good fit for the USSPA. Mungo later wrote that Bloom “was a dangerous & irresponsible left-winger” in the eyes of USSPA editors.<sup>10</sup> From another perspective, the circumstances surrounding Bloom’s removal were tied to his closeted homosexuality. “Marshall’s faggoty manner,” soon-to-be LNS colleague Allen Young sympathetically wrote in 1973, “was a major factor in some people’s negative attitudes towards him and in the eventual decision to fire him.”<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the circumstances causing Bloom’s USSPA firing, the themes of political radicalism and sexuality would continue to haunt LNS as the organization matured.

LNS expansion was rapid. By September 26, LNS had added sixty student and underground newspapers to its initial mailing list of fifteen papers; shortly thereafter the number ballooned to ninety, including two papers based in London.<sup>12</sup> Within weeks of the USSPA fiasco, LNS subscriptions had expanded by six times. Demand clearly existed for the LNS news packet, initially published from Washington on a haphazard schedule before later settling on a twice-weekly routine. In October 1967, LNS’s five full-time staffers fanned out across the country: Bloom and Mark Steiner attended an SDS conference in Madison, Max Smith traveled to New York for research, and Elliott Blinder set out for Boston. Meanwhile, at the central office on Church St. NW in Washington,

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<sup>10</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Allen Young, “Marshall Bloom: Gay Brother,” in *Voices from the Underground*, vol. 1, *Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, ed. Ken Wachsberger (Tempe, AZ: Mica’s Press, 1993), 60. This article originally appeared in *Fag Rag*, no. 5 (Summer 1973): 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> “What has happened since the USSPA Congress,” LNS (September 26, 1967); and LNS (October 1967?). All citations of Liberation News Service packets will include—when available—author, title, issue number, and date. Page numbers have been omitted from early packets because pagination is inconsistent (even within individual issues) and because packets are short enough to easily find articles. Especially in LNS’s earliest packets, citation information is not always available. The author accessed LNS packets through *Underground Newspaper Collection*, microfilm (Wooster, OH: Bell and Howell, 1967-81); and—for the select issues that were omitted from microfilm—Liberation News Service Records, Contemporary Culture Collection, Temple University Library.

Mungo began preparations for LNS's first national meeting, scheduled for October 20, the eve of the Pentagon March.<sup>13</sup>

The recipe for the meeting was two parts disaster, one part success. On the one hand, the *Washington Free Press* rightly declared that “chaos reigned [and] the scene was absurd.”<sup>14</sup> Drugs, poetry readings, and outrageous costumes dominated what had promised to be a foundational networking meeting of the underground. On the other hand, *something* meaningful occurred in that loft on the evening before the Pentagon March. At one point, the *East Village Other's* Walter Bowart announced: “I am told that the editors present here today represent more than fifteen million young readers. Fifteen million people who have yet to exercise one iota of the social, economic, and political majority they possess.”<sup>15</sup> These numbers are exaggerated, but the potential influence gathered in the loft was enormous. Unfortunately, the energy proved difficult to harness. Mungo remembered that “it was clear on first meeting our constituency, that LNS was to be an uneasy coalition.”<sup>16</sup>

What had been the original conception of LNS that failed to materialize at the October 20 meeting? Initially, Bloom and Mungo had focused on the foundational concept of participatory democracy. Soon after the gathering, however, Mungo realized that their “conception of LNS as a ‘democratic organization,’ owned by those it served,

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<sup>13</sup> LNS [October 1967].

<sup>14</sup> Grossman, “Underground Press Joins Theater of the Absurd,” 5.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 70.

<sup>16</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 20.



was clearly ridiculous.”<sup>17</sup> It did not take long for Mungo to entirely abandon the spirit of democracy. Six weeks after the Pentagon March, LNS moved to a new location at 3 Thomas Circle NW, which it shared with various leftist organizations, including the local chapter of SDS and the *Washington Free Press*. Mungo’s later observations about the operation of the *Free Press* illustrate his emerging disillusionment with participatory democracy in action: “Since the *Free Press* never had an ‘editor’ or ‘business manager,’ it was presumed that the ‘entire staff’ made all the decisions. But the newspaper itself gave the impression that nobody made any decisions. Meetings of the ‘entire staff’ were periodically called . . . and at times lasted as long as ten or twelve shouting hours.”<sup>18</sup> This democratic spirit quickly faded at LNS, if it had existed at all. And conflict over the meaning of democracy remained a shade haunting LNS.

In lieu of democratic organization, LNS’s Washington digs came to embody what Mungo and others described as “magic.” The resulting free community, Mungo later recalled, bordered on anarchy:

A free community does not have meetings, and your attendance is never required in a free community. You are welcome to do whatever comes to mind, so long as it does not actively harm others, in a free community. Nothing is expected of you, nothing is delivered. Everything springs of natural and uncoerced energy. Compassion and understanding will go a long way toward making your community free, delegation of labor will only mechanize it.<sup>19</sup>

For the twenty-one-year-old Mungo, the twenty-three-year-old Bloom, and other early staffers, magic was the guiding spirit of the organization and accounted for much of LNS’s appeal. Harvey Wasserman—a graduate student in history at the University of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

Chicago as he drifted into the LNS orbit after the October meeting—remembered the (dis)organization with similar fondness. “The news service was colorful, lively, obscene, and funny,” Wasserman remembered. “While I typed rock-and-roll lyrics in the margins of the mailings, Marshall was holding the operation together with mirrors in a way that would put Jay Gould to shame. He got money from nowhere, sent it somewhere else, and two days later equipment would arrive. Magic!!”<sup>20</sup> Magic perhaps, but the philosophy came under stress as LNS expanded.

And expansion was inevitable. Bloom and Mungo sought to crystallize the period’s paragon of a fused Movement through a “glorious scheme of joining together the campus editors, the Communists, the Trots, the hippies, the astrology freaks, the pacifists, the SDS kids, the black militants, the Mexican-American liberation fighters, and all their respective journals.”<sup>21</sup> It was a grandiose vision for a handful of LNS staffers. In fact, it represented the hopes of an entire activist generation seeking to build a movement of movements.<sup>22</sup>

But in LNS’s opening issues coverage of the black freedom struggle lagged behind that of the antiwar movement in both volume and depth. Consistent civil rights and black power coverage, of course, formed a prerequisite for LNS to successfully ascend to central Movement status. So as its circulation grew, LNS sought to resolve this shortcoming. With black power and black separatism on the rise that winter, it proved

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<sup>20</sup> Harvey Wasserman, “The Joy of Liberation News Service,” in Wachsberger, *Voices from the Underground*, vol. 1, *Insider Histories*, 53-54.

<sup>21</sup>Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> For a definition and historicization of the term “movement of movements,” see Van Gosse, “A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left,” in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 277-302.

difficult for a group of white underground journalists to gain entrée to the workings of the radical wings of the black freedom movement.<sup>23</sup> The creation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) short-lived Aframerican News Service in Atlanta, however, provided the means by which LNS expanded its coverage without adding to its staff or workload. LNS announced that Aframerican News Service "provides information important to blacks, written by black brothers and sisters around the country."<sup>24</sup> Thus, LNS deferred to black separatist autonomy by reprinting black journalism while moving toward its goal of broad movement coverage. Unfortunately, it also provided an excuse for an all-white organization to remain racially homogeneous for the foreseeable future.

LNS also registered the earliest tremors of the women's liberation movement in early 1968, but the organization did not faithfully apply its central tenets. Particularly Mungo revealed an early, albeit quirky—and chauvinist—fascination with the women's movement in a self-reflective article on the January Jeannette Rankin Brigade march in Washington: "I asked my chick to her face if *she* felt oppressed and she said no. . . . But . . . all movements start mildly—and if it was only Avon Calling this time around, it may be the fire next."<sup>25</sup> For Mungo, the central grievance made by women's libbers—and one to which he was sympathetic—focused on the "historic slavery of women to men, the unjust reduction of women to basically servile roles."<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, when LNS added Verandah Porche—a close friend of Mungo's from Boston University—as its "editor of

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<sup>23</sup> For an analysis of SNCC's internal debate about the position of white members within the organization, see Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 236-42.

<sup>24</sup> "Enter Aframerican News Service," LNS 24 (January 3, 1968).

<sup>25</sup> Raymond Mungo, "It's All Right, Ma: Only Avon Calling," LNS 29 (January 17, 1968).

<sup>26</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 65.

poesie,” the unofficial job description included much that falls under the category of “servile roles”: “Miss Porche came to us, as fates would have all great poets, a hungry and homeless waif, and is now bringing joy unto our humble home. Lately, she has been pasting-on-labels, a most unMuselike task, and undertaking a variety of other shitwork necessary to keep us going, and all without salary or even very much food.”<sup>27</sup> Porche quickly emerged as a central figure in the Bloom-Mungo cabal, but LNS’s immediate curiosity with the women’s movement did not lead to a liberated job description for LNS’s editor of poesie. Neither did it translate into the erosion of Bloom’s and Mungo’s editorial authority or of LNS’s anarchic magic.

If LNS’s application of women’s liberation was suspect, the organization did begin to make gestures toward the movement following the Jeannette Rankin Brigade protest. LNS published no articles written solely by women in its first twenty-nine issues, up to and including Mungo’s coverage of the Brigade march; but in the following ten issues, at least eight articles listed women as their sole authors. Furthermore, LNS released a special LNS women’s issue on June 18, 1968, which included a series of poems by Diane Di Prima and coverage of the movement’s early manifestations.<sup>28</sup> LNS—like so many sixties groups—begrudgingly embraced the women’s movement, without dramatically restructuring its staff or its organization.

Mirroring the growth of its black freedom and women’s liberation coverage, LNS expanded its staff that winter. Allen Young emerged as the new LNSer with the greatest

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<sup>27</sup> “Announcement,” LNS 40 (February 12, 1968). For a similar description of the treatment of Nina Sabaroff, see Deaver Collins, “The Liberation News Service,” May 1973, 27, David Kerr Research Materials on Liberation News Service and the Alternative Press, Box 1, Folder 1, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

<sup>28</sup> LNS 83 (June 18, 1968).

influence over the organization. Unique among early LNS staffers for his background in professional—rather than student—journalism, Young came to LNS in December 1967 soon after returning from a three-year tour of Brazil and Chile, funded by Fulbright and Inter-American Press Association grants. Upon his return to the United States, Young took a job on the police beat for the *Washington Post*.<sup>29</sup> But he quickly became disillusioned with the *Post*'s staid liberal approach to the period's social movements. Young met Bloom and Mungo through contacts at the *Washington Free Press*, and he immediately joined them and three others on the LNS board of directors. Not surprisingly—in light of his professional journalistic aspirations and experience—Young had little interest in the anarchistic magic that pervaded the home and office at 3 Thomas Circle. Instead, he sought a political reorientation. “As soon as I left the *Post*, and started working for the LNS,” Young recalled in 1970, “I also began looking for a political group that I could relate to, and SDS seemed to be the one. . . . I felt very warmly toward the SDS. I think that Ray and Marshall did not.”<sup>30</sup> Young's quest for political authenticity took him outside of LNS.

Bloom's political ideology remained less clear. In the summer of 1968, Bloom reflected on his former political eclecticism:

In an ideological discussion [I reminded myself] how really “pro” SDS I was, if being anti-SDS meant not believing in the existence and evilness of exploitation, capitalism, and imperialism. . . . Alas, why do I have to feel so singular, as one

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<sup>29</sup> Allen Young, interview by author, June 22, 2008, Royalston, Massachusetts. See also Allen Young, “Red Diaper Baby: From a Jewish Chicken Farm in the Catskills, to the Cane Fields of Cuba, to the First Gay Protests in New York City,” *Viet Nam Generation* 7, nos. 1-2 (1996?): 25-33; and Ethel Grodzins Romm, “You Go Underground For ‘Inside’ Report,” *Editor and Publisher*, May 11, 1968, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Collins, “Liberation News Service,” 16-17, Kerr Research Materials, Box 1, Folder 1.

who believes in so many Truths of so many people—Diggers, SDS, Yips, pacifists, Avatars, etc?<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, these broad sympathies were at the heart of LNS and represented much of its appeal to the Movement underground.

Nevertheless, political conflict between Bloom and Young became evident in a debate over LNS's relationship with SDS and the Yippies. By early 1968, SDS and Yippie had emerged as the New Left's leading antiwar groups. But they agreed on very little strategy in the months of planning prior to the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.<sup>32</sup> As SDS and the Yippies made overtures toward LNS, conflict developed between Bloom and Young. SDS's organizing potential and theoretical base appealed to Young, while the Yippies' theatrical absurdity appealed to Bloom's magical side. Neither group successfully prodded LNS into a formal alliance and both attracted coverage. LNS printed six lengthy pieces by Jerry Rubin to promote Yippie and several shorter articles covering Yippie performances.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, coverage of SDS remained common, but these pieces rarely approached the advocacy journalism of Rubin's articles, which bordered on Yippie propaganda throughout the spring and summer of 1968. The

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<sup>31</sup> Bloom, journal, August 20, 1968, Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folder 35. In a letter from February or March 1968, Bloom negatively expressed his broad politics of the period: "I am ordinarily an anti-Rubin around here, literally, screaming and yelling he is dangerous and wrong. But, on the other hand, you should know the alternative: SDS is telling people NOT to come to Chicago this summer, which is madness. Even more mad than Rubin can possibly be." Marshall Bloom to Steve [Diamond], [February or March 1968], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 19.

<sup>32</sup> For a balanced treatment of the two perspectives, see David R. Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> For Rubin articles, see especially "Guerrilla Theatre Opposes War in London and New York," LNS 18 (December 8, 1967); "What the Revolution is All About," LNS 26 (January 10, 1968); "'Don't Trust Anyone Over 34,'" LNS 38 (February 7, 1968); "Yippees are Coming Coming Coming to Chicago," 48 (March 1, 1968); and "Elvis Presley Killed Dwight Eisenhower," 58 (March 25, 1968). It is worth noting that LNS printed two articles critical—to varying degrees—of Yippie. For these, see Michael Rossman "I Don't Believe YIP Can Legislate Participation," LNS 60 (March 29, 1968), which is harsh; and Harvey Wasserman, "That Wonderful Town," LNS 54 (March 15, 1968), which is ponderous. Mungo outlines the SDS-Yippie conflict in *Famous Long Ago*, 60.

SDS-Yippie conflict pushed Young even further outside of LNS in his search for political support and inspiration.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Young's experience and leadership, Bloom remained LNS's unquestioned authority. An unspoken bond between Bloom and Mungo—Bloom indicated in an early 1968 letter—made this an easy arrangement: “One of the ways LNS has worked from the beginning is that Mungo and I agree on so many things we don't even have to talk about them.”<sup>35</sup> Most other LNSers happily followed Bloom's lead. Wasserman affectionately remembered Bloom's authority: “We thrilled to his insanity, chortled at his insufferability, were dazzled and infinitely warmed by his loving genius, and were confused by where he dragged us. . . . He took acid while Washington burned and tried to walk the streets in his Moroccan challaba carrying a little toy bird that dangled from a string.”<sup>36</sup>

Young was not thrilled. To him, chaos was not to be celebrated: “The house was such a pig-sty. . . . Ray and Marshall, were just really into being dirty hippies. . . . Everything was *totally* chaotic. There was *no* structure.”<sup>37</sup> Young's critique, however, extended beyond mere style. When LNS held meetings—an uncommon affair in its early months—Young sensed that Bloom manipulated the conversation to arrive at his preconceived ideas. Furthermore, Young sensed that Bloom and Mungo were “very full

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<sup>34</sup> Collins, “Liberation News Service,” 22, Kerr Research Materials, Box 1, Folder 1. For a fascinating retrospective analysis of Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman, see Marty Jezer, *Abbie Hoffman: American Rebel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Marshall Bloom to Todd [Gitlin?], n.d., Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 27.

<sup>36</sup> Wasserman, “Joy of Liberation News Service,” 52, 54.

<sup>37</sup> Collins, “Liberation News Service,” 18, 23, Kerr Research Materials, Box 1, Folder 1.

of themselves [and] were really into being gurus.”<sup>38</sup> Not only did Bloom’s and Mungo’s leadership annoy Young, he found it to be insincere: “I feel that their phony attitudes towards magical blah-blah, or whatever, totally ignored the reality of what it meant to publish this news service—and not only to publish this news service, but to struggle against the establishment press and Nixon and Johnson and . . . the political situation.”<sup>39</sup> Not surprisingly, other staffers picked up on this tension. The conflict was simple, but problematic to Wasserman: “Allen was down-to-earth, believed in carefully thought-out positions and political consistency. Marshall was an affront to Allen’s sensibilities; Allen was an affront to Marshall’s taste in art.”<sup>40</sup> Bloom was a charismatic and polarizing leader.<sup>41</sup> Those who believed in Bloom—including Mungo and Wasserman—were willing to follow his chaotic lead; those who did not transferred their angst directly upon his shoulders. This was a tenuous alliance.

But 1968 was not a good year for tenuous New Leftists. And LNS had been swept into the swirling currents of change that swept through the Movement. Black activists called for black power; women rallied for women’s liberation; and peaceniks debated strategies for that August’s Democratic National Convention in Chicago. With so much news to track, LNS lost sight of its internal operation. Sustainability had been put on hold to keep up with the Movement’s breakneck pace. And more tumult lay on the horizon.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>40</sup> Wasserman, “Joy of Liberation News Service,” 56.

<sup>41</sup> Bloom embodied the Weberian sense of charisma and magic functioned as his *modus operandi*. By the sheer force of his personality and his capacity to imbue mundane office tasks with spontaneity and zest, he attracted a set of followers within LNS who were willing to follow his every step. For my understanding of charisma, see “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority” and other essays in Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).



The expansion and transformation of the American underground finally forced LNS to rethink and restructure its mission. One essential narrative dominated the underground's evolution in early 1968: the media began as a psychedelic outlet for hippies before expanding and transforming into a radical political voice. Robert J. Glessing—an early historian of the underground—most eloquently spoke to this transformation: “[The underground press] turned abruptly in 1967 from an expression of flower-child love, participatory rock music, and occult religion to coverage of campus unrest, police confrontation, and radical politics.”<sup>42</sup> This decentralized expansion and transformation represented the emergence of a potential force in American youth culture and activism. As a new organization seeking immediate currency and leadership within the underground, LNS faced difficult decisions about how it would define its politics and organization.

Meanwhile, expansion came at a dizzying rate. By February 1968, LNS maintained a subscription list that included 150 underground rags and 90 college newspapers, while claiming an audience of more than 4.6 million readers.<sup>43</sup> Within two months the number had swelled to 280 subscriptions.<sup>44</sup> LNS published two and sometimes three news packets per week and set up teleprinting machines in Washington,

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<sup>42</sup> Robert J. Glessing, *The Underground Press in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 60. For echoes of Glessing's original argument, see Laurence Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries: The Rise of the Underground Press* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972); and Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties*.

<sup>43</sup> “Leftists and War Foes Set up Center in Capital,” *New York Times*, February 16, 1968, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Pepper, “Growing Rich on the Hippie,” *The Nation*, April 29, 1968, 570.

Chicago, Berkeley, and New York. But Mungo later recalled that “[LNS] grew beyond our ability to keep up with it.”<sup>45</sup>

In turn, the quality and objectivity of LNS copy declined. Mungo sometimes played fast and loose with the facts when putting together LNS packets:

We were not sticklers for accuracy—neither is the underground press in general, so *be advised*—but our factual errors were not the product of any conspiracy to mislead the young, but of our own lack of organization, shorthandedness, and impatience with grueling research efforts. *Facts* are less important than *truth* and the two are far from equivalent, you see; for cold facts are nearly always boring and may even distort the truth, but Truth is the highest achievement of human expression.<sup>46</sup>

Two other important LNS staffers expressed similar views later that year. In an article published in the *New York Times*, Thorne Dreyer declared that “objectivity is a farce,” and Daniel McCauslin stated that “we’re not held together by massive objectivity, but by trust.”<sup>47</sup> These were what media critic Michael L. Johnson would in 1971 call “artists of nonfiction,” exemplars of a new journalism that had “broken away from traditional journalistic practice to exercise the freedom of a new subjective, creative, and candid style of reportage and commentary.”<sup>48</sup> But with his background in professional journalism—where fact-checking is at least professed if not often attained—Young felt uncomfortable with Mungo’s tricks.<sup>49</sup> Even Young, however, was open to a limited objectivity. “We have returned to the concept of 18th and 19th century American

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<sup>45</sup> Raymond Mungo, *Beyond the Revolution: My Life and Times Since Famous Long Ago* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1990), 23.

<sup>46</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 75.

<sup>47</sup> John Leo, “Politics Now the Focus of Underground Press,” *New York Times*, September 4, 1968, 49.

<sup>48</sup> Michael L. Johnson, *The New Journalism: The Underground Press, the Artists of Nonfiction, and Changes in the Established Media* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1971), xi.

<sup>49</sup> See Collins, “Liberation News Service,” 31, Kerr Research Materials, Box 1, Folder 1.

journalism,” he argued, “when newspapermen were passionately partisan.”<sup>50</sup> Even when the new journalism did not entirely deny objectivity, it smelled of forthright advocacy.

To maintain consistent copy from around the United States and Europe—and to avoid the necessity of dreaming up half-baked stories—LNS established branch offices in London and Berkeley in its first winter. LNS set up its first international telex wire machine in late December and quickly moved to establish an International Communications Network office in Oxford, England. Two of Bloom’s chums from his year at the London School of Economics translated LNS articles into foreign languages and began distributing packets to papers in England and on the continent. By March, Oxford LNSers also telexed stories to Washington, initially from London, but increasingly from stations across Europe.<sup>51</sup> Similar developments occurred on the home front. During the first week of January, Bloom and Mungo flew to Cleveland, Ohio, to attend a conference of the University Christian Movement and met with leaders of the Student Communication Network (SCN), an LNS-like outfit operating out of Berkeley. After much haggling, SCN agreed to function as a west coast LNS bureau, establishing a critical source of stories just as LNS packets grew thicker and demand increased.<sup>52</sup>

Winter turned into spring and yet another LNS bureau popped up, this one in New York City at the behest of SCN. As important as the Berkeley and London bureaus were for increasing and improving LNS copy, the establishment of a New York office north of Columbia University was the key development of early 1968. The office—founded by Columbia junior Steve Diamond and former Columbia graduate student George

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<sup>50</sup> Romm, “You Go Underground For ‘Inside’ Report,” 82.

<sup>51</sup> LNS 52 (March 11, 1968); and Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 42-43.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

Cavalletto—modestly began on Cavalletto’s tab. After Bloom’s first visit to the New York office, he wrote a friendly note to Cavalletto: “I enjoyed very much and was inspired by my visit to the office today. The building is wonderful. And the people? The people are real menschs. (Ask [Philip] Roth what that means).”<sup>53</sup> As activism at Columbia heated up during the first four months of 1968, the New York office became increasingly central to LNS coverage.<sup>54</sup>

Simultaneously, the Washington office fell into a funk. The riots that plagued the neighborhoods around 3 Thomas Circle following Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination provided a symbolic backdrop to LNS’s internal confusion. Mungo remembered this period as critical to his personal transformation. He began to question LNS’s mission and to reevaluate the qualitative consequences of LNS expansion:

Our subscriptions were up to five hundred or more, but we all had to agree that the vast majority of underground papers were not worth reading—not merely because the printing and art were so bad, but more because the content was banal, illiterate, or jingoistic. . . . We’d become a stagnant filler service for a lot of fourth-rate publications, we’d done some eighty issues without a rest, we all hated each other, we were hungry and overworked to the point of exhaustion, we were frenzied and mad.<sup>55</sup>

The fatigue grew and slowly led to reflection:

Easter came. . . .

Verandah and I kept Easter vigil in the basement . . . considering how our lives had been given over to slavish routine and mindless tasks, wondering how we got *there* after starting out on such a noble, idealistic level. . . . We kept our vigil . . . until the word *VERMONT* popped into our heads, almost simultaneously. Vermont! Don’t you see, a farm in Vermont! A free agrarian communal nineteenth-century wide-open healthy clean farm in green lofty mountains! A place to get together again, free of the poisonous vibrations of Washington and

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<sup>53</sup> Bloom to Cavalletto, [spring 1968], Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 27.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Diamond, *What the Trees Said: Life on a New Age Farm* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), 5; and Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 139-40.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

the useless gadgetry of urban stinking boogerin' America! The Democratic Republic of Vermont!<sup>56</sup>

This was not an entirely new development for Mungo. In July 1967—just as the idea of LNS had sprouted—Mungo wrote to Bloom from Packer Corners, Vermont: “Did you ever stop to think how superior Boston is to most places, including Washington, D.C. but not including Packer Corners? Well, it’s true.”<sup>57</sup> Four months later—in the midst of founding LNS—Mungo again wrote to Bloom from Packer Corners: “A second 100 acres have gone on sale here and if I can get hold of any bread, I’d like to take a mortgage on it next spring. It could be a very good institute for emerging radical journalists as well as a haven for poor types like us who like to get away from it all—and I do mean all.”<sup>58</sup>

Clearly, Mungo had arrived in Washington with a rural bias and with relocation plans. When the tireless mundanities and thankless but necessary office tasks mounted, Mungo turned to rural retreatism as a new ideal. Personal enlightenment had been sacrificed to organizational expansion; Mungo and Porche sought a new direction.

And as they began the slow relocation from Washington to Vermont, Bloom began to toy with the idea of a rural news service, free from the tethers of urban America. In February, Marshall enviously wrote to Mungo: “I am stuck in the city yet with our reactionary news service which doesn’t yet know that the cities are capitalist cities and the world we seek cannot be attained by working within them anymore than by working with the Democratic party or LIFE Magazine. But the LNS people have full hearts and

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 107-08.

<sup>57</sup> Mungo to Bloom, July 15, 1967, Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 16.

<sup>58</sup> Mungo to Bloom, November 6, 1967, Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 23.

open minds and I am sure we will join you soon.”<sup>59</sup> Nobody in the New York office, however, would have seconded Bloom’s assertion that the news service might relocate to Vermont or any other rural destination in the near future.

Word of Mungo’s and Porche’s planned departure slowly filtered through the organization, but the move would take months to complete. In the meantime, Mungo continued to influence the direction of the organization. In late April, Mungo, Porche, and Bloom left Washington for a lengthy road trip across the South to California, where they met up with the SCN staff in Berkeley. They were gone for nearly four weeks, leaving Young and Marty Jezer—a tried and true New Yorker who floated over to LNS when the collective at *WIN* magazine fell on hard times—to run the Washington office. The timing of the trip was fateful.

The Columbia University protest of 1968 is among the touchstone moments of the 1960s, and LNS coverage of the event was unparalleled in the underground or mainstream presses.<sup>60</sup> Bloom, Mungo, and Porche, however, were three thousand miles away on April 23, when Columbia students stormed Hamilton Hall and set off the weeklong protest. Meanwhile, Young happened to be in New York City and joined a handful of other LNSers inside the protest’s five communes.

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<sup>59</sup> Bloom to Mungo, [February 1968], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 19.

<sup>60</sup> For the Columbia protest, see Jerry L. Avorn, et al., *Up Against the Ivy Wall: A History of the Columbia Crisis* (New York: Atheneum, 1969); and Blake Slonecker, “The Columbia Coalition: African Americans, New Leftists, and Counterculture at the Columbia University Protest of 1968,” *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 967-96.

Mainstream press coverage distorted the Columbia protest and angered students.<sup>61</sup> Columbia trustee Arthur Ochs Sulzberger served as the president and publisher of the *New York Times*, which ran notoriously pro-administration and anti-activist stories throughout the week. The major metropolitan dailies—to say nothing of the national media reporting on the incident—misrepresented the number of students participating in the strike, the degree of destructive actions taken by protesting students, the role of the faculty in the protest, and many other issues throughout the week. The student-run *Columbia Daily Spectator*—sympathetic to, but independent from the protest—carefully catalogued these inconsistencies and placed a sign on its door to fend off “prostitutes of the national press.”<sup>62</sup> Seventy-five students grew so angry over *New York Times* coverage of the protest that they picketed Sulzberger’s Fifth Avenue home on May 2.<sup>63</sup>

*Times* coverage of the Columbia protest created a void to be filled by the underground, and the opportunity for widespread LNS publicity could not have been riper. LNS covered the event extensively in its next five issues, including insider photographs and student perspectives unavailable elsewhere. The Columbia protest appealed to Young equally for its political implications and for what he saw as a “cultural

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<sup>61</sup> For mainstream coverage of the Columbia protest, see Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 150-52.

<sup>62</sup> Tom Hamilton and Allen Young, “Columbia: The Students Stick With It,” LNS 71 (May 3, 1968). For examples of discrepancies between mass media and student-run media, see Alice Embree, “The Urban Removal Masquerade: Columbia and the New York Times,” *Rat*, May 17-30, 1968, 4; Michael Stern, “Damage Negligible in Low; Demonstrators Keep Order,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 26, 1968, 1; Stern, “City Newspapers Distort Protests,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 27, 1968, 1; Stern, “Twisting the news: perspectives or prejudice?” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 10, 1968, C6; Robert B. Stulberg, “Report Buildings Vandalized After Students Leave,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 2, 1968, 7; and “Misrepresentations,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 7, 1968, 2.

<sup>63</sup> “75 Students Picket Sulzberger’s Home,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 3, 1968, 1.

revolution” that took place in the five communes.<sup>64</sup> These exciting developments captured Young’s imagination. He later recalled that “the whole idea of moving to New York really took hold in my mind when I visited the New York office around the time of the Columbia strike.”<sup>65</sup> For his part, Wasserman remembered that “Columbia sent a feeling of power into us that was only duplicated in moments that summer when it seemed the French students had succeeded in toppling the Fifth Republic.”<sup>66</sup> By the time Mungo, Bloom, and Porche returned from California in the middle of May, not only had everyone tired of life in Washington, but Young had spent considerable time in New York becoming acquainted with the New York staffers. He had also grown resentful of the burdens placed on him by Bloom’s and Mungo’s departure at precisely the moment that LNS required intelligent and thorough leadership. Factionalization was underway.

Driven by rising disillusionment and the emergence of Columbia as a Movement hub, LNS decided to move its headquarters to the New York office within a few weeks and to keep a skeleton staff of three behind in Washington. Mungo reflected on this new direction with disappointment: “The movement as we knew it had changed from flowers and yellow submarines, peace and brotherhood, to sober revolutionary committees, Ché-inspired berets, even guns, and there was nothing we could do to stop it. We made the mistake of making LNS an organ of The Movement, and now that The Movement was sour and bitter, LNS had to follow.”<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, Mungo recognized how untenable it

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<sup>64</sup> For Young’s political analysis of the protest, see “Columbia: Just a Little Political Analysis,” LNS 71 (May 6, 1968). For his cultural analysis, see “Columbia Eyewitness: Cultural Revolution,” LNS 73 (May 13, 1968).

<sup>65</sup> Allen Young, interview by David Kerr, May 4, 1977, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folder 4.

<sup>66</sup> Wasserman, “Joy of Liberation News Service,” 54.

<sup>67</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 149.



would be to maintain dual and competing offices in Washington and New York. He played a central role in pushing for the relocation by conspiring with Young to convince Bloom of the wisdom of moving. When Bloom later discovered this fact, he angrily wrote to Mungo: “There would have been no move except for the brief but key Unholy Alliance between you and Allen.”<sup>68</sup> For Young, the move was exhilarating: “New York City was in ferment: it had a big SDS chapter, the Columbia strike that had just happened, and the LNS office in New York. . . . That office had a number of people who were really interested in LNS.”<sup>69</sup> In fact, by the time of the move, New York staffers actually outnumbered their Washington counterparts.<sup>70</sup> Recognizing the awkward challenge that faced Bloom—as LNS’s presumptive leader—upon entering an established office, Young offered an olive branch to Bloom in a letter:

I have given some thought to a natural division of labor, especially between you and George [Cavalletto], since you have been sort of a “wheel” in LNS-WASH (I don’t mean that with hostility) and George has been sort of a wheel at LNS-NY. . . .

Hopefully we can overcome our problems of hierarchy and mistrust through division of labor and mutual confidence.

This is meant as a suggestion, a mere outline, of what can happen with the personnel in NY. Undoubtedly, things will change, people may drop out, but I think you will eventually come to agree with more enthusiasm than you’ve shown up to now that the move to NY is key to the successful future of LNS.

I do not and did not hold any ill will toward you personally.<sup>71</sup>

Young admirably hoped to pave over his tensions with Bloom through the move to New York. But this letter—replete with regretful acknowledgements of intractable

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<sup>68</sup> Bloom to Mungo, [summer/fall 1968], Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 29.

<sup>69</sup> Collins, “Liberation News Service,” 33, Kerr Research Materials, Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>70</sup> Wasserman, “Joy of Liberation News Service,” 54.

<sup>71</sup> Young to Bloom, [spring/summer 1968], Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 37.

tensions—primarily accentuates the divisiveness of the leadership question throughout LNS.

Just as LNS packed up its equipment to leave Washington for good, Sheila Ryan—a longtime staffer at the *Washington Free Press* who had published occasionally in LNS—decided to join them in their move to the Big Apple. Recently released from the Washington Women’s House of Detention—where she had been jailed for six months for her role in a White House sit-in to protest federal indifference to the civil rights crisis in Selma—Ryan was but one more coal thrown under the tinderbox of LNS’s new basement headquarters in Harlem.<sup>72</sup>

### Goodbye, Part 1

Factions hardened soon after LNS’s move to the Big Apple in the early summer of 1968. And Bloom’s leadership formed the polarizing center around which LNS conflict revolved. A Bloom faction that esteemed his magic confronted a cohort of New York newcomers—sympathetic to Young—that challenged his authority. These factions separated during work and personal time, deepening the organizational divide. But they also met face-to-face in a series of lengthy staff meetings that set the parameters of the conflict. The debates—often lasting upwards of eight hours—carried on for at least two

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<sup>72</sup> For Ryan’s prison term, see Margie Stamberg, “Sheila Ryan Beaten by Prison Guard,” *Washington Free Press*, November 23, 1967, 4; and Sheila Ryan, “Sheila’s Statement,” *Washington Free Press*, November 23, 1967, 4, 8.

weeks.<sup>73</sup> The dispute hinged on LNS's most basic organizational ideal: How should LNS authority be structured?

This tension quickly took its toll on the LNS packet, as both sides damaged the quality of LNS copy by penning shrill or incoherent articles. But the Bloom faction pinned accusations of poor writing on the New Yorkers, while bemoaning the impact of the New York move on packet:

Suddenly, the size of the national office swelled from six to fourteen, and as in all bureaucracies . . . no one seemed to work less than they had previously, no one seemed happier at his work, and not more, but *less* productive copy was turned out. . . . Mailings were actually getting thinner and thinner, and their quality began to vary immensely. For the first time, LNS began getting letters complaining of the drop in its quality.<sup>74</sup>

The New Yorkers admitted that problems developed after the move and focused most intently upon a series of “simplistic stories on ‘pigs’—plain clothes ‘pigs,’ Pentagon ‘pigs,’ TPF ‘pigs,’ and ‘pig abuse’” that Al Dickinson and Tom Hamilton sneakily inserted in the packets.<sup>75</sup> But neither Dickinson nor Hamilton served as full-time LNS staffers. Quality control seems to have been a problem for staffers on both sides of the split.

Frustrations about the packet only highlighted existing distinctions between how the factions approached alternative journalism. As we have seen, Mungo advocated a new journalism that did not strictly adhere to the mainstream media's conception of objectivity. This tendency—taken to its extremes—in part accounted for Young's disagreement with Mungo at 3 Thomas Circle. Still, the New York faction also played

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<sup>73</sup> Wasserman, “Joy of Liberation News Service,” 56.

<sup>74</sup> “Dear Friends,” LNS/Montague 100 (August 16, 1968).

<sup>75</sup> “Dear Friends,” LNS/NY, 100 (August 19, 1968). For the most obvious example of a packet replete with “pig” journalism, see LNS 94 (July 26, 1968).

fast and loose in its presentation of factuality. Several months later, New Yorkers Thorne Dreyer and Vicky Smith outlined the tenets of their new media: “A journalistic ‘given’ that the new media refuses to accept is ‘objectivity.’ . . . In the movement media . . . involvement and experience are prerequisites for good journalism, for a *liberated* journalism. Once freed from the illusory constraints of objectivity, you can explore new levels of creativity and communication.”<sup>76</sup> While the New York faction—to all accounts—never fabricated stories, advocacy journalism that stretched objectivity remained standard for both groups.

But only Bloom faced barbs about his sexuality, a fact that reminds us how taboo homosexuality remained within the New Left prior to the Stonewall Inn riots. In 1973, upon becoming active in the gay liberation movement, Young looked back upon Bloom’s repressed homosexuality with sympathy: “The truth is that Marshall had GAY written all over him, especially when he talked and moved. I heard someone make a nasty comment about Marshall being a faggot, and I voiced my objection by replying something like, ‘Just because someone is effeminate doesn’t mean he’s homosexual.’ . . . Marshall was a lonely, unfulfilled *faggot*.”<sup>77</sup> It is likely that the incident Young recalled occurred in one of the endless basement meetings. It is here that Mungo remembered the New Yorkers denouncing “Marshall as a tyrant, liar, and homosexual.”<sup>78</sup> Another staffer remembered someone from the New York office declaring that “Marshall Bloom [is] a frustrated

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<sup>76</sup> Thorne Dreyer and Victoria Smith, “The Movement and the New Media,” LNS/NY 144 (March 1, 1969).

<sup>77</sup> Young, “Marshall Bloom: Gay Brother,” 59.

<sup>78</sup> Mungo, *Beyond the Revolution*, 25.

homosexual who uses the news service as his genitals.”<sup>79</sup> These attacks were some of the most painful elements of the split for Bloom, who remained in the closet. While it would be extreme to assert that homophobia drove the split—especially in light of Young’s closeted homosexuality and leadership among the New Yorkers—the vicious attacks Bloom faced for his homosexuality indicate that personal antagonisms did not take a backseat to ideological conflict.

There is even some indication that sexuality complicated the disagreements between Young and Bloom. In a private note from this period, Bloom wrote that “the basic difficulty with Allen included sex.”<sup>80</sup> Young echoed this sentiment in a 1977 interview:

I had a homosexual life when I lived in Washington, but it was a secret, or private life: I went to gay bars, I went cruising, I even had a boyfriend for a while. . . . It was a part of my life that I kept secret. I didn’t think that the atmosphere was permissive. In fact there were other gay people around, some of whom I suspected and I tried to bring the subject up and didn’t feel like I got anywhere.<sup>81</sup>

It is difficult to gauge how this shared sexual repression impacted the relationship between Young and Bloom, but what is certain is that both harbored important apprehensions about their sexual identities in the pre-Stonewall era.

Infiltration of LNS by the CIA and FBI—an all-too-common occurrence within the underground—provided another circumstance that contributed to the internal tension that July. The CIA’s Operation CHAOS began as an attempt to uncover the foreign connections of New Left groups, but quickly began a more general assault on the underground media. In fact, investigative journalist Angus MacKenzie estimates that the

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<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties*, 124.

<sup>80</sup> Note, n.d., Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folder 35.

<sup>81</sup> Allen Young, interview by David Kerr, May 5, 1977, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folder 5.

government infiltrated more than 150 of the 500 underground newspapers of the period. At least three FBI agents penetrated LNS. In particular, they attempted to create friction among staffers, to discredit the organization within the underground, and even to burn down the LNS office in Washington. All of these tasks—and many more—were intended to undermine LNS’s legitimacy within the underground and to foment internal discord.<sup>82</sup>

Clearly, a host of issues contributed to the LNS factionalization. But Bloom’s perceived authoritarian editorship formed the New York faction’s central concern. Although LNS had originally been incorporated with a board of directors that included Bloom, Mungo, Young, Wasserman, Mark Sommer, and Lis Meisner, Bloom freely ran the day-to-day operation prior to the New York relocation. Already in the late spring, Young had traveled to New York to speak with George Cavalletto about the difficulties of working with Bloom.<sup>83</sup> In a July 14 letter to Cavalletto, Young—who was then preparing for an eight-week trip to Europe—presciently reflected on the problem: “I sincerely hope that this hiatus will not see the disintegration of the incipient radical family we have at LNS. . . . Let this letter be another reaffirmation of solidarity, and cooperation, regardless of the ‘Bloom problem.’”<sup>84</sup> Even LNSers on Bloom’s side of the split recognized the “Bloom problem.” Steve Diamond later noted: “Bloom [was] known fondly as ‘Mad Marshall’ or ‘The Incredible Freak.’ And, while it could be said that

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<sup>82</sup> Angus MacKenzie, “Sabotaging the Dissident Press,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 19, no. 6 (March/April 1981): 57-63. For the best accounts of underground press repression, see Geoffrey Rips et al., *UnAmerican Activities: The Campaign Against the Underground Press* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1981); and David Armstrong, *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America* (Los Angeles: JP Tarcher, 1981).

<sup>83</sup> “Dear Friends,” LNS/NY 100 (August 19, 1968). This account, from the New York faction, states that Mungo accompanied Young to New York and that Mungo referred to Bloom as “compulsively authoritarian.” This account is difficult to verify, but we can state with certainty that Young spoke with the New York bureau about Bloom throughout the spring and early summer.

<sup>84</sup> Young to Cavalletto, July 14, 1968, Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 25.

Marshall was ‘mad,’ it was a brilliant kind of madness, more like that of a wily fox. . . . He was unstoppable.”<sup>85</sup> Mungo knew and loved this side of Bloom from the beginning of LNS. Nevertheless, he understood the polarizing impact that Bloom could have on people:

To some [Bloom’s] performance-in-life seems domineering, unstable, and disconcerting while to those, like me, who love him it is simply his way. . . . His enemies insisted a radical news service must be managed by socialists who lived communally and conducted their endeavors as a group, a democratic Team. His friends liked what he did, knew it was good, and encouraged him to do more of it, knowing that *nobody else* could.<sup>86</sup>

What most confused the New Yorkers was the basic contradiction between Bloom’s authority and the anarchic magic that Bloom and Mungo placed near the center of their operation. Did the founders seek chaos or a rigid, hierarchical operation? The answer was never clear.

The New Yorkers hoped to replace Bloom’s authority with a democratic organizational structure that would include *all* staffers in *all* decision-making. What constituted “democracy” for the New Yorkers? While LNS defined and redefined democracy throughout its existence, its earliest formulation emphasized “that the [entire] staff should have ultimate power in the organization, and should be empowered to delegate administrative responsibility to persons or committees of its choice.”<sup>87</sup> This was not consensus, but rather the elimination of hierarchy in favor of majority and committee-based authority. This proposal sounds eerily like the scenario—described and dismissed by Mungo—in the office of the *Washington Free Press*. This fact was not coincidental, of

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<sup>85</sup> Steve Diamond, “Back to the Land,” in *Time It Was: American Stories from the Sixties*, ed. Karen Manners Smith and Tim Koster (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 239.

<sup>86</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 27.

<sup>87</sup> “Dear Friends,” LNS/NY 100 (August 19, 1968).

course, as former *Free Press* staffer Sheila Ryan had quickly risen to an influential status in the New York office upon her arrival. The New York faction gave three reasons for seeking democratization. They argued that in light of Movement devotion to democracy-in-action, it only made sense for a central Movement press to be democratically organized. The New York staffers also discovered that a democratic structure would be the only manner to effectively work with Bloom. Finally, they argued that participatory democracy would maximize the efficiency and humanity of the organization. In sum, they claimed that the formation of a work collective would best serve the Movement and would streamline the LNS operation.<sup>88</sup>

By late July 1968, it had come to this: a forty-eight-hour staff meeting, cooped up in LNS's Harlem basement, marking the climax of the LNS debate over democratization. At stake, it seemed, was the very soul of the organization. Would the two-dozen staffers democratize and reincorporate as a work collective, or would they continue to defer to Bloom and LNS's founding board of directors? After bitter debate, which included vicious personal attacks in addition to informed ideological wrangling, the question of democratization came to a vote. The result of the first vote was hardly surprising: thirteen favored democratization, nine opposed the measure. The debate continued until a second vote produced a shocking result for the New York faction: unanimous support for democratization, with only Mungo and Wasserman abstaining.<sup>89</sup> LNS would radically reorganize along democratic lines. The July 26, 1968, packet—LNS issue 94—announced the restructuring. Peace prevailed; the divisive conflict abated; or so it seemed.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.



Many LNS staffers undoubtedly slept well that night; the organization seemed to have defined a coherent path; but they were dreaming. Actually, the unanimous democratization vote signaled the beginning of a split and not an honest attempt to reconcile the differences between the two factions. The plotting and scheming continued. The New Yorkers packed the interim steering committee, set up to establish new by-laws and articles of incorporation; of the seven staffers on the committee, Bloom was the sole holdout from the Washington days. Outnumbered and outvoted, the Bloom faction became bitter:

The “staff meeting” to “democratize” was a packed, selected meeting of some of the New York office staff, which is not LNS. This meeting would have profoundly changed the content and direction of LNS by parliamentary maneuvering, and the large group who voted against the change—which includes all of us who were informed of the meeting—obviously didn’t think we were voting to oppose our having a voice in LNS. No-one votes “no” to democracy; but what was planned didn’t sound democratic to us.<sup>90</sup>

Unhappy with the recent developments, Bloom, Diamond, and Wasserman began reincorporation plans of their own that would leave the New York faction without a leadership role. Democratization actually signaled the death-knell of the unified LNS.

In the two weeks that followed, LNS/Montague—composed of the Bloom faction—came into being. Steve Diamond was the key figure in a plot to transfer LNS’s printing equipment and subscription rolls to a farm in rural New England. Because Diamond had been a founder of the New York bureau, the New York staff assumed that he remained committed to the Claremont Avenue office. Young had even included Diamond with George Cavalletto and Sheila Ryan in his “incipient radical family” as

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<sup>90</sup> “A Few Obvious Facts and Some That Are Not,” LNS/Montague 100 (August 16, 1968).

recently as mid-July.<sup>91</sup> But Diamond had quickly allied himself with the Bloom cohort upon the New York relocation. In light of the division within the organization and the perception that he sat somewhere near the fence in this dispute, Diamond proved to be the perfect inside man to organize and lead the heist that followed. At the same time, he was planning an LNS benefit showing of The Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour*—including the number one hit, “Hello, Goodbye”—which provided a (disreputable) funding source for the adventures to follow.

The split unfolded in three stages. To begin, Diamond and Bloom funneled five thousand dollars from the advance benefit ticket sales toward buying farmland in Montague, Massachusetts. By this time, Mungo, Porche, and a cohort of buddies from Boston University had established Packer Corners in southern Vermont. But many of these communards did not boast direct ties to LNS. Recognizing this fact, Diamond and Bloom located the soon-to-be LNS farmhouse a short drive south from Packer Corners—close enough to maintain daily interaction, but far enough away to avoid invading their sister farm. Next, the heist depended on the New Yorkers staying up late while attending the *Magical Mystery Tour* benefit on Saturday, August 10, and staying away from the office the following morning. This assumption was critical—and proved to be correct—because George Cavalletto's apartment was a mere half-block from the office. This emptiness facilitated LNS/Montague's final step of stripping the New York office bare of its equipment, which it loaded into a rented Hertz truck—in broad daylight—on Sunday morning. Off they flew to the country.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Young to Cavalletto, July 14, 1968, Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 25.

<sup>92</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 163-71; and Diamond, “Back to the Land.”

The reaction was swift. We will never know just how violent the New Yorkers were when they stormed Montague Farm to recover their press. Neither will we know whether “We Shall Overcome” drifted through the midnight air that August night. But we do know that as soon as the heist and raid were complete, the divisions between LNS/NY and LNS/Montague went public. Wasserman remembered: “The symbols began flying again. Country/city, freak/militant, you did this/you did that, honorable/thief, bourgeois/revolutionary. What a drag.”<sup>93</sup>

#### Interlude: You Say Why, And I Say I Don’t Know

Let us shift our vantage point, for a moment, to the office of the *San Francisco Express-Times* in late April 1968. Understaffed and underfunded, the *Express-Times*—a weekly underground newspaper that had formed only three months earlier—had come to rely on LNS copy to fill its pages, printing at least forty LNS articles in its first thirty issues.<sup>94</sup> The editors awaited the arrival of each packet with anticipation. In all these regards, the experience of the *Express-Times* typified that of underground outlets across the country. How did the LNS split unfold from this perspective?

Packet 69 arrived in late April and contained a brief mention of LNS opening a New York bureau, a seemingly innocuous development. Packet 70 arrived a week later with a blow-by-blow account of the Columbia University protest. The opening of the New York bureau seemed like a brilliant and timely decision. Nearly two weeks later, packet 72 arrived with a note to LNS subscribers that perhaps roused mild concern:

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<sup>93</sup> Wasserman, “Joy of Liberation News Service,” 57.

<sup>94</sup> *San Francisco Express-Times*, January 25-August 14, 1968.

“There are many dozens of you . . . who have not responded to the bill. Our situation remains critical. We also need manpower: secretaries, typists, clerks, editors, writers, and a new printer. The survival of LNS is up to you.”<sup>95</sup> You had paid your bill, however, and the location of your office precluded anybody from packing up to help fulfill LNS’s need for extra staffers. You continued work-as-usual.

Sometime during the first week of June, packet 79 arrived by second-class mail with a momentous, if understated announcement: “The Liberation News Service national office will be moving later this month to New York City.”<sup>96</sup> You noted the change of address and began sending copies of the *Express-Times* to the address on Claremont Avenue in Harlem. A week later you received an odd comment about balmy weather, borrowed typewriters, “someone . . . sleeping under a tree in the Democratic Republic of Vermont,” and a nude weekend conference on a farm.<sup>97</sup> You shrugged it off as mere high jinks. Packet 86 arrived in early July “TO CONVINCING YOU THAT WE ARE *FINALLY* MOVING TO NEW YORK.”<sup>98</sup> The next issue featured a newly designed cover and a new address.

It is around this time that you began to grow concerned. Packets were shrinking. You received a note in packet 91 that expressed—with dark humor—that “growing concern has been voiced here over the ‘incredibly low living standards’ and ‘actual

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<sup>95</sup> “Note to LNS Members,” LNS 72 (May 9, 1968).

<sup>96</sup> “News About Ourselves,” LNS 79 (June 3, 1968).

<sup>97</sup> LNS 82 (June 11, 1968).

<sup>98</sup> LNS 86 (June 28, 1968).

hunger’ of the staff of a radical group [LNS].”<sup>99</sup> Then, as July wound down, packet 96 arrived with a surprising announcement:

#### LNS Restructured

After a weekend of intense discussion and two all-night staff meetings, Liberation News Service announced a new organizational structure. The entire working staff now legally owns and controls the radical news agency.

LNS was previously owned by a corporation with a self-perpetuating board of directors. The entire staff [now] makes all decisions on basic policy issues for LNS.<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless, when the next packet arrived, it contained a single article. You figured that in light of the new restructuring LNS might be open to receiving feedback from its subscribers, so you wrote them a note to express your concern:

August 1, 1968

Brothers and Sisters:

Something has happened to the LNS mailings and we want to register our disapproval. For months we have been gleefully using LNS stories—material we couldn’t find anywhere else, hard political news and engaging panoramas. In the past few weeks we’ve hardly found anything worth using. There seems a pattern to the recent mailings—ponderous political prose decorated with marginal cultural blurbs. It seems to us that at least some of you are assuming that serious stuff has to appear gray and doctrinaire in order to be “correct.” This is a debased conception of politics: we had hoped we were all moving away from it together.

Please do something.<sup>101</sup>

You waited.

Two weeks later, a bombshell arrived: an LNS packet from a farm in Montague, Massachusetts. The packet contained a short piece by Raymond Mungo outlining why LNS had moved to the country and a lengthy article outlining how the organization carried out the move. The story sounded like a new take on a familiar Movement riff: ideological dispute begets factionalization begets formal division. But this story was

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<sup>99</sup> LNS 91 (July 17, 1968).

<sup>100</sup> “LNS Restructured,” LNS 94 (July 26, 1968).

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in “Dear Friends,” LNS/Montague 100 (August 16, 1968).

more extreme than the exclusion of whites from SNCC or the takeover of SDS by the Prairie Power contingent; it contained daring daylight robberies, violent midnight raids, and large sums of cash in heated dispute. Familiar names graced the packet: Steve Diamond, Verandah Porche, Ray Mungo, Marshall Bloom, Harvey Wasserman. A short time later, a packet arrived from the New York staffers to outline their side of the story; as relative newcomers, their names were somewhat less familiar: Thorne Dreyer, Dan McCauslin, George Cavalletto, Sheila Ryan. Allen Young's name was missing, but from his last article, you were aware that he had traveled to Bulgaria to cover the World Youth Festival. Two packets are better than one, you decided, knowing that before long you would need to choose sides.

## Goodbye, Part 2

The LNS split produced a litany of accusations and recriminations that pulsed through the underground and mainstream media. It also formed a logical outgrowth of conflicts that precluded the move to New York. The mission of LNS to serve as an information center for the Movement led to a rapid expansion from the moment Bloom and Mungo founded the organization. Likewise, the tensions between Young's organization and Bloom's magic that began at 3 Thomas Circle intensified upon LNS's arrival in New York City. But LNS also confronted a new set of conditions in its basement office near Columbia University. Events moved very quickly in the five weeks between the move and the split—factions crystallized, formal and informal meetings never ceased, and organizational philosophies remained in constant tension and flux. By

the time of the split, each faction had a set of ready-made accusations that they fired off in letters that rapidly filtered through the underground.

The great temptation in dealing with the split is to follow Mungo's lead in *Famous Long Ago*—a classic memoir of the Movement—and to cast the conflict as one between New York's "vulgar Marxists" and his rural "virtuous caucus" of hip freaks.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, LNSers on both sides of the split cast the conflict as one between radical New Yorkers and counterculture escapist. Steve Diamond remembered the conflict as one between a set of "politicos"—led by Allen Young—who sought a political revolution, and a contingent of "freaks"—led by Marshall Bloom—who "sought a cultural, life-style total and constant revolution."<sup>103</sup> This concept is constant in all accounts, but the terms vary: "vulgar Marxists" versus "beautiful people with a broader perspective";<sup>104</sup> or the "hardcore political leftists" versus the "cultural revolutionaries."<sup>105</sup>

What is striking about these accounts, however, is the extent to which both groups denied their stereotypes and actively sold themselves as embodiments of political *and* cultural radicalism. In other words, both groups tried to be all things to all people in an attempt to convince subscribers that they were the authentic LNS.

The articles penned by members of both factions prior to the split support a non-ideological interpretation of the LNS cleavage. Articles about the counterculture represented a scant minority of the overall coverage of both factions. Instead, both groups emphasized social movement analysis that placed particular emphasis on the antiwar and

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<sup>102</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*.

<sup>103</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 7.

<sup>104</sup> "Dear Friends," LNS/NY 100 (August 19, 1968).

<sup>105</sup> Diamond, "Back to the Land," 237.

students movements. The New York faction did emphasize SDS in contrast to the Bloom faction's Yippie preference. But even this must be qualified by noting that Young was responsible for all five articles dealing exclusively with SDS. The ideological distinction between the two was significantly less stark than either side cared to admit.<sup>106</sup>

Following the split, the "SDS vulgar Marxists" quickly denied their SDS affiliation and asserted their status as cultural radicals to their subscribers. In their version of the split, the New Yorkers insisted that Bloom and Wasserman "are admitted SDS members" and claimed that two of the three New York SDS members were invited into LNS by Bloom himself. Furthermore, they argued, Allen Young, a "frequently cited [SDS] 'conspirator,'" had been away in Bulgaria during much of the summer.<sup>107</sup> They insisted that "some of us are in SDS, some are not."<sup>108</sup> While LNS/NY was quick to denounce what they considered to be a "weird latter-day McCarthyism," they were also quick to deny any affiliation with SDS.<sup>109</sup>

What does this denial illustrate? To begin, it indicates that LNS/NY feared that a connection with SDS would damage their credibility to underground newspapers that had only recently made the transition into radical politics. Furthermore, the denial illustrates the tenuousness of SDS's status as *the* New Left organization as it became increasingly radical and militant. Providing an independent voice within the Movement seemed to be a safe appeal. The New Yorkers went beyond denial of their political extremism to insist

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<sup>106</sup> For a quantitative breakdown and analysis of the articles written by both factions prior to the split, see Appendix 1.

<sup>107</sup> "Dear Friends," LNS/NY 100 (August 19, 1968).

<sup>108</sup> Mary Hamilton, "Radical News Service Splits in Two," *Guardian*, August 24, 1968, 9.

<sup>109</sup> "Dear Friends," LNS/NY 100 (August 19, 1968).



upon a broad definition of politics that resembled what Bloom and Mungo had long been saying about the proper orientation of the Movement:

We affirm that our conception of politics determines that it would be counter-revolutionary to turn LNS into a heavy, anti-poetry, “vulgar-marxist” propaganda sheet. Our perception of politics is that personal liberation is an integral part of the revolutionary process in twentieth century America—personal liberation expressed in poetry, graphics, photography and joy in media.<sup>110</sup>

Considered in isolation, it would be difficult to credit this statement to a set of militant, urban revolutionaries.

The New Yorkers went to great lengths to reinforce their support of a cultural revolution in the months immediately after the split. Every couple of weeks they introduced new cultural material in the packet. In September, they began running a cultural supplement titled “GUERRILLA!”<sup>111</sup> A month later they ran a list of intentional communities across the country.<sup>112</sup> In November 1968, they introduced separate new columns on music, sports, and food.<sup>113</sup> The counterculture bug also extended into their personal lives as the collective began renting a farm in upstate New York for weekend getaways.<sup>114</sup> This was a dramatic development in light of the recent heist that sent LNS’s equipment to another rural farm. Clearly, city life had taxed both factions.

The new Vermont and Massachusetts communards, meanwhile, insisted upon the radical and even revolutionary nature of their “insufficiently militant” faction. The irony here runs deep. Less than twelve months after Bloom and Mungo had been evicted from

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> LNS 102 (September 2, 1968).

<sup>112</sup> LNS 111 (October 16, 1968).

<sup>113</sup> LNS 115 (November 1, 1968); 116 (November 7, 1968); and 117 (November 9, 1968).

<sup>114</sup> “For Liberation News Service Members; A Letter From Us to You,” LNS 107 (September 27, 1968), A.

the USSPA for their radicalism, they found themselves embroiled in a conflict in which they were accused of being insufficiently militant. The Movement, it seems, left little space for moderation. Accused of veering into a counterculture haze, the Montague group insisted that it was “a group closely associated with the New Left of the American 60’s.”<sup>115</sup> While this may strike us as a comparatively hollow claim, it was significant insofar as it identified the compatibility of rural communalism and leftist political activism. Indeed, the rural retreatants claimed that “the most revolutionary thing LNS has done, the thing which will make it most possible for the LNS national staff to enter the New Age, is the move to the farm.”<sup>116</sup> We should not point to the use of the term “New Age” as evidence of the primacy of the counterculture to the communards. In fact, the press of the North Vietnamese National Liberation Front was the model to which Bloom and Mungo aspired: “The NLF pointed out to me last year [while meeting with them in Czechoslovakia] that it is necessary . . . in a war-torn state to keep one’s essential presses out of the heat of combat, into the countryside, and under the ground. . . . America is a nation at war. The cities are its battlefields.”<sup>117</sup> Bloom boldly invoked Karl Marx in a proposal sent to Abbie Hoffman, seeking support for the move:

Why should we advocate and live on country communes, organically tied to city bureaus? 1. The younger Marx was right: Capitalism is alienating. American cities are wholly capitalistic developments. They are in an inherently alienating environment in which meaningful liberation is impossible. They are structured to cause dependence on the capitalist system. . . . 2. The particular powerlessness of white revolutionaries in the cities should be clear. . . . 3. The more profound, philosophical argument runs like this: The cities are money, capitalism, economic power base. The idea of real estate, land worth more and owned by a few who

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<sup>115</sup> Raymond Mungo, “Why Move?” LNS/Montague 100 (August 16, 1968).

<sup>116</sup> “A Few Obvious Facts and Some that Are Not,” LNS/Montague 100 (August 16, 1968).

<sup>117</sup> Mungo, “Why Move?” LNS/Montague 100 (August 16, 1968). For an almost identical statement from Bloom, see Hamilton, “Radical News Service Splits in Two,” 9.

exercise sanctions and take rents from others. The country is much less dependent on this whole system, power being determined much more by numbers and land than by wealth. . . . 4. It is politically correct, as well, because the country commune would give the participants a chance to explore meaningful, liberated human relationships, and would not do this in an unreal and isolated environment. The LNS commune would be integrally connected with the cities; some editors would go back and forth, between LNS bureaus and the commune. Others, remaining in the country, would be able to offer political opinions tempered by an understanding of natural rhythms. . . . 5. It is politically correct because it would offer the modern, technological alternative to capitalism.<sup>118</sup>

Combating capitalism and providing an unplugged rural alternative to urban complicity formed the ideological bedrock of the move. The communards did not abandon the news service upon moving to rural America; instead, the rationale for the move was precisely its revolutionary political implications for LNS and the Movement.

Both factions emphasized their political inclusiveness, which suggests that ideology per se is an insufficient explanation for the split. In response to accusations of SDS infiltration, the New York group argued that “the people in the New York office are very diverse politically.”<sup>119</sup> The communards, for their part, emphasized their tolerance and denounced the New Yorkers for their doctrinaire politics: “The *spirit* of LNS, as an underground news service open to a wide and contradictory variety of ideas and ways of looking at the world, its tolerance and inquisitiveness,—these seemed threatened by the transformation of LNS in New York.”<sup>120</sup> Mungo echoed this sentiment in *Famous Long Ago*: “Their politics was communal socialism, whereas ours was something like anarchism; and while we could cheerfully keep a few socialists around, they couldn’t

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<sup>118</sup> Bloom to Abbie Hoffman, [early summer 1968], Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 26.

<sup>119</sup> Hamilton, “Radical New Service Splits in Two,” 9.

<sup>120</sup> “Dear Friends,” LNS/Montague 100 (August 16, 1968).

function as they planned with even one anarchist in the house, one Marshall Bloom.”<sup>121</sup>

While both sets of statements were published specifically to woo Movement support, they nevertheless indicate sympathy for ideological diversity and illustrate that the LNS split was not primarily about distinctions between political and cultural radicalism.

From the beginning, tension existed between LNS’s anarchic day-to-day operation—what Mungo and others called “magic”—and its desire to rapidly expand, between Bloom’s authority and the Movement’s professed commitment to egalitarianism. It took the emergence of a democratization faction—a group that just so happened to be sympathetic to Marxism—to bring these tensions to the fore and force a rethinking of LNS’s mission. Certainly there were differences in the politics of these two groups, but both must be categorized as politically *and* culturally radical. We are left with a political terrain that did not preclude effective operation of a news service. In fact—if we bear in mind the factions’ shared profession of political inclusiveness—these political squabbles might have made for a stronger and more diverse organization. Both groups envisioned a news service that would cover the Movement—a collection of diverse social movements that included antiwar, black power, student, and women’s activism. Broad and inclusive political values were at the core of both LNS factions, while the meaning of democracy remained in contention.

The LNS split centered on competing visions of how activists should go about *living the Movement* on the contentious political terrain of 1968. Prefigurative politics formed the heart of Allen Young’s “incipient radical family” at LNS. It also motivated Bloom, who insisted to Abbie Hoffman that “one of the key points of [our new revolutionary idea] is that the revolutionaries live the kind of life they advocate,

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<sup>121</sup> Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 156.

inasmuch as possible; that they no longer talk of ‘you should,’ or the ‘masses should,’ but of ‘we are’ and ‘join us.’”<sup>122</sup> So let us join Bloom and company at Montague Farm to see how this vision of the revolution looked with their hands in the dirt.

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<sup>122</sup> Bloom to Abbie Hoffman, [early summer 1968], Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 26.

## Chapter 2

### Forging a Family: Prefigurative Politics at Montague and Packer Corners Farms, 1968-1973

It did not take long for the Liberation News Service farm to transform itself into a communal farm with agriculture and community—rather than the news packet—at its core. This inspiration first occurred to Steve Diamond. “The main reason I wanted to stop printing Liberation News Service mailings was this: We simply didn’t have anything more to say,” he wrote about his November 1968 awakening. “The dichotomy between farm life and the news service life had become more than apparent. Each was choking off the other. The schizophrenia was setting in.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, it was difficult to convince Marshall Bloom—who had staked his entire identity on LNS for more than a year—that LNS/Montague should halt its presses. But before long, Bloom came around to the idea:

[LNS] was a good idea in the city; in the country it’s not such a good idea. . . . I don’t like to admit we are less committed or up to date on change in America than we were; I’m not sure the eye of the whirlpool is the best vantage point. But inescapably our day to day movement has been to draw closer together . . . to be less active, less in direct touch with the world out there.<sup>2</sup>

And when the winter chill froze the ink in the LNS print house, Montague Farm’s transformation became official. The farm’s new identity, Diamond wrote, quickly took shape: “With the news service out of commission . . . the transition from commune to

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Diamond, *What the Trees Said: Life on a New Age Farm* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), 47-48.

<sup>2</sup> Loose diary entry, n.d., Marshall Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folder 37, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

family was making itself more and more apparent.”<sup>3</sup> The communards up at Packer Corners shared in this desire to sire a likeminded family.<sup>4</sup> Ray Mungo coined a catchphrase to describe Packer Corners’—and by extension Montague’s—familial cohesion: “No more me, no more you.”<sup>5</sup>

But the dissolution of the self in favor of a collective family identity proved difficult for many individuals and provided a challenge to the communes that they only slowly and unevenly resolved. Diamond—using Bloom as his central subject—pointed to a new conflict that immediately appeared on the farm: “The family and the tribe would need leaders, to be sure; but their function would be a bit different and on a much higher plane than those of an underground news service director.”<sup>6</sup> Diamond’s basic concern for Bloom amid the transition to communalism applied equally to everybody at the farms. As in the LNS split of 1968, questions of authority, identity, and work became fulcrums of conflict.

The stakes were high. Montague communitarian Tom Fels later wrote that “we had the freedom to create our own lives and to make a world that worked.”<sup>7</sup> This freedom proved challenging, but ultimately liberating. Within the next five years, the communards completed the shift from Movement exiles to organic farmers, from commune to family.

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<sup>3</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> For communes as families, see Peter G. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 191. Poet and writer Judson Jerome indicated that at Beaver Road Farm (an alias for Packer Corners) “there was more stability and family feeling than in most communes.” Judson Jerome, *Families of Eden: Communes and the New Anarchism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 41.

<sup>5</sup> Marty Jezer, “Psychic Farming: The Organic Method,” in *Home Comfort: Stories and Scenes of Life on Total Loss Farm*, ed. Richard Wizansky (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1973), 134.

<sup>6</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 95.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Fels, *Farm Friends: From the Late Sixties to the West Seventies and Beyond* (North Bennington, VT: RSI Press, 2008), 11.

And prefigurative politics—apparent in the resolution of conflicts over divisions of labor, sexuality, and farming methods—took center stage as the family replaced an outwardly revolutionary program with the internal implementation of Movement values.

### Down on the Farm

Dropping out proved difficult. Many communes across the United States discovered too late that successful communal living required a shared set of values.<sup>8</sup> And this realization took time. While many of the founders of Packer Corners had previously lived together in Brookline, Massachusetts, the communal farming experience challenged them in new and unexpected ways. Meanwhile, the dissolution of LNS/Montague eliminated any firm set of beliefs or activities that Montague farmers shared. The development of a communal system of values came about by fits and starts over the following few years, and often grew through the resolution of conflicts rooted in work and leadership roles on farms.

Disagreement over the communards' proper roles quickly appeared at Montague. Upon moving to the farm, Al Dickinson and Bill Lewis had emerged as the farm's resident freeloaders. They worked little, left projects unfinished, and haphazardly spent communal money. Furthermore, Tom Fels indicated, they violated one of Montague's sole rules: "Nothing of importance could be done without a discussion."<sup>9</sup> Diamond added

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<sup>8</sup> Sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter distinguished between retreat communes and service communes, arguing that service communes tended to be stronger than retreat communes because of their shared sense of purpose. See Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 192.

<sup>9</sup> Fels, *Farm Friends*, 12.



that because of their “psychic obesity . . . their energy is mainly negative.”<sup>10</sup> This “psychic obesity” was largely responsible for the departures of two beloved farmers within the commune’s first two months and bred resentment among those who remained.

Bill’s and Al’s simultaneous hiatuses from Montague Farm during a November 1968 weekend occasioned a communal meeting at which the farmers decided to ask for their departure. This task fell to Diamond. The rationale for the farm’s decision, Diamond remembers, was based on practicality and communal viability: “The place can just sustain so many, right now. . . . We have too many mouths to feed. . . . We aren’t able to support everyone now and it seemed to all of us that this would be the best way to keep the whole trip from going under before it really takes off.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, both excommunicated farmers immediately blamed Marshall—always a lightning rod of conflict—for their travails.

Thanksgiving arrived and the farmers declared a truce for the day. But the conflict had not died down for Marshall as he sat down to write in his diary that evening: “Bill spent the day asleep right in the living room, on the couch, having been up all night. It was an act which made me understand the difference between the yahoos who still swarm in our house and drive the gentile folk away, and the few of us gentile but hardies who remain.”<sup>12</sup> Within the next week, Bill and Al left the farm. The Battle of Thanksgiving—as Diamond dubbed this chapter in early farm life—raised a host of questions that the farmers slowly answered.

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<sup>10</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 39-40.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Journal, November 27, 1968, Thanksgiving, Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folder 39.

The tension between individual and collective aspirations played a central role in the Battle of Thanksgiving. But all the communards experienced a shock as demands of privacy met head on with those of the commune. Ray Mungo coyly described this tension at Packer Corners: “The community needs privacy and exposure. The members of the family need inviolable privacy from each other and inevitable exposure to each other.”<sup>13</sup>

Bloom echoed this sentiment down at Montague:

There are a lot of locked doors, small little rooms for one person or two persons that are actually locked on the inside when in use. A reaction to too much invasion of privacy. You see, before people can share, there must be somebody *there* behind each locked door who can unlock it and come out and people need to spend time with themselves only finding out *who's* there.<sup>14</sup>

But Bloom did not always respect the desire for individuality in others. An anonymous communard received Marshall’s opprobrium when he converted the old LNS print shop into a studio and bedroom:

After I had moved there, I was plagued by the spirit of the community, in the form of Marshall himself, who seemed to be saying that such a private, ordered space and way of life did not suit the community’s goals. Marshall would browbeat me in his inimitable way, cleverly poisoning whatever pleasures I had managed to obtain for myself.<sup>15</sup>

Bloom aspired to an exacting utopianism that often asked too much of others and of himself. But the abandonment of the individual formed one of the farm’s basic ideals.<sup>16</sup>

The dissolution of selfhood in favor of the commune was a delicate process that took time. The key—as Packer Corners’ Marty Jezer saw things—was to move slowly:

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<sup>13</sup> Raymond Mungo, “What This Community Needs: A Self-Indulgent Essay,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Bloom, journal, December 18, [1968], Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folder 35.

<sup>15</sup> Fels, *Farm Friends*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Judson Jerome used the term “I-Death” to describe the replacement of individual aspirations with those of the commune. He argued that I-Death was common among the communards he visited and that it formed a central rite of passage at communes across the country. Jerome, *Families of Eden*, 162-82.

“I’ve seen communes, especially just beginning, O.D. on honesty and destroy themselves in the process. . . . We never got together in a group to expose our emotions. Nor did we ever delude ourselves into thinking that just because we lived as a group on a commune we were, in fact, a communal group.”<sup>17</sup> After more than a year at Montague, Bloom still complained that “I feel sucked off, invaded here, not left any privacy.”<sup>18</sup> The most fundamental tension at the communes—between privacy and transparency—became apparent to the farmers from their earliest days.

Much of this tension revolved around how to divide work responsibilities or whether a formal division of labor should exist at all. The lack of a coherent pattern of labor formed a central conflict in the LNS split of 1968. The debate quickly reappeared on the farm, although the contrasts were less stark. One problem, Fels remembered, centered on the fact that cleaning up after others formed a good deal of farm work: “One’s schedule was largely determined by others; one cleaned up after their pets, even if he had none of his own, and did their laundry, as they sometimes did his.”<sup>19</sup> These tasks were reciprocal, but they could also breed resentment. Verandah Porche eventually appreciated farm labor as the commune’s unifying force: “What it comes down to on the farm is that ideas didn’t count very much. What counts is ‘Whose grease is on the bathtub?’ ‘Who will shovel out the outhouse when it’s time to do it?’ That doesn’t evolve through any ideas; it evolves through people’s good nature and being considerate of one

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<sup>17</sup> Jezer, “Psychic Farming,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 132, 134.

<sup>18</sup> Bloom, Last Journal, August 7, 1969, 71, Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folders 40 and 41.

<sup>19</sup> Fels, *Farm Friends*, 13.

and other and to struggle when it doesn't work."<sup>20</sup> But this evolution toward good-natured and considerate labor patterns took time.

Initially, a divide emerged over how individuals envisioned the labor of maintaining the farms. Despite protestations otherwise, a dichotomy quickly emerged between the merits of physical and intellectual labors. One anonymous farmer noted hypocrisy in Montague's profession of the equality between manual and intellectual work:

While an interest in such things as writing and painting was professed *pro forma* by most of the farm family . . . it was for most of them something foreign. When faced with an actual person writing a book or doing a series of paintings, or any of the other patently useless things such people do, their reaction was usually not one of interest or approbation but of opprobrium and accusation. . . . I was not much better. Vegetables were grown and appeared on the table probably, to my mind, by much the same miraculous process through which others imagined books and paintings to have been generated.<sup>21</sup>

Virtually everybody at the farms identified themselves as both artists and farmers. But distinctions about the primacy of these two identities created an uneasy alliance.

The distinction between Jezer and Mungo on this point is most revealing. Jezer remembered the emergence of this conflict in the early months at Packer Corners:

Physical work had a low priority in the overall sense of what had to be done; or the then reality of the farm, as defined by Ray, didn't leave enough space for it. This was terribly frustrating to those like myself who were accustomed to defining ourselves on the basis of our work. For a long time I remember waking early in the morning bursting with energy, ideas, and plans for things I wanted to do during the day only to have the day end in rage and anger because there was no one with whom to share my enthusiasm and because all the things I wanted to do were new to me and there was no one to either teach me or share my mistakes.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Verandah Porche, "The Queen of Poesie," in *Generation on Fire: Voices of Protest from the 1960s, An Oral History*, ed. Jeff Kisseloff (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 241.

<sup>21</sup> Fels, *Farm Friends*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Jezer, "Psychic Farming," in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 129-30.

Ray understood farm work in very different terms than did Marty: “We work at maintaining ourselves, though our shared labor is seldom very taxing, for it takes little enough work to make plants grow, most of it is out of our hands, and our relationship to the work one of direct gratification and reward, as children insist on.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, much of Mungo’s contribution to the farm came not in physical labor, but in intellectual work. Ray typically wrote in the wee hours of morning, powered by coffee and cigarettes; he would often remain in bed until the afternoon. But even Jezer admitted: “Ray gave us our first reality, a mythic one woven from mixed strands of fantasy, hyperbole, a vision of the apocalypse, a sense of the absurd, and a generous portion of bullshit. . . . Ray’s imagination gave us a common myth.”<sup>24</sup> But a common mythology did not bring in the firewood.

It did bring in money. Publishing royalties provided the greatest single source of both farms’ incomes, further contributing to the divide between physical and intellectual laborers. Steve Diamond’s *What the Trees Said* and Harvey Wasserman’s *History of the United States* helped fund operations at Montague, while Mungo’s first two books, Verandah Porche’s *The Body’s Symmetry*, Peter Gould’s *Burnt Toast*, and Alicia Bay Laurel’s *Living on the Earth* lined the Packer Corners coffers. Even Marty got into the mix by revising and updating *The Food Garden*, a 1942 book on vegetable gardening. This was an intelligent bunch of communards, and the intellectual leadership of the farms was widely shared.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Raymond Mungo, *Total Loss Farm: A Year in the Life* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), 157.

<sup>24</sup> Jezer, “Psychic Farming” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 129. Tom Fels quipped that “in our little tribe Raymond held the stature of a shaman.” Fels, *Farm Friends*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Books that contributed financially to the farms included, Diamond, *What the Trees Said*; Harvey Wasserman, *Harvey Wasserman’s History of the United States* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972);

But practical leadership of the sort practiced by Jezer was less common. Cathy Hutchinson’s know-how—gleaned from her Pacific Northwest childhood—provided much of the knowledge that the farmers required to survive. Fels remembered the origins of Cathy’s agricultural smarts: “Her mother had been an early advocate of the organic gardening movement. Recycling her mother’s skills, and teaching us all the while, Cathy reinvented herself as our earth mother. As gardener, cook, sound thinker and reasonable counsel . . . her well-grounded approach made her probably the most influential person at the farm.”<sup>26</sup> Cathy did not challenge the leadership of the farm’s intelligentsia, nor did she alienate those whom she led; instead she gently provided the practical skills necessary for survival but lacking in her fellow communards.

While Montague found a nice balance of leadership, the role of manual guru passed from hand to hand at Packer Corners, breeding a good deal of resentment. Laurie Dodge had been the first communard to inherit the leadership mantle at Packer Corners. Laurie’s carpentry experience and capacity at manual labor set him apart from his peers. But the scarcity of these survival skills led to an unusual deference. Richard Wizansky—Laurie’s boyfriend at the time—recalled: “[Laurie] was the foreman and we the willing students and workers. Laurie freaked out. He became itchy in the role of boss and Mr.

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Raymond Mungo, *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with Liberation News Service* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970); Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*; Verandah Porche, *The Body’s Symmetry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); Peter Gould, *Burnt Toast* (New York: Knopf, 1971); Alicia Bay Laurel, *Living on the Earth: Celebrations, Storm Warnings, Formulas, Recipes, Rumors, and Country Dances* (New York: Vintage, 1970); Edna Blair, *The Food Garden*, illus. Laurence Blair (New York: MacMillan, 1942), reprinted with revisions and updates by Marty Jezer (New York: New American Library, 1972); and Wizansky, *Home Comfort*.

<sup>26</sup> Tom Fels, “From the Late Sixties to the East Eighties: Communes as Crossroads in Our Lives” (lecture, Colloquium on Social Change, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, October 31, 2005), <http://famouslongago.org/famous/?m=200510> (accessed December 18, 2008).

Know-it-all, began to feel guilty about being pushy and arrogant.”<sup>27</sup> Laurie soon left the farm. With this departure, Wizansky wrote, “[The leadership] role passed onto the shoulders of a number of us, and each one in turn shrugged off the responsibility and pain of ‘seeing to it’ that things got done.”<sup>28</sup>

Frustrations quickly arose when the leadership mantle passed to Jezer. To begin, he developed an impressive array of skills related to the management of the woods: “I fell in love with the forests, walked around with a guidebook, and soon learned to identify them all. I became skilled with the ax and chain saw, and learned to ‘read’ the forest, to know which trees needed cutting and which trees should stand.”<sup>29</sup> As his skill in the woods developed, Marty felt increasingly responsible for the farm’s general wellbeing: “Whenever there was a vacuum in a work project, I rushed in to fill it. My high energy made it impossible for anyone else to assume responsibility and step into the breach. This soon drove me crazy.”<sup>30</sup> Marty began to count his fellow farmers’ sins of both commission and omission, and his unhappiness increased. By the late summer of 1970, Marty was ready to split and—after gathering the winter’s wood for Packer Corners—he left the farm to live at a nearby commune and to travel to New Mexico and California.

Similar frustrations drove Ellen Snyder away from Packer Corners. Whereas Laurie, Marty, and others spent long hours keeping the farm in working order, Ellen

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Wizansky, “Who’s in Charge,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 73. An echo of the farmers’ deference toward Laurie is evident in Mungo, *Famous Long Ago*, 195.

<sup>28</sup> Wizansky, “Who’s in Charge,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 74.

<sup>29</sup> Marty Jezer, “Tunneling to California and Back or Psychic Farming, Part II,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 244.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

worked at a nearby hospital to help keep money flowing into the farm. But she also sensed that some communards did not appreciate her sacrifice:

By the end of April [1969] I had put together quite a theory for myself about how the place ‘worked,’ giving myself lots of points for self-sacrifice, responsibility and Hard Work, giving Ray many demerits for lies, exaggerations, and leading people on, Verandah for never combing her hair and still being compelling. I remembered that Ray and Verandah always used to say that ‘the drones carry on,’ and I thought that Connie and I, Marty, Mark, and Dale must be the drones who kept up the place while the more verbal and literary types thought, wrote, dreamed, and fed us myths.<sup>31</sup>

Ellen left the farm soon thereafter, moving to San Francisco where she tried, but failed, to gain admittance to medical school; eighteen months later she returned to Packer Corners, where she discovered a more balanced and appreciative community. The shared hope of egalitarianism that most farmers brought to Packer Corners met head on with the realities of work and leadership. It took years for the communards to resolve this dilemma. But as Ellen’s story indicates, while the communards could leave the farm, the farm did not necessarily leave them.

Despite the bitterness and finality of splits such as the Battle of Thanksgiving, departures from Montague did not necessarily signal a removal from the proverbial family. The summer 1969 departure of John Anderson and Susan Maraneck is a case-in-point. In their six months on the farm—from January to June 1969—John and Susan had upset Bloom enough for him to write that “John and Susan . . . each tried to destroy the place or were willing to risk its destruction when things didn’t go their way.”<sup>32</sup> The tension was palpable, but also remarkably easy to resolve. When John and Susan announced that they would be moving a half-mile away to the Gardner farm and would

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<sup>31</sup> Ellen Snyder, “How I Came to the Farm,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 117.

<sup>32</sup> Bloom, Last Journal, July 13, 1969, 55, Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folders 40 and 41.



remain a nearby part of the family, Bloom celebrated: “It was as if the tension of our relationship were resolved by him proving his equality and independence, and through seeking approval, almost, of the village elder [Bloom], to his young brave warrior. I never felt so much like a hip (?) village elder as then.”<sup>33</sup> In this case, the family made extra room to accommodate its members and to relieve tension in the community.

More common, however, was for individuals to travel away from the farms when life grew too taxing or the weather took a turn toward New England’s worst. In the early years, in fact, the occasions when the entire family was united at either farm were rare. Verandah remembered that “people came and went pretty quickly at the beginning.”<sup>34</sup> Wasserman celebrated the freedom to move that the farm afforded: “That was one of the great things about the farm, you could go away and come back . . . and it was like you were never gone.”<sup>35</sup> In the farms’ first eighteen months alone, itineraries included stops in Ireland, England, continental Europe, Morocco and North Africa, Oregon, Washington, California, New Mexico, Illinois, Florida, and destinations throughout the northeast. To be sure, some communards were more frequent travelers than others—Mungo being the foremost example—but the travel bug struck nearly everyone for varying periods of time.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bloom, Last Journal, June 15, 1969, 17, Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folders 40 and 41. See also Ibid., June 30, 1969, 43; and Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 179-80.

<sup>34</sup> Porche, “Queen of Poesie,” 236.

<sup>35</sup> Harvey Wasserman, interview by Tom Fels, summer 2006, Tom Fels Personal Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Evidence of the travel bug is replete in farm accounts. See, for example, “Zig-Zag Cigarette Pappers,” Liberation News Service Records, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Library; Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*; and many of the essays in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*.

What impact could something as seemingly innocuous as travel have upon a burgeoning community? Mungo helps answer this question: “Traveling is the hardest work of all, and restores our healthy sense of the impermanence of all things in this life. When you’re moving from town to town many months on end you cannot be attached to specific possessions, or even specific company. You leave everything (and everybody) behind everywhere.”<sup>37</sup> This detachment from possessions and people certainly fell in line with the New Age ends of the farmers, but also contributed to an uneven development of community back home.

The farmers at Montague and Packer Corners faced the typical challenges of a burgeoning counterculture commune. In addition to developing communal and agricultural traditions that promoted self-sufficiency and survival, however, these communards struggled to create an intellectual identity that promoted harmony and sustainability. Before long, new tensions arose about sexual identity politics that would impact the core values and collective aspirations of the communards.

### The Bloom Highway: Tragedies and Identities

At the same time that Montague and Packer Corners struggled to establish communal identities, a sexual revolution exploded with enough force to reach New England’s hinterland farms.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, by the summer of 1969 radical feminism—replete with its assertion of personal politics, its use of consciousness-raising, and its insistence

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<sup>37</sup> Raymond Mungo, *Tropical Detective Story: The Flower Children Meet the Voodoo Chiefs* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), 37.

<sup>38</sup> David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

on sexism's primacy—had pushed women's liberation to the fore of American social movements.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, the Stonewall Inn riots of June 1969 awakened a gay liberation movement that had previously been shoved to the shadowy margins of the nation's activism.<sup>40</sup> While the communards at Montague and Packer Corners did not participate in these movements, the winds of change influenced their thinking and their lives. But the liberationist spirit that swept through American youth culture maintained a mixed legacy at the farms, as individuals confronted the implications of their sexual identities in a communal setting. Down on the farm, the legacy of sexual liberation was decidedly mixed.

As Montague's first bitter winter deepened and the ink froze in the LNS print barn, Marshall Bloom received induction orders to report to Denver's Local Board No. 4, where he had earlier registered for the selective service. Some things couldn't be avoided by a simple move to the country. The board had granted Bloom status as a conscientious objector by March 1969, but Bloom found the board's mandatory twenty-four months of service at the Denver General Hospital to be only marginally more appealing than military service. Throughout the ensuing summer months, Bloom refused to report for a mandatory physical that would have preceded his work at the hospital. He was also unable to find a job closer to Montague that would have enabled him to remain at the farm while completing his service. The Selective Service—a body that Bloom had spent

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<sup>39</sup> For this evolution, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>40</sup> For the Stonewall Inn riots, see Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993). For early gay organizing and the homophile movement, see John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

so much time and energy to attack and to discredit—threatened to impinge upon his rural idyll and Bloom was slow to yield to its unceasing call.<sup>41</sup>

Early amid this tumult, Bloom packed up his Triumph Spitfire sports car and split from the farm for a month-long voyage to California. A budding cross-country romance with Lis Meisner promised to provide some psychic relief in the face of Bloom's draft worries and the demise of LNS/Montague. Furthermore, February in San Francisco promised to top the frigid life of a snowed-in farm. But the trip also complicated Bloom's sexual identity.

Bloom's sexuality was complex and fragile. He most aptly described the nuances of his sex life in an undated note to himself that he likely composed sometime after his move to the farm:

I have and may have occasion in the future to practice at least three different kinds [of sex]. When I am lonely, I have been known to amuse myself; self-reliance I try to call it. When I was stranded in Calif. [on a trip in spring 1968], I made the bread I needed to get out of the Carmel area . . . by sleeping with a coaxial cable or something installer, and I confess it was one of the most pleasurable ways I have made money. Alas, there is no substitute for, best of all are, certain few, very few particular girls.<sup>42</sup>

Meisner—with whom Bloom stayed during his 1969 trip to San Francisco—was precisely one of those girls. She had been on the original LNS Board of Directors and had worked closely with Bloom in Washington in the winter of 1967-68. But in March of 1968 she had resigned from LNS and moved to San Francisco to find straight work. A year later, Marshall and Lis fell in love. As lovers are wont to do, they dreamed of children's names, career changes, wedding bells, and a promising future. Bloom announced their plans in a letter to Mungo: "You are the first to know, in the sense that

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<sup>41</sup> Correspondence re: Selective Service, 1969, Bloom Papers, Box 8, Folder 24.

<sup>42</sup> Bloom, note, n.d., Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folder 35.

this is being typed before the Formal Announcement for Montagroove: Lis and I are getting married in August on the farm and hope soon to have BABIES. The orgy after the wedding will be something you and yours will NEVER forget.”<sup>43</sup>

But this momentum quickly subsided upon Bloom’s return to Massachusetts. In a twenty-page letter to Lis, Marshall tried to redress her newfound reluctance to leave Berkeley and to join him at the farm:

Perhaps we got too carried away with our compact. . . . At first, perhaps, I needed you & the plans . . . now I just need you now. . . . You see, being in love—if it is, or whatever it is—with you, has opened all kinds of possibilities for my life. . . . One who was moderately interested in women finds all kinds of excitements & enticements all around—all kinds of women I never paid much attention to, intrigue me now. . . . For *now* what else is there? What in Berkeley without trying life with me 1st? . . . It is impossible that you could be the lesser for coming here even if it doesn’t work out permanently. . . . I think I cannot separate you from me; I think I need you for many years ahead; I think you are me & me you. . . . It is you who play a too-masculine, careerist, too loyal to unmerited things role, not me.<sup>44</sup>

There is no record of Meisner’s response. And while Lis visited the farm early that summer, no August wedding occurred at Montague. The promise of love, marriage, and children soon faded.

Bloom had returned from San Francisco to find a very different farm from that which he had left. First and foremost, he returned to a commune that—for the first time—no longer defined itself by the operation of a news service. Furthermore, the leadership void created by Bloom’s departure began to be filled not by another individual, but by everyone at the farm. Diamond later wrote: “[Bloom’s] absence meant that *there was no one to ask*, no final authority—if the energy was present, it would happen. And so it did. The disappearance of the living room wall was the first in a series of expressions,

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<sup>43</sup> Bloom to Mungo, n.d. [winter/spring 1969?], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 16.

<sup>44</sup> Bloom to Meisner, n.d. [spring 1969?], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 25.

individual and collective, of people coming out of their shells. Out of their shells in relation to the place and to each other.”<sup>45</sup> Several new people had also moved to the farm since New Year’s, and these individuals had been drawn to the farm as a communal farming venture rather than as a Movement center.

The change was palpable and unsettling to Bloom. Throughout his life, Bloom responded to adversity with extreme emotional swings. Harvey Wasserman even speculates that—were Bloom alive today—he would be diagnosed with manic depression.<sup>46</sup> The collapse of LNS/Montague, his Selective Service nightmare, and his failed relationship with Lis pushed Bloom into a deep depression. He opened his psyche only to those with whom he was especially close. He wrote to Mungo: “There are two kinds of us, Raymond, even in the same karass [community]. The actors & the sufferers. You & Cathy are actors, Verandah & me, of course, sufferers. The sufferers sort of plod there, whining & complaining & all, secretly (all too often) buoyed by the happy appearance of the actors.”<sup>47</sup> Dan Keller—a friend from nearby Wendell Farm who grew especially close to Marshall during this period—remembered an evening spent with Marshall at a diner in Millers Falls, Massachusetts: “Marshall had already drawn out of me all my problems and worries of the moment, and told me some of his. He was worried about the draft. . . . [He said,] ‘anything could happen. Anything. Things are very crazy, you know how freaked things can get. . . . Times are bad, maybe they’re especially bad

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<sup>45</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 98.

<sup>46</sup> Wasserman, interview, Fels Personal Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Bloom to Mungo, n.d., Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 19.

for me. I have to tell you that something could happen, I don't know what it is, but it could happen at any moment."<sup>48</sup>

Even more revealing of his psychic trauma, however, is Bloom's journal from this period. In early July, Bloom reflected on an otherwise ordinary day: "I felt our profound madnnesses today and in my own deep madness I felt that all the while past I had been divorced."<sup>49</sup> Extreme swings in emotion often occurred several times per day, as they did on August 31. On this day, Bloom recorded dejection at Cathy's and Laz's departure, followed by ecstasy at a phone call from Lis, followed yet again by a down period after a phone call from Laz, and finally joy at a private conversation with Cathy in the evening.<sup>50</sup> These fits were neither predictable nor controllable for Bloom.

On October 15, 1969, Bloom departed for Denver to visit his family and to contest an indictment brought against him in the United States District Court for his failure to report to his employment assignment and to his physical exam. It was a trying week. His legal dispute remained unresolved. Furthermore, a conflict with his folks over his long hair served to remind Marshall that—in the words of Verandah—"He wasn't his parents' blue-eyed boy."<sup>51</sup> On October 19, Marshall sat down to reflect on the emotional intensity of his trip: "The cold chill of my madness is my only company tonight. Oh if only I could call [Dan] Keller, but it is such a drag to talk to him on the phone. Oh did

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<sup>48</sup> Dan Keller, "Dark Side of the Iceberg," *Green Mountain Post*, no. 5 (Spring 1977): 32. Print copies of the *Green Mountain Post* and its predecessor, the *New Babylon Times*, are available in the Famous Long Ago Archive, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Library. Digital copies of the *Green Mountain Post* and the *New Babylon Times*, are also available online at "Green Mountain Post," University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Library, Special Collections, Digital Collections, <http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/digital/gmp.htm> (accessed January 11, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Bloom, Last Journal, July 2, 1969, 47, Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folders 40 and 41.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, August 31, 1969, 87-88.

<sup>51</sup> Porche, "Queen of Poesie," 239.

[Lis] sound distant, even more distant. . . . I just want to plow the field, fix the tractor and truck, and then to die. Why won't it all let me alone. . . . Am I really come to this. And we are all mad together here."<sup>52</sup> For all of Marshall's efforts to escape the grind of everyday America—the bustle of urban life, the obligations of citizenship, the pains of unrequited love—he found himself continually doing battle with the outside world. Rural commune life never quite attained the level of remove of which Marshall dreamed.

Early on the morning of November 1, 1969—back on Montague Farm—Marshall parked his green Triumph sports car down a narrow road on a rocky hill. The road would later be called the Bloom Highway. He hooked one end of a hose up to the tailpipe and another end into a sealed window. He wrote his last words: “My love to all, especially my parents, and to too many to name here who have given me joy and love; would that my life could have been more help to them; I am sorry about all this.”<sup>53</sup>

Sadly, Bloom's suicide was not the only tragedy that the farmers confronted in their first year. Stephen Scolnick—more affectionately known as Wonderboy or Stevie—had been at LNS early in its existence and followed the Bloom crew to New England. At Packer Corners he had been the first communitarian to speak of the farm as a family. In part this was due to his youth; he had been only sixteen when he had arrived at LNS in the winter of 1967-68. In turn, LNS and the farm served as surrogate families to Stevie. Within a month of his arrival at Packer Corners, however, he was forced to leave the farm

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<sup>52</sup> Bloom, Last Journal, [mid-October 1969], 109-10, Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folders 40 and 41.

<sup>53</sup> Bloom, last will and testament, November 1, 1969, Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.



because his drug habits became problematic. Shortly thereafter, in September 1968, Scolnick died in a freak auto accident.<sup>54</sup>

But Bloom's proximity to the heart of the commune experiment and the reordering of lifestyles that he inspired in other people set his suicide apart as a foundational farm event. This was nowhere more apparent than in the life trajectory of Marshall's closest friend, Ray Mungo. A few years after Bloom's death, Allen Young reflected upon Bloom's suicide and placed his repressed homosexuality at the center of the torment that led him down the Bloom Highway.<sup>55</sup> Others agreed. Whether Young's characterization aptly described Bloom's psychological state or instead functioned to reclaim a repressed homosexual for the gay liberation movement is impossible to determine. What is certain, however, is that Bloom's death inspired a sexual coming-of-age in Mungo. And the extent to which the farmers employed sexual liberation at home provides a lens into the prefigurative politics practiced at Montague and Packer Corners.

Romantic trends developed early at the farms and monogamous relationships were doomed. Tom Fels simply noted that "partners were not permanent [at Montague]."<sup>56</sup> But the graveyard of failed love at the communes had little to do with sexual promiscuity. Indeed, chastity bordering on celibacy pervaded life at Packer Corners. Furthermore, life at the farm neither altered the communards' overwhelming preference for monogamous relationships, nor lessened their desire to seek love and affection. In light of this conundrum, Richard Wizansky offered the best explanation for

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<sup>54</sup> Marshall Bloom, "STEPHEN SCOLNICK, 1951-1968," LNS/Montague 107 (September 16, 1968).

<sup>55</sup> Allen Young, "Marshall Bloom: Gay Brother," in *Voices from the Underground*, vol. 1, *Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, ed. Ken Wachsberger (Tempe, AZ: Mica's Press, 1993), 59-60.

<sup>56</sup> Fels, *Farm Friends*, 12.

the failure of romance at the farms: “The energy which it takes for a dozen or so men and women to discover and embrace one another high on a hill in nowhere as yet cannot foster the milieu that is necessary for the mysterious, private process of falling in love.”<sup>57</sup> Of the many attempted relationships at Packer Corners, the farmers only considered one to be an unqualified success: that of Pete Gould and Ellen Snyder, who bore Packer Corners’ first child. Amidst the bustle and labor of farm life there was little privacy to foster relationships.

This was not due to want of trying. In fact, Steve Diamond proposed a predictable cycle of love at Montague:

Mr. S and Miss C come to the farm as a pair. They share the same space, physical and metaphysical, until one day this space is not large enough to hold them both. They have grown closer and yet larger than when they first came to live out on the land, the space is now cramped. Something has to give. So Mr. S or Miss C take off in a burst of melodrama, leaves the farm searching for more space, air to breathe and a place to lick the wounds. But this sort of abrupt going-off-in-the-night is never very permanent. In fact, everyone I know who has ever left one of our farms with a broken heart has returned to the land of the living to make his/her peace with both the place and the former ‘other half.’<sup>58</sup>

Diamond’s general description of coupling at the farms borrowed rather specifically from his failed romance with Cathy Hutchinson, who had left Diamond in the early summer of 1969 to begin a relationship with Laz, another communitarian. For the next year, Diamond maintained a sexual relationship with a female farmer at nearby Wendell Farm, but by Christmas of 1970—when he left for a Central American expedition with Mungo—Diamond was without a serious partner. In the weeks leading up to the trip, Ray fell in love with Steve. The feelings were not mutual.

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Wizansky, “A Nervous Appraisal,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 221-22.

<sup>58</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 134.

Mungo's unrequited passion for Diamond developed into a personal disaster. The story is best recounted in Mungo's semiautobiographical novel, *Tropical Detective Story*, which he would later describe as a book that "details the insanity of the first few years after Bloom's death, when I came out of the closet but fell hopelessly in love with one straight guy after another, setting myself up for the pain of unrequited affection."<sup>59</sup>

Mungo's love for Steve Diamond (portrayed as Jake Dobson in the novel) represented the epitome of his conflict and the novel's central problem:

Jake couldn't believe I needed him in any physical way because, however many men may have wanted him in his current form, I's the first to come up and *say* so. And he wouldn't believe me 'cause he loved me so dear as friend and fellow poet and cared for me, so to hurt me would be to hurt himself. But he didn't know how to avoid it, and I really needed the pain. . . . He loved me with his heart and soul but couldn't love me further with his body. And just as he'd refused to believe me when I first announced my love, I refused to believe his absolute rejection. When I found myself believing it was, indeed, impossible, and I'd never have Jake so long as I lived, I only wanted to die.<sup>60</sup>

Such are the perils of romantic love, of course, but two factors made Mungo's turmoil especially traumatic. First, over the same period in which Mungo fell in love, Diamond maintained a sexual relationship with a woman whom he invited to accompany them on their trip. Not only did Mungo face rejection, but he did so in the shadows of Diamond finding sexual compatibility with a woman within Mungo's field of vision. Second, and more important, this heartbreak came at the same moment that Mungo was preparing to come out of the closet and represented his first attempt to openly and honestly practice his homosexuality. In light of Bloom's tragic sexual repression, this step was all the more difficult for Mungo to take.

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<sup>59</sup> Raymond Mungo, *Beyond the Revolution: My Life and Times Since Famous Long Ago* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1990), 15.

<sup>60</sup> Mungo, *Tropical Detective Story*, 92, 121.

Mungo's sexual orientation and identity were sources of great confusion, but they were also tremendous creative outlets as he became increasingly comfortable with his sexuality and moved on professionally from the publication of his first two memoirs. But first he had to come out of the closet. Every so often, Mungo distributed a small newsletter, titled "The Occasional Drop!" around the nearby farms. In December of 1968, he used this forum to declare: "I hate sex. I mean I really wouldn't miss it if it somehow could go away. As it is, though, I'm stuck with it, I guess we all are, and it does nothing but make me miserable."<sup>61</sup> There is little unusual in this expression of sexual frustration, however, until we pair it with Mungo's extensive fictionalization of his sexual inadequacy.

If Mungo created a shared mythology for Packer Corners, he likewise created a self-mythology that centered on sexual confusion. In *Between Two Moons*—a screenplay commissioned by Robert Redford that has yet to be put to film—his fictionalized self confesses to a woman who picked him up while hitchhiking: "You see, I'm not sure whether I'm male or female, that is, I think I'm both, and it bothers me cause I'm not used to it."<sup>62</sup> In the aftermath of Bloom's suicide, Mungo came to embrace his bisexuality and—in part through his own stylized confessional writing—worked through his hang-ups. He had begun to turn a corner in his sexuality and become comfortable not only in his self-identity, but in declaring openly that he was gay. Mungo published his first public avowal of his homosexuality in the 1971 issue of the haphazardly published farm-family

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<sup>61</sup> Raymond Mungo, "The Occasional Drop!" December 19, 1968, Bloom Papers, Box 9, Folder 54.

<sup>62</sup> Raymond Mungo, *Between Two Moons: A Technicolor Travelogue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 18.

pamphlet *Green Mountain Post*, only a few months after he had traveled through Central America with Diamond:

I wanted my love with men and women both. . . .

Whereas my past relations with women were impotent and whining, my present ones became full and easy: on one level because I no longer had any problem getting it up, and on another level because I could acknowledge at last the balance of men and women in me, in everybody. I no longer had to prove my masculinity. I no longer had to “screw” anybody. I found myself free to give myself. . . .

My homosexual instinct came out too. I slept with men who were friends by karma, and with men who were complete strangers. I did everything I’d fantasized, and didn’t care anymore who knew about it or what they thought. I suddenly realized this made me “gay,” and liked the sound of the word. But I’m not “gay and proud” and I don’t feel oppressed. . . . I’m awfully, ecstatically glad that gay people are no longer ashamed, and I hope I’ve lost my last gay brother to the screaming terrors or night, mother, hospital and suicide.<sup>63</sup>

But Mungo’s coming out left him vulnerable to heartbreak and illustrates how, even in an environment that was sympathetic to gay liberation, the process of coming out was difficult.

Mungo’s difficulties were too much to bear and, unlike the spurned heterosexual lover in Steve’s hypothetical farm romance, Mungo could not reconcile his pain with his farm life. He spent much of the next year away from the farm—moving from Nova Scotia to New York City, San Francisco to the Pacific Northwest. By December of 1971, Mungo was prepared to write a letter to Packer Corners explaining his comings and goings: “It’s time I owned up to some heavy confessions. I left the farm last Christmas, nearly a year gone now; although I returned for portions of February, March, and April, my real identity departed before the end of December. At the time I left, I was both very

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<sup>63</sup> Mungo, “Listen,” *Green Mountain Post*, no. 3 (1971): 4. Mungo also tells this story in *Between Two Moons*, 170-72. For a more explicit connection between Bloom’s suicide and Mungo’s coming-out, see Mungo, *Beyond the Revolution*, 14.

deeply in love and very close to mad.”<sup>64</sup> Years later, Mungo further elucidated the reasons for his departure: “I knew I’d never leave that place if I could just avoid growing up. But something more powerful than will or inclination forced me out, onto the lonesome highway and all the way around the world searching for the one thing the farm couldn’t give me. Call it what you will, it was pure lust. I fell in love. It didn’t work. And my unhappiness with the object of my obsession finally overwhelmed any ability to stay together, farmed out, pretending to be friends.”<sup>65</sup>

What are we to make of Mungo’s coming-out? What about Bloom’s closeted homosexuality? The farms were simultaneously hospitable and inhospitable homes for gay communards. On the one hand, the farmers were supportive of individual sexual preferences. Bloom faced none of the homophobia at the farms that he had encountered in the New York office of LNS. When Mungo came out in 1971, he received nothing but sympathetic responses—even from Diamond who had spurned Mungo as a lover. On the other hand, something about life on the farms prevented Bloom and Mungo from being forthright about their sexuality. In Bloom’s case, this was in part due to his own psychological hang-ups. But both men sought heterosexual relationships to fill their romantic voids. Bloom’s relationship with Lis Meisner and Mungo’s with Ellen Snyder and Linda Myers do seem to have fulfilled some of their sexual yearnings. But in another sense, these relationships were stopgap measures to prevent full confrontations with their respective homosexualities. These were not gay communes and with the fluctuating population of two- or three-dozen people in the community, gay romance did not thrive at Montague or Packer Corners. Richard Wizansky likewise experienced Packer Corners’s

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<sup>64</sup> Raymond Mungo, “Letters From Ray Mungo,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 308.

<sup>65</sup> Mungo, *Beyond the Revolution*, 42.

mixed attitude toward gay relationships: “While Laurie and I were together as a couple, it was not very much discussed. And everybody knew, but we didn’t discuss it very much. We weren’t particularly public about it and there was a lot of closetedness in those days.”<sup>66</sup> Despite communal idealism, gay taboos continued to touch Wizansky and other farmers. Bloom’s closetedness likely contributed to the psychological trauma that led to his suicide. And Mungo’s coming-out directly led to his departure from the farm. In the end, gay liberation on the farms did not provide the newfound comforts and opportunities that individuals encountered in urban areas where a gay culture flowered and eased the transition out of the closet.

The farms maintained a similarly mixed record in applying the tenets of women’s liberation. Initially, labor at both farms divided along traditional gender lines. Ellen Snyder remembered this about first arriving at Packer Corners:

I kept pretty close to a sink full of dishes most of the time. I was so eager to find a helpful niche, to be doing a job, that I wasn’t surprised or offended to find mainly women doing cooking and cleaning. It seemed quite avant-garde that we split wood for the stove by ourselves. Men took up their familiar occupations—driving cars, carpentry, playing music, and telling stories.<sup>67</sup>

As Marty Jezer put it, “Women, naturally, ended up in the kitchen.”<sup>68</sup> Steve Diamond shyly remembered the men’s housekeeping shortcomings: “None of the men ever washes dishes or hardly cooks. Cathy, Wanka, Alice and Linda (though the last two have little

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Wizansky, interview by author, June 19, 2008, Guilford, Vermont.

<sup>67</sup> Snyder, “How I Came to the Farm,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 114.

<sup>68</sup> Jezer, “Tunneling to California and Back,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 244. Tom Fels echoed this sentiment: “Women were key to the farm effort, in the early days often carrying out the way of life about which the men only theorized. . . . Farm life did not preclude a division of labor but, rather, seemed to encourage it.” Fels, *Farm Friends*, 35, 53.

interest in the kitchen) do most of the work. And we do have a hell of a lot of dishes.”<sup>69</sup>

At Montague, the problem was especially bad while the news service remained in operation. Strong male leaders were never in short supply around the farms and the agenda they set rarely included challenges to traditional women’s roles.

Verandah Porche’s life at Packer Corners best illustrates the mixed legacy of the women’s movement at the communes. In early 1969, Verandah became pregnant by her boyfriend at the farm. Ill prepared for motherhood, she traveled to Boston where she obtained an illegal abortion. The experience was all the more harrowing for Verandah when the doctor revealed that she had, in fact, been pregnant with twins. She entered into a deep depression that lasted for at least a year.<sup>70</sup> In 1973, she gave birth to a daughter named Oona while at the farm. But her then-husband habitually hit her, a problem further complicated by Verandah’s communal living situation. More than thirty years later she recalled:

My first husband was a batterer. Nothing in my experience prepared me for what that was like. If you talk to other people who were here at that time, they knew about it, but they were very conflicted about whose business it was. Ultimately we took our show elsewhere. People just became increasingly hostile toward him, and that isolated me, because I felt caught in between. . . . I left here with him because I wanted my daughter Oona to have a father. It was a real failure of imagination on my part.<sup>71</sup>

Soon thereafter Verandah returned to the farm, where she has lived to the present.

The farm was a haven for Verandah during this period, but it could not provide the support to a battered woman that might otherwise be available. Packer Corners

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<sup>69</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 30.

<sup>70</sup> Porche, “Queen of Poesie,” 232. See also Bloom to Laz, [winter/spring 1969], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 28.

<sup>71</sup> Porche, “Queen of Poesie,” 241.



provided the space in which she could recover from the trauma of her abortion and a place where she could retire after gathering the courage to leave her abusive husband. But it was also the isolated space in which she first dealt with the abuse. Gaining reproductive rights and developing strategies to respond to male abuse were among the hallmarks of women's liberation in the early 1970s and while Verandah's experiences of each were difficult and slow processes, the farm provided much-needed, though limited support throughout her travails.

The sexual landscape at Montague and Packer Corners was complicated. Contrary to the commune stereotype of sexual lasciviousness, the farms were relatively staid. Nudity was common—especially reprehensible to nearby farmers was the female communards' propensity to farm topless—but sex generally operated within traditional bounds. Liberation was not a keynote theme at either farm. Gay men found comfortable homes free of discrimination, but did not find an easy environment in which to practice their homosexuality. Amidst the bustle of learning to run a farm, women often found themselves performing traditional female tasks. Most importantly, however, there is little evidence that the communards felt that the farms themselves were sources of repression. Relationship problems are always difficult, and were made increasingly tough by the close quarters, but all who lived at the farms seemed to find the experience of farming and living communally to be the source of release, comfort, and affection.

Nevertheless, the communards met new challenges at every turn. The work required to maintain the farms had created conflicts over divisions of labor and leadership roles. Meanwhile, sexual identity politics led the farmers to question how communal living impacted their personal lives. How would Montague and Packer Corners resolve

these tensions? The answer to this question determined whether the farms would survive the coming decade or be thrown into the trash heap of America's failed communes.

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Conflict at the farms forced the communards to establish collective values and to define the relationship between individual and communal identities. But conflict is destructive of community if it is not accompanied by creativity, problem-solving, and love. Conflicts rooted in work, sexuality, and tragedy challenged the communes to inspect the meaning of communal living and to define their own vision of the New Age. And *family* emerged as the central metaphor of the farm community.

The political involvement of the communards widely varied from one individual to the next, but within two or three years both farms had become largely depoliticized. At Packer Corners, this was to be expected; the farm had been established not as an intended Movement center, but as a communal, back-to-the-land retreat. Still, political removal was not on everyone's agenda. Marty Jezer, in particular, continued as an activist and registered some resistance to his political activity from other farmers:

Once I had political visitors to the house and one of the ladies, because politics at the time threatened her reality, threatened her idea of what the farm meant as home, freaked out. She did everything possible to drive them away, but Ray stepped into the breach. . . . Ray told me that he was . . . trying to assure me that there was room for my political world on the farm, that I need not ever fear being shut out.<sup>72</sup>

Packer Corners would not be a Movement center, but it could provide space for individual political involvement.

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<sup>72</sup> Jezer, "Psychic Farming," in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 131.

Aside from Jezer, Packer Corners utilized an inclusive definition of politics, something akin to the politics of everyday life. Verandah Porche remembers: “Politics was what we did all day, the idea of the personal being political. We believed deeply in the significance of daily life to make it aesthetically meaningful, to make it full of great stuff, whether that was pushing the boulder of humanity up the hill or whether it was flying your head. What we did seemed to count.”<sup>73</sup> Porche, Mungo, and others had begun to politicize daily life while living in Washington; but such a forthright assertion of personal politics did not exist prior to moving to Packer Corners.

Montague’s creation as an LNS farm set the commune on a very different political trajectory, but by the early seventies it shared Packer Corners’ general antipathy toward activism. The end of LNS/Montague marked the beginning of this shift. Diamond considered his trip to Washington to celebrate a counter-inauguration alongside Nixon’s first Oath of Office to be his last political act: “Washington had made a lot of things clearer than they’d been in a long time. . . . Our suspicions that the only movement that counted was the one within your own mind, your body and (hopefully) your spirit, had all been confirmed.”<sup>74</sup> For some, this transition was painstaking; but within a few weeks of Nixon’s inauguration, even Bloom had been willing to concede his relief at the farm’s new direction. Writing from San Francisco, he noted: “My fear when I left was that the swirl of political life in the cities would make me feel guilty once again or deeper again for us not exactly being activists any more. Happily it turns out the opposite. . . . The political activity is more meaningless, more rote and degenerate, more deadening and co-

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<sup>73</sup> Porche, “Queen of Poesie,” 237.

<sup>74</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 74.

opted, than even I had theorized in rationalizing the move to the farm.”<sup>75</sup>

Depoliticization, in turn, sparked a period of inward reflection and communal growth at Montague, something that had been lacking amidst the hurried publication schedule of the news service. This newfound spirit pervaded farm life long afterward.

The slow resolution of work disparities also went a long way toward eliminating internal animosity and promoting community growth. The kitchen—and by extension Home Comfort, Packer Corners’ wood-burning stove—became a symbol of this shift. Wizansky remembered the early disparity between how the farmers carried out farm labor and how they worked in the kitchen: “Every evening, come frying July day or 30 below and snow in January, a sumptuous feast was laid (at first perhaps less than festive cookery—we called it ‘something for nothing’ or ‘cheap but good’) which was invariably cooked and served by a different, tired farmer. And every night (almost) the dishes were done by some new face at the sink. No kitchen manager.”<sup>76</sup> By 1973—after having left and returned to the farm—Marty Jezer had shifted his view of the farm’s leadership problems:

We’ve rarely held formal meetings and I cannot remember any time meeting to assign chores, choose tasks, make lists, or in any way try to impede this natural flow. . . . Tomorrow everything will be different, I don’t know who will do the chores, cook dinner, and wash the dishes. But everything will get done in its fashion. . . . I think of our structure (even lack of structure implies structure) as being much like a free-form jazz band.<sup>77</sup>

This analogy works nicely. Like a jazz quartet, it took time for the farmers to learn how to lead and when to follow, when to drive a melody and how to find harmony.

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<sup>75</sup> Bloom to Montague Farm, n.d. [February or March 1969], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 28.

<sup>76</sup> Wizansky, “Who’s in Charge,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 74.

<sup>77</sup> Jezer, “Psychic Farming,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 127.

While the kitchen functioned as an initial site of camaraderie, it took more time to establish standard farming practices. In part, this was simply due to the communards' lack of agricultural experience; but it also resulted from some very real uncertainties about the meaning of their communal lifestyle. The controversy about organic farming is the best avenue for exploring how philosophical disputes met head on with the nitty-gritty realities of the soil and the hoe.

In 1968, organic farming was not the default method for small, local farmers. In fact, the founding of the farms coincided with the establishment of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, which would eventually advocate for the applied technology movement and help push organic farming further into the American mainstream.<sup>78</sup> But these developments primarily came in the 1970s, as the message from Rachel Carson's 1962 bestseller *Silent Spring* seeped into the American consciousness and agricultural alternatives to pesticides emerged.<sup>79</sup>

The question of whether to organically farm at Montague arose in the spring of 1969, in what was the farm's first full planting season. The debate centered on whether the farm was intended for self-sufficiency alone, or whether they would attempt to sell some of their produce. Bloom and a couple of friends at neighboring farms had taken out a contract early that spring to grow cucumbers for the Oxford Pickle Company. In order to succeed, Marshall argued, he would need to use pesticides. Montague's women were the first to advocate organic farming, but before long, most Montague farmers argued

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<sup>78</sup> See Andrew Kirk, " 'Machines of Loving Grace': Alternative Energy, Environmentalism, and the Counterculture," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 353-78; and Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

<sup>79</sup> See Linda J. Lear, *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997).

against the use of pesticides.<sup>80</sup> Laz even threatened to leave the farm if Marshall applied chemicals to his cucumber plot. Finally, Marshall was forced to relent—with some disgruntlement.<sup>81</sup> The cucumber plot failed that summer—due in large part to the season’s unusual heat—but the farm had been firmly established as a center of local organic agriculture.<sup>82</sup> A similar, though less spirited, debate took place up the road at Packer Corners. Within a few years of its founding, in fact, Packer Corners was able to sell enough produce to nearby markets to meet the entire cost of their garden plot.<sup>83</sup> Selling their produce became especially easy as the ecology and organic food movements took off in the early 1970s.

Still, the decision to grow organic produce did not mean that the communards knew how to farm. Plowing, planting, weeding, reaping—these skills came with time, yet

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<sup>80</sup> Samuel Lovejoy, “Somebody’s Got to Do It,” in *Time It Was: American Stories from the Sixties*, ed. Karen Manners Smith and Tim Koster (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 418.

<sup>81</sup> There is a complicated politics of memory at work in the relationship between Marshall and the decision to organically farm at Montague. Contemporary accounts are unanimous in asserting that Bloom was among the early proponents of using pesticides to promote commercial farming at Montague. See, for example, Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 114; and Bloom, Last Journal, June 23, 1969, 25, Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folders 40 and 41. Forty years later, however, this fact seems to have escaped the memory of at least two former communards. Sam Lovejoy remembered: “When [Montague] started, Marshall and Ira had had a big argument about organic versus chemical farming. Ira was quite emphatic that you needed pesticides, but in the end Marshall and the others won the day, and the farm went strictly organic.” Lovejoy, “Somebody’s Got to Do It,” 418. In fact, Marshall and Ira had been on the *same* side of the conflict, both advocating for the use of pesticides before eventually caving in to the rest of the farmers. Diamond likewise remembered Marshall’s purported pro-organic stance: “It’s funny, now in retrospect, how important our effort to grow organic food, to live organically with the Earth, would become. I recall that Marshall Bloom was insistent on the subject, whenever anyone suggested we use pesticides.” Stephen Diamond, “Back to the Land,” in Smith and Koster, *Time It Was*, 245. An important shift in memory seems to have occurred over the past forty years. How is this significant? Bloom was the unquestioned leader and founder of Montague Farm and since his suicide, the communards at Montague have attempted to honor his memory by taking the farm in directions in which they sensed Marshall would have approved. Simultaneously, organic farming became intimately tied to the farm’s identity. Thus, the later development of memories associating Marshall with the growth of organic farming attempts to make sense of two early, and seemingly contradictory, farm developments.

<sup>82</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 113-14, 152.

<sup>83</sup> Marty Jezer, “Agriculture,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 265. See also Porche, “Queen of Poesie,” 241.

the early gardens at both farms were surprisingly successful. Montague planted its first garden in the spring of 1969 and immediately grew enough produce to last through the ensuing winter. In addition to their two acres of beans, tomatoes, corn, carrots, onions, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, eggplant, peppers, brussels sprouts, cabbage, zucchini, asparagus, artichokes, peaches, and apples, the farmers at Montague acquired two-dozen chickens, a couple of goats and pigs, and a cow within their first year. They had less success with their first crop of marijuana. “The [marijuana] plants grew well enough,” Diamond later wrote, “but the THC content was so low that you had to smoke at least ten joints to get the slightest ‘buzz.’ And even then, you weren’t sure if you were high or just dizzy from inhaling too much.”<sup>84</sup> At its best, Diamond recalled, garden preparation contributed to the strengthening of the farm community: “Work done on the farm isn’t *work* at all, it’s play.”<sup>85</sup> Up the road, Packer Corners succeeded in planting a small garden immediately upon its establishment in the summer of 1968. Thereafter, Packer Corners planted a garden each spring and spent much of the autumn months picking vegetables, before canning, pickling, and freezing them for the winter.<sup>86</sup> Once established, the fields at both farms produced sufficient harvests to prevent over-reliance on nearby markets.

With their hands so often in the dirt, it should come as no surprise that the communards at Packer Corners and Montague developed an environmental consciousness in the early days on the farms. John Wilton established the earliest terms of Montague’s environmental justification for rural communalism:

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<sup>84</sup> Diamond, “Back to the Land,” 245.

<sup>85</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 122. The best description of Montague’s early farm is in *Ibid.*, 110-25.

<sup>86</sup> For stories about farming at Packer Corners, see Wizansky, *Home Comfort*.

Somewhere out there beyond the range of the city, it's still the garden of eden, where food to eat grows out of the ground, there are fish to eat in the rivers, game to eat in the woods, wood to cook with and stay warm and build with, and it's all there for free, like Adam all you have to do is help yourself. Of course, it isn't easy. . . . MAN is a PEST on this planet. His numbers are out of control, and he's destroying the face of the earth with his highways and warrens, he's poisoning the air and streams and oceans. He's lost his place beneath the skies and in the hierarchy of animals.<sup>87</sup>

For Mungo, the primary environmental task at the farm was simple: "We were trying to be alive in the mother country with neither ecological nor political distortion attached. . . . Our strongest security is [in] our attempt to relate to the environment as part of it rather than as onlookers."<sup>88</sup> While living in New York, Mungo had denounced the city for myriad reasons, but had yet to make strong environmental arguments for the move to the country. Once at the farm, however, ecological concerns came to the fore.

And environmental consciousness formed the core of Packer Corners' spirituality. Wizansky remembers that the commune's proximity to the land led to the emergence of a communal spiritual life: "[Our spirituality] was the ability to be in nature and to understand that there was a transcendental quality about existence. . . . All this greenness. All this water. All these plants. There's an energy. And you can be in touch with it. You don't have to be separated from it."<sup>89</sup> Indeed, communing with nature and exploring the land imbued daily life at Packer Corners with meaning and order.

Before long, these environmental interests began to extend beyond the property boundaries of the communes. Bloom wrote to Mungo in December 1968: "The US threatens the ecology of the whole earth. . . . But our concern is this area, my concern

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<sup>87</sup> John Wilton, "New York Marrakech and Montague," *New Babylon Times*, no. 1 (Fall 1969): 5.

<sup>88</sup> Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 99, 132. For echoes of this sentiment, see Diamond, "Back to the Land," 244.

<sup>89</sup> Wizansky, interview.



being the [Connecticut] River.”<sup>90</sup> Bloom referred to the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corporation’s proposed construction of a nuclear power plant in Vernon, Vermont, a mere seven miles from Brattleboro on the Connecticut River. Three years later Harvey Wasserman gave sardonic voice to an imaginary “Mr. Big” in a *Green Mountain Post* story that echoed Bloom’s earlier concern: “Vernon power plant, I’ll make a fortune on that, and I’ll wipe out that goddamn [Connecticut River], too.”<sup>91</sup> Various conservation organizations based in Vermont, New York, and Kansas delayed plant construction for the next three years, but no one at the farm became actively involved in the movement despite their voiced opposition.<sup>92</sup>

The shift toward environmental advocacy was intellectually nudged along by the writings of Henry David Thoreau, which were widely read at the communes. While in San Francisco with Lis Meisner, Marshall wrote back to the farm and centered his reflections on Thoreau’s woodsmanship:

I confess again I find the most striking and clear example I can give of our life at the farm and the curiosity and search for a new way, new age, whatever we share, is [Thoreau]. I am no longer a scoffer at [Thoreau]. I understand particularly for the women how, when clothes have been such a big thing around you all those years, to learn what you need by washing by hand, to have a few things you care about and know the hard-earned clean and dirty feel of, is very important.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps it should come as no surprise to us that a community of urban youth retiring to countryside farms would find an affinity with Thoreau and his experimental naturalism.

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<sup>90</sup> Bloom to Mungo, December 20, [1968], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 16.

<sup>91</sup> Harvey Wasserman, “Chief Thunderbunny Meets Mr. Big,” *Green Mountain Post*, no. 4 (Summer 1972): 14.

<sup>92</sup> For details on the debate over Vermont Yankee’s construction, see “Another State Plans Reactor,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1969, F16; Tom Wicker, “In the Nation: Paying a Price in New England,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1969, E13; and “Vermont A-Plant May Start Soon,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1972, 58.

<sup>93</sup> Bloom to Montague Farm, [February or March 1969], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 28.

Indeed, Bloom seems to have found a kindred spirit in Thoreau. But Thoreau's quaint antiquity—insofar as his projects struck the communards as existing in a preindustrial world entirely foreign from their own—also served to buttress their complaints against the nation's patterns of development.

The communards' readings of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* best illustrates how they saw Thoreau's idealized world and their own industrial wasteland. In a spring 1969 article decrying the impact of the automobile on American life, Jon Maslow saw fit to make an aside that indicted the environmental decay of industrialization: "Garbage floats smugly in the Connecticut River, thumbing its nose at us, as fish continue choking, as if they had swallowed their own bones in despair. If Thoreau lived, he could hardly travel on the Concord and Merrimack."<sup>94</sup> The proposition was apparently an inviting one because that October Ray and Verandah spent a week retracing Thoreau's footsteps and oars. Ray would later title their adventure "Another Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," which formed a chapter in his second book, *Total Loss Farm*.

The trip was a disappointment, but it also provided Mungo with a clear and encouraging moral. His discoveries on the trip exceeded even his low expectations: "We expected to find the Concord and Merrimack rivers polluted but still beautiful, and to witness firsthand the startling juxtaposition of old New England, land and water and mountains, and new America, factories and highways and dams."<sup>95</sup> But even these modest hopes were dashed. Ray was disgusted by the trash at one stop along the Concord: "The bank, when I reached it, was knee-deep in garbage of all kinds—metal,

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<sup>94</sup> Jon Maslow, "Auto-Manua," *Green Mountain Post*, no. 2 (Spring 1969): 11.

<sup>95</sup> Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 17.

paper, and glass. Rolls of toilet paper had been strung like Christmas tinsel on the brittle limbs of the trees, and cardboard containers by the hundreds, flattened by snow and made soggy by rain, had formed layers of mush. I was the creature from the black lagoon, or a soul in purgatory.”<sup>96</sup> Mungo’s anticipated juxtaposition of old and new New Englands was not to be found; instead, he encountered a world entirely disconnected from the farm:

The land at the farm, at this writing, is alive and well if soaked with rain. It stretches out as far as my eyes can see, forming exquisite perspectives on all sides and limited only by the open sky which protects it. It generates new life at a furious pace, such that our main problem is keeping the forest from reclaiming itself. . . . “Live off the land,” our fathers said, and so we do. . . . Friend, we are barking up the right trees.<sup>97</sup>

As we have already seen, leaving the farm to travel played a mixed, but critical role in the development of the commune community. It did so not only by recharging the individual’s batteries, but also by reiterating the mission of their movement back to the land. Indeed, Ray’s float down the Concord and Merrimack revealed to him that the commune project was a worthwhile venture in a world quickly going to pot.

The communards turned to Thoreau for inspiration on a final front: the unexpected realm of friendship. In an undated letter to Dan Keller, Bloom suggested reading Thoreau’s passage on friendship in the “Wednesday” chapter of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.<sup>98</sup> It is the same passage that Mungo would later quote at length to conclude his “Another Week” section of *Total Loss Farm*. The passage exerted a strong influence on how the farms defined their community. Thoreau wrote:

My Friend is not of some other race or family of men, but flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone. He is my real brother. I see his nature groping yonder so

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>98</sup> Bloom to Keller, [spring/summer 1969], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 22.

like mine. We do not live far apart. . . . Is it of no significance that we have so long partaken of the same loaf, drank at the same fountain, breathed the same air summer and winter, felt the same heat and cold; that the same fruits have been pleased to refresh us both, and we have never had a thought of different fibre the one from the other!

. . . My Friend shall forever be my Friend, and reflect a ray of God to me, and time shall foster and adorn and consecrate our Friendship, no less than the ruins of temples. As I love nature, as I love singing birds, and gleaming stubble, and flowing rivers, and morning and evening, and summer and winter, I love thee, my Friend.<sup>99</sup>

No quote could better capture the shift that occurred on the farms over their first few months and years. The farms transitioned from communities founded on the shards of divisive conflict to communes premised upon a cooperativism that bordered on kinship.

The development of commune rituals—particularly those centered on drugs and meals—contributed to these changes. Drug use was widespread on the farms. Harvey Wasserman quipped that “we were really high all the time.”<sup>100</sup> And Fels noted that “LSD and highly prized mescaline were consumed as consumer good were not.”<sup>101</sup> Drug use became ritualized at Montague, Diamond recalled, as “family trips” on Sunday became commonplace in early 1969: “It was a Sunday, this day of my first mescaline experience. . . . Perhaps it was a coincidence that we had chosen the Day of Rest to take our tribal sacrament, an event we were to repeat throughout the rest of the winter and early spring: family trips on Sundays.”<sup>102</sup> Diamond, for one, believed that communal drug use staved off many of the confrontations and disputes that pervaded the early days at the farm. Up

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<sup>99</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Walden; or, Life in the Woods, The Maine Woods, Cape Cod*, Library of America ed. (New York: Library of America, 1985), 231-32. Also quoted in Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 52-53.

<sup>100</sup> Harvey Wasserman, interview by David Kerr, January 23, 1975, David Kerr Research Materials on Liberation News Service and the Alternative Press, Box 1, Folder 15, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

<sup>101</sup> Fels, *Farm Friends*, 12.

<sup>102</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 78.

at Packer Corners, they took so many psychedelics in their first winter that they jokingly spoke of “the Acid Olympics.”<sup>103</sup> But the Acid Olympics did serve a purpose, according to Jezer: “Family acid trips . . . brought us closer together.”<sup>104</sup> Marijuana, hashish, mescaline, acid—the list was long, but it did have its limits. When Packer Corners asked Wonderboy to leave the farm, his habitual methamphetamine use ranked high on the farm’s list of grievances.<sup>105</sup>

Because of the amount of time devoted to food at Packer Corners, the kitchen and garden emerged as sites where labor conflicts were resolved. “Most of the commune’s energies,” writer Andrew Kopkind observed upon visiting the farm, “go into the production, preservation, and preparation of food.”<sup>106</sup> Daily kitchen rituals played the greatest part in promoting communal solidarity. Disputes over labor came to be resolved in the kitchen and vibrant mealtimes built a sense of community. Richard Wizansky remembered: “Our first realization that ritual was a part of farm life centered around food, and with my cloudy understanding of ages past I knew that there, too, it was the planting and harvesting of food which ignited spirits. . . . It was in the midst of scraping knives and forks and jawing music that we revealed to one another our histories, ambitions, and dreams.”<sup>107</sup> Memories differ widely about whether the first food served at the table had been worth eating, but before long—as the garden developed—meals

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<sup>103</sup> Porche, “Queen of Poesie,” 240.

<sup>104</sup> Jezer, “Psychic Farming,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 134.

<sup>105</sup> Marshall Bloom, “STEPHEN SCOLNICK, 1951-1968,” LNS/Montague 107 (September 16, 1968).

<sup>106</sup> Andrew Kopkind, “Up the Country: Five Communes in Vermont,” *Working Papers for a New Society* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 45.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Wizansky, “Rituals,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 278. Marshall echoed this basic sentiment with reference to Montague Farm in journal, December 18, [1968], Bloom Papers, Box 1, Folder 35.

became elaborate affairs. All agree that dinnertime was critical to the communes' collective identities. At Packer Corners, mealtimes were so dramatic that Laurie Dodge built a dining platform on which the communards simultaneously ate and spun mythology. Wizansky remembers these meals as central to the creation of a farm family:

We just used to have the most wonderful communal dinners, where we would be eating our own pork roast and our own vegetables. Potatoes and onions. And we'd be drinking wine or beer and just sitting on this platform and being very witty and bubbly and chatty and political and argumentative. That's a favorite memory that just infuses the best years of the farm. This was a meal that we had all cooked together and talked about for a number of days and continued to talk about after. And we would always be talking about the outhouse during dinner. . . . The farm was very much about food. Growing food, eating food, and pooping food.<sup>108</sup>

These meals were—quite literally—life elevated to art. They also provided a simulacrum of family life.

These ritual observances all signaled a conscious and self-reflective inward turn early in the farms' histories. Two later decisions similarly contributed to this shift. First, the farmers began to limit their travel and to emphasize remaining at the farm to promote community formation. Early on, busy travel schedules had led to farm populations that were in constant flux. By 1973, Pete Gould explained, this stopped:

Most people have ceased to travel, except within the communes; as time goes by, very few people still choose to gain knowledge by moving about on the face of things. At last the long moment had to come when the peaceful minds, the abundant farms, the increasing tribe stood still, and breathed deep where it stood, of the power entrusted to it, while the planet itself gathered its own voice.<sup>109</sup>

Second, the slow elimination of connections to the outside world—what the farmers called “unplugging”—further contributed to the development of a distinctive community identity. They unplugged the telephone and television, relied on wood-burning stoves,

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<sup>108</sup> Wizansky, interview.

<sup>109</sup> Pete Gould, “How I Came to This Place,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 68.

and—perhaps most painfully for a set of communes with ties to the underground press—cancelled their newspaper subscriptions. At Packer Corners, the electricity powered “one stereo, the water pump, light bulbs, and amplifies an occasional musical instrument and that’s all.”<sup>110</sup> And what did they hope to accomplish by unplugging? How did this inward turn shape the farms? To begin, it forced the community members to face one another and to make the commune function. Mungo offered another answer to these questions: “When you can no longer see any real differences between We and They, you’ve made it to the New Age. . . . We will need to be so together that impartial observers could never tell us apart: ‘they all look the same to me.’”<sup>111</sup> The communards searched for a spiritual connection that mended difference. The result bordered on kinship.

From the beginning of the farms, there was great debate about how to conceive of the relations between the farmers. In fact, a pair of Montague farmers quipped: “What we are is the perennial topic of discussion. . . . It is not at all clear what we are or where we are going.”<sup>112</sup> Bloom, for one, thought that the use of the term family was shortsighted and insincere. In the late spring of 1969, he listed two critical flaws in the commune experiment to that point: “The first [fault] is just taking-for-grantedness. . . . The second fault is, I think, the short-minded narrowness of a term we’ve all used. ‘Family.’”<sup>113</sup>

Nevertheless, the term came to predominate; Diamond best justified its usage:

The difference between the commune and the family has always been obvious: The commune is a *place*, an ‘alternative institution,’ which must of necessity give way to a more important and absolutely intrinsic social structure based in *individual people* and their relationships to each other. The family. Place must

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<sup>110</sup> Marty Jezer, “Total Loss Economics,” in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 151.

<sup>111</sup> Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 86, 171.

<sup>112</sup> “Zig-Zag Cigarette Papers; A Marge and Dave Production,” LNS Records, UMass.

<sup>113</sup> Bloom to “[Montague] family,” [late spring 1969], Bloom Papers, Box 2, Folder 28.

always be secondary in priority to the people, otherwise the magic stops. For many kids who came to the farm during its early days this was but a way station, a passing phase. It is no longer that way. For the members of the family, this is It, Real Life, this is where the stand is being made; which accounts for the demonic intensity of the players.<sup>114</sup>

It was precisely the permanency of the communal arrangement that convinced the farmers to adopt the terminology of kinship to speak of their community.

At Packer Corners, the transition was swifter. The aspiration to establish a family network formed part of the farm's founding mission. Porche and Wizansky remembered the close of the first summer as the critical turning point in this shift: "We wanted to sire a family. . . . We concluded [at the end of the summer of 1968] that it was necessary to evict the others, and we felt guilty, and still do."<sup>115</sup> Packer Corners even adopted role-playing nicknames to simulate the nuclear unit: Raymond was Grandpaw, Verandah was Mother.<sup>116</sup> The familial arrangement, Andrew Kopkind argued after visiting the farm, formed the key reason for Packer Corners' longevity: "[The commune] is very much like a successful nuclear family, in which members accept certain well-defined roles, don't argue about them, and concentrate on external work. The content of those roles is vastly different from those in a conventional family, but the process of interaction is similar: a lot of tolerance, not very much change."<sup>117</sup> The farmers carefully thought through the implications of adopting the terms. And Jezer tried to untangle the knot between genuine blood relations and the commune family:

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<sup>114</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 98.

<sup>115</sup> Verandah Porche and Richard Wizansky, "Skating Home from the Apocalypse," in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 31-32.

<sup>116</sup> Mungo, *Beyond the Revolution*, 39.

<sup>117</sup> Kopkind, "Up the Country," 46.



The idea that we are a family is important to the people on the farm. This sense of family wouldn't be so much a part of our present awareness if we didn't each carry within us memories of what our family life was in the past; where it broke down and ceased being meaningful and how, now, it can be reconstructed to that end. We've all, symbolically or literally, left home and rejected our pasts. At first this was merely rebellion, a necessary but negative act of breaking away. In retrospect, we seemed to be running not as much *from* our families, but in search of family, looking for the sense of community and family life we once knew but, in the end, found lacking at home. As we reclaim this sense of community life, we rediscover the tribal soul and within ourselves become family men and women once again.<sup>118</sup>

Like a family adopting a child, the act of *choosing* to enter the farm family made it a meaningful commitment. As Wizansky saw things, the *decision* to join the family defined the farm's significance: "For us, who are now a tribe or family, the same bonds of love and labor and responsibility [as exist in a family] exist [here], transformed in the alchemy of friendship without bitterness or regret, because it is neither a place we were born into or had thrust upon us, but have deliberated upon and found."<sup>119</sup>

But why were the communards so insistent upon using the term "family"? And, furthermore, why should we take their use of the term seriously and imbue it with meaning? To a great extent, the communards were exiles from the Movement. But they were also exiles from their own families, however disparate the circumstances in which they were raised. Tom Fels remembers that "at this point in our lives, many of us did not get along particularly well with our parents."<sup>120</sup> Thus, the movement back to the land was not only an escape from a Movement that the communards found increasingly shrill, but

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<sup>118</sup> Marty Jezer, "How I Came Here," in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 37.

<sup>119</sup> Richard Wizansky, "Blood Is Thicker Than Water," in Wizansky, *Home Comfort*, 138-39.

<sup>120</sup> Tom Fels, "From the Late Sixties."

it also represented a movement toward a new ideal of interpersonal relations that bore a near association with an ideal of family that many found wanting elsewhere.<sup>121</sup>

The argument that they were a family-by-choice, however, became less imperative to the farm's identities as the communards developed genuine ties of kinship through marriage and birth. Cathy and Laz bore Montague's first farm child on the one-year anniversary of Bloom's suicide; up at Packer Corners, Verandah Porche and Ellen Snyder would each have children in the coming years. When a fire destroyed the farmhouse at the nearby Johnson Pasture Farm in April 1970, commune exiles made their way to Montague.<sup>122</sup> Janice Frey and her daughter Sequoya—whose father passed away in the fire—moved to Montague along with Charles and Nina Light. Nine months later, Nina bore a son named Eben.<sup>123</sup> This further deepened the farm's kinship. The metaphor of family had become increasingly real.<sup>124</sup>

The ties within the individual farms also extended outward to create a sense of an extended family network that existed between the farms. The communards termed this community a *karass*—a word adapted from Kurt Vonnegut's 1963 novel, *Cat's Cradle*, to signify the spiritual connections among a group of people. Diamond best spelled this out: "Our two farms are like sisters. Two clumps of people of the same *karass*, relatives of the same family, but separated by an invisible distance of some twenty or thirty

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<sup>121</sup> For yearning toward familial relations as a driving force of the commune movement, see Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Getting It All Together: Communes Past, Present, Future," in *The Future of the Family: Mothers, Fathers and Children; Sex Roles and Work; Communities and Child Care; Redefining Marriage and Parenthood*, ed. Louise Kapp Howe (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 311-25.

<sup>122</sup> For the Johnson Pasture commune (thinly veiled as "Jackson's Meadows"), see Barry Laffan, *Communal Organization and Social Transition: A Case Study from the Counterculture of the Sixties and Seventies* (New York: P. Lang, 1997).

<sup>123</sup> Charles Light, interview by author, June 23, 2008, Turners Falls, Massachusetts.

<sup>124</sup> For child rearing in communes, see Bennett M. Berger, Bruce M. Hackett, and R. Mervyn Millar, "Child Rearing in Communes," in Howe, *Future of the Family*, 159-69.

miles.”<sup>125</sup> The communards included nearby Wendell and Tree Frog farms in this extended family network and the central family gathering occurred each year at Packer Corners to celebrate May Day. On this day, all the nearby farms gathered to plant the maypole, celebrate the arrival of spring (or the decline of winter), and take a family trip.<sup>126</sup>

The tensions that arose during the first days of communal living never entirely disappeared from the farms. But the metaphor—and reality—of family life created a nurturing environment that allowed conflicts to arise without threatening the existence of the communes. Gathered in good faith, trust, and investment in communal success, the farmers forged a family from a group of New Left exiles. *Living the Movement* led the communards down unexpected paths. Forging a family created a taproot for the decade to come.

Conclusion: “It Took About Two or Three Years to Make Everything Work”

From 1968 to 1973—a period that historians often portray as a loud and disastrous denouement of the New Left and counterculture—Montague and Packer Corners were at work to establish a functional prefigurative community. Forty years later, Sam Lovejoy looked back upon the early years at Montague Farm and made a simple evaluation of the period: “It took about two or three years to make everything work.”<sup>127</sup> Taking cues from the Movement’s best inward-looking tenets, the farm family had

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<sup>125</sup> Diamond, *What the Trees Said*, 176.

<sup>126</sup> See *Ibid.*, 176-77; and Mungo, *Tropical Detective Story*, 24.

<sup>127</sup> Lovejoy, “Somebody’s Got to Do It,” 419.

organized its own house in order to advance a challenging social agenda. Indeed, the farms turned away from earlier confrontation politics in favor of a self-reflective prefigurative orientation. Organic farming, travel, and ecological consciousness were tools that strengthened community. And despite the fact that conflicts often resulted in individuals leaving the farms—as they do in all families—the communes ultimately advanced a movement toward personal politics by fostering a familial community as an end in itself.

But this is somewhat deceptive. Packer Corners continued to advance its communal organic identity and to shun political activism in the years to follow. But the folks down at Montague began to convert their social and agricultural capital into a political base from which to continue the Movement fight. Former activists peopled Montague Farm. And while their first years had been spent farming, many were itching to get back into the Movement game.

## Chapter 3

### **Forging a Collective: Prefigurative Politics at Liberation News Service, 1968-1972**

When Allen Young returned to New York from the World Youth Festival in Sofia, Bulgaria—where he had been traveling as the split unfolded—he discovered a Liberation News Service altogether distinct from that which he had left only a few weeks earlier. Everybody in the office had not only professed a commitment to participatory democracy, but had actually defended democracy by tooth and nail. They had begun to forge a collective.<sup>1</sup> But work remained. LNSers shared an egalitarian impulse to forge a perfection of Movement democracy in the smithy of LNS's Harlem basement. But the collective still faced the arduous task of converting this common ideal into a common reality. Realizing this goal formed LNS's central task between 1968 and 1972—the high water mark of LNS influence within the Movement.

This was an exciting time to be near the volatile center of the American New Left. Indeed, the period between 1968 and 1972 marked a shift away from the idea—whether real or imagined—of a single Movement, toward single-issue movements based on separatism and identity politics. Throughout this period LNS maintained an influential discursive position within the New Left and the underground media, covering black and Puerto Rican nationalism, women's and gay liberation, and the ecology and American Indian movements with interest, acumen, and sympathy. Forging a collective at LNS

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Young, interview by author, June 22, 2008, Royalston, Massachusetts.

required a shift in emphasis that partially mirrored the new direction of the Movement between 1968 and 1972. But LNS rejected the separatist tendency in preference of a broad-based vision of the Movement. LNS reflected this eclecticism within the pages of its packets, where news of disparate movements ran side by side.

The process of forging a collective came in three steps. To begin, LNS sought to define its strategic politics. By the close of the 1960s, LNS had established a loose Marxist analysis that balanced domestic radicalism—fashioned in the violent last days of SDS—and Third World Marxism, while demanding that participatory democracy govern the collective’s daily operation. Next, LNS shifted its energies to the emergent women’s and gay liberation movements. The collective realized that the challenges posed by sexual liberation politics required a dramatic rethinking of how LNS operated and divided its work. Finally, LNS fashioned a collective structure that took sexual liberation as its starting point and collective accountability and participatory democracy as its ends. LNS did not quietly go about its collective restructuring, but openly promoted and discussed its changes with its diverse readers. The process of forging a collective formed the central concern of LNS at the height of its power, while also threatening to jeopardize its very existence.

### Good Politics

In early 1969, the Movement received an unprecedented spurt of attention. *FORTUNE* ran an eleven-article special issue on American youth in its January issue, while *Esquire* published “A Spectator’s Guide to the Troublemakers,” a mottled article

by John Kifner intended to serve as an introduction to Movement leaders for the uninitiated.<sup>2</sup> This spotlight raised all sorts of tricky questions for the New Left, which Allen Young highlighted in the first LNS packet of the new year:

If we are fighting the ruling class (which advertises in *Esquire*), should we even want to appear ‘groovy’ in the middle of all that shit? Does an article like this make us fodder for a kind of political voyeurism?

Or, despite all these shortcomings, is an article like this useful simply because it makes the movement attractive and thereby turns some people on to us (the assumption being that we provide the ‘good politics’ later)?

Obviously, there’s no clear answer to these questions.<sup>3</sup>

But these questions established an intellectual roadmap for LNS during 1969. With the mass media loudly knocking on the Movement door, LNS began to define the role of the underground in American public discourse. At the same time, the collective refined what constituted “good politics” and established a more precise albeit roughhewn LNS political analysis.

Because underground rags across the country reprinted the packet, LNS was probably the most widely read source of New Left news and analysis in the United States between 1967 and 1981. And the period from 1969 to 1972 marked its golden age.<sup>4</sup> From an average total distribution of 471 packets in 1968, LNS achieved a peak circulation of 895 in 1971 and continued to distribute more than 400 packets through 1976.

In 1969, however, the staff underwent a dramatic turnover that forced LNS to rethink its collective values. Of the twelve LNSers in the collective in October 1968, only three remained a year later. These new staffers were significantly more stable in their

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<sup>2</sup> “American Youth: Its Outlook Is Changing the World,” special issue, *FORTUNE*, January 1969, 66-152; and John Kifner, “A Spectator’s Guide to the Troublemakers,” *Esquire*, February 1969, 86-91.

<sup>3</sup> Radical Media Bulletin Board (RMBB), LNS 129 (January 9, 1969), 14.

<sup>4</sup> For a visual representation of LNS circulation statistics, see Appendix 2, Figure 1.

commitment to LNS. Of the fourteen collective members in October 1969, seven remained on staff for at least a year, five kept on for at least two years, and two remained for longer than three years. This influx of staffers inherited an established readership, but encountered an organization only beginning to formulate a theory of American media.<sup>5</sup>

This theory branded the mass media as LNS's enemy through a hackneyed Marxist analysis. Vicky Smith—who had arrived at LNS from the *St. Paul Dispatch* in 1968—most strongly voiced LNS's radical critique of the mass media. In response to *FORTUNE*'s special issue, Smith celebrated “the growing anxiety of the ruling class . . . that capitalism is up against something qualitatively different from anything in its history—youth in total revolt.”<sup>6</sup> Fearful that the capitalist press “wants to castrate the left while turning it into a commodity,”<sup>7</sup> Smith urged New Leftists to read *FORTUNE*'s coverage in order to get “a clear picture of what the enemy is thinking.”<sup>8</sup> According to Smith, New Leftists had done irreparable harm to the Movement by abetting mass media sorts in their coverage of the Movement. Although Allen Young had expressed ambivalence about mass media coverage of the Movement, he echoed Smith's Marxist media analysis: “America's press is in fact a powerful and willing tool of the powerful elite which runs the nation. The press reflects values which are both capitalistic and

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<sup>5</sup> Staff statistics taken from LNS 108 (October 4, 1968); 199 (October 2, 1969); 290 (October 1, 1970); 380 (October 2, 1971); and 469 (October 4, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Vicky Smith, “Fortune Telling: Business, Foreseeing Doom, Forecasts Cooptation,” LNS 130 (January 11, 1969), 18.

<sup>7</sup> Vicky Smith, RMBB, LNS 132 (January 18, 1969), 18. For big business's cooptation of hip youth culture, see Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Vicky Smith, “Fortune Telling: Big Business Foreseeing Doom, Forecasts Cooptation,” LNS 130 (January 11, 1969), 19.



hierarchical.”<sup>9</sup> With this understanding in place, LNS set out to define its vision of the underground’s role in American media.

To begin, LNS defined its journalistic style relative to that of the mass media. Mark Feinstein remembered LNS’s fine dance with the distortions of mainstream news coverage: “[LNS’s editorial style] was straight journalistic style. . . . It was not so much personal journalism, as it was picking up on what the establishment press either covered up or didn’t pick up on or did badly or simply misrepresented.”<sup>10</sup> Feinstein and LNS increasingly reviled “older hippie papers,” and no longer felt the need “to provide the artsy fartsy stuff, to provide the poetry, to provide the way-out graphics.” Instead, LNS’s job was “to provide the charts and diagrams for the quantitative stories, to provide the good photographs, to provide the solid stories.”<sup>11</sup> The new LNS style guide would have read very differently from that of Mungo or even LNS circa fall 1968.

While LNS no longer advocated excessive subjectivity, it pushed “participant journalism,” which spun the news to Movement ends. Katherine Mulvihill again placed LNS partisanship in conversation with the mass media: “We weren’t neutral in the mainstream journalistic sense.”<sup>12</sup> LNSers Thorne Dreyer and Vicky Smith argued that “people involved with movement papers generally see themselves as activists or

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<sup>9</sup> Allen Young, “Mass Media in America,” LNS 177 (July 10, 1969), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Feinstein, interview by David Kerr, February 16, 1977, David Kerr Research Materials on Liberation News Service and the Alternative Press, Box 2, Folders 10 and 11, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Allen Young similarly promoted reputable research to support solid journalism in “Journalism and Research: A Working Paper,” LNS 137 (February 6, 1969), 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Marx and Katherine Mulvihill, interview by author, June 24, 2008, Cambridge, MA.

organizers first, and journalists second.”<sup>13</sup> This statement held true for LNS staffers.<sup>14</sup>

Andy Marx later described how participant journalism impacted LNS objectivity: “We had a sense of ourselves as journalists reporting the truth. . . . We weren’t relativists. We thought certain things were important, but we weren’t trying to distort reality to fit into a particular ideology.”<sup>15</sup> LNS boasted a straightforward editorial style that advanced a cause while maintaining rigid standards of accuracy.

Not only were LNSers participant journalists, however, they were forthright New Left partisans. Some years later, LNS responded to a question as to whether they considered themselves to be part of the Movement with a blunt rhetorical query: “Does a bear shit in the woods?”<sup>16</sup> The collective was unabashedly political, describing itself as “[an arm] of the revolutionary movement,”<sup>17</sup> and calling for others to “join us in making revolutionary propaganda.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in an increasingly political underground, LNS provided “a revolutionary service” intended to promote activism and internal education.<sup>19</sup> This last point is critical: even LNS stories that were never reprinted in underground rags could serve as vital conduits of internal education and common intellectual capital, as

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<sup>13</sup> Thorne Dreyer and Vicky Smith, “The Movement and the New Media,” LNS 144 (March 1, 1969), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Jessica Siegel—who did not arrive at LNS until the fall of 1970—succinctly echoed Dreyer and Smith: “You’re a journalist but you’re also a participant; you can’t stand on the sidelines.” Liberation News Service Reunion Packet, 2000, 26, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

<sup>15</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

<sup>16</sup> “Special RMBB: State of the Onion,” LNS 417 (March 11, 1972), 24.

<sup>17</sup> RMBB, LNS 275 (July 25, 1970), 11.

<sup>18</sup> RMBB, LNS 319 (February 20, 1971), 4. See also, Young, “Red Diaper Baby,” 29.

<sup>19</sup> RMBB, LNS 261 (June 3, 1970), 11. See also, Andy Marx’s entry in LNS Reunion Packet, 3-4.

staffers at underground newspapers and New Left organizations read through the packet regardless of whether they reprinted the material.

Nevertheless, LNS could not please everybody. John Wilcock—co-founder of the Underground Press Syndicate, another vital underground network—complained to *Rolling Stone*: “We’re paying LNS \$180 a year . . . to send us whatever they damn well feel like sending us. You’ll find that papers all over the country are unhappy with what LNS sends out, but we’ve got no choice. Nobody can tell LNS what’s worth covering and what’s not. They don’t listen.”<sup>20</sup> While Wilcock’s diatribe was largely driven by LNS competition with the Syndicate as the underground’s primary source, LNS sometimes remained out of touch with the demands of its subscribers.

But LNS remained in conversation with its subscribers in a variety of forms. To begin, many LNSers arrived at Claremont Avenue with backgrounds in underground or student papers. Thorne Dreyer transferred from Austin’s *The Rag*, Sheila Ryan had experience at the *Washington Free Press*, and Allen Young had edited the *Columbia Daily Spectator*. Contact with the underground took other forms, as well. Nina Sabaroff, for example, took leave from LNS to work separate stints at San Francisco’s short-lived *Dock of the Bay* and the *Richmond Chronicle*.<sup>21</sup> LNS also reprinted incoming letters from the underground in the packet’s Radical Media Bulletin Board, creating a shared underground dialogue.

Furthermore, LNS had specific readers in mind, whom they tried to seduce by the logic and simplicity of their reportage. Dreyer and Smith described the ideal LNS readers

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<sup>20</sup> John Burks, “The Underground Press: A Special Report,” *Rolling Stone*, October 4, 1969, 21.

<sup>21</sup> Nina Sabaroff (Katya Taylor), interview by author, August 21, 2008, telephone.

as “new, presently un-hip people who must become part of a revolutionary class.”<sup>22</sup>

Radicalization was central to the LNS mission. But seduction of the “un-hip” required a particular style, free of potentially alienating Marxist rhetoric. At the same time that LNS attempted to form a radical analysis of American capitalism, the collective established a style devoid of rhetoric, overt partisanship, and blind organizational fealty. In other words, LNS sought to express radical independence.

Two new political issues began to test LNS’s resolve to maintain this independence. To begin, the emergence of Third World Marxism as a leading Movement tendency and the underground’s general indifference to LNS’s international coverage pushed the collective to balance demands on its meager resources with the priorities of its politics. Meanwhile, the New Left divisions created by SDS sectarianism forced LNS to walk a fine line between simple objective reportage and potentially alienating partisan coverage. The collective’s resolutions of these conflicts defined LNS’s political worldview for much of the next decade.

Expanding its international coverage marked one of LNS’s central goals during 1969 and 1970. Staffer Anne Dockery considered LNS’s internationalism to be among its most valuable traits: “We feel that our experiences and our position as a news service puts us in an excellent position to bring the struggles in third world countries back to the people in the United States.”<sup>23</sup> The first step down this road consisted of running stories and following up on news from international outlets, including Vietnam News Agency,

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<sup>22</sup> Dreyer and Smith, “The Movement and the New Media,” 28. A similar assertion is made in Anne Dockery, Description of LNS, n.d. [1971-1972], MS 1875, LNS Records, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927,” Folder: “Cuba,” Contemporary Culture Collection, Temple University Library.

<sup>23</sup> Anne Dockery, Description of LNS, n.d. [1971-1972], MS 1875, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927,” Folder: “Cuba.”

Hsinhua (the Chinese news service), and Prensa Latina (the Cuban news agency). LNS also began tapping into a network of foreign correspondents between 1969 and 1971. LNS packets regularly featured stories by Hugo Hill from Saigon, Schofield Coryell from Paris, and Sheila Ryan and George Cavalletto—who left LNS in the spring of 1970—from Amman.

International travel by collective members, however, formed the core of LNS's strategy to promote Third World liberation movements. Many staffers traveled to Vietnam; others ventured to Cuba as part of the Venceremos Brigades and otherwise. Funded in large part by contributions from churches of the Joint Strategy and Action Committee—including Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Methodist churches—LNS also sent staffers to the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa in 1970.<sup>24</sup> Making Third World liberation movements relevant to American activists emerged as a key LNS goal during this period; but nobody in the underground seemed to appreciate the effort.

LNS's coverage of African decolonization movements is the best example of the discontinuity between the resources that the collective poured into Movement internationalism and the lack of attention it fostered from underground rags. LNS began covering the African political scene in early 1969 and from the beginning felt the need to justify this coverage to its readers: "A liberation struggle is going on in Africa. . . . The struggle is just beginning. It will be long, difficult, and probably bloody, but it cannot be suppressed. U.S. radicals should know something about it."<sup>25</sup> Within a couple of months,

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<sup>24</sup> "A PROPOSAL TO THE JSAC CHURCHES," [1971], MS 645, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Causes: Arms Control to Homosexuality," Folder: "Causes: Churches."

<sup>25</sup> Editor's Note to "News From Africa," by Africa Research Group, LNS 169 (June 5, 1969), 11.

LNS pushed their Africa coverage with even greater zeal. “If you think that the subject [of African politics] is not ‘interesting to your readers,’” LNS argued,

You might reflect that people began to be very interested in Vietnam—after American soldiers started to be slaughtered. But before that, the mass media didn’t make an issue of Vietnam—for obvious reasons. . . .

There was no radical press of significant size to tell people in the U.S. about Vietnam before the obituary columns did. Now, however, there are hundreds of radical papers across the country.

The question is whether these papers will tell the people about the potential African Vietnam before it happens—and possibly prevent it from occurring.<sup>26</sup>

By drawing on the Movement’s collective abhorrence of events in Vietnam, LNS tried to sway the underground to shine a spotlight on African decolonization. LNS went a step further and sent staffers Andy Marx and Mike Shuster on a seven-month tour of Africa, backpacking through Kenya, Ethiopia, and other countries, and meeting with villagers and revolutionaries throughout the continent. Marx recalls the specific motivation for this trip: “We would go and we would try to educate people that many of the same kinds of things that they saw happening in Vietnam were going on in the Portuguese colonies and in Africa, and that the movements for independence and for the right to set their own path to improving lives for people were taking place in Africa as well.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, American imperialism maintained its grip across the globe and not solely in Indochina.

LNS coverage of Africa—and particularly stories written by Marx and Shuster—attempted to sell Africa as a compelling story to the underground. They often did so by making explicit connections between African politics and American business and government. “Ethiopia is the largest recipient of U.S. military aid in Africa,” LNS wrote

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<sup>26</sup> LNS 186 (August 14, 1969), inside front cover.

<sup>27</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

as an introduction to a July 1970 article on Ethiopian poverty.<sup>28</sup> But if Africa in and of itself did not appeal to the American underground, neither did LNS's transnational spin on African politics.

Simply stated, the American underground did not reprint LNS's international coverage. Mark Feinstein considered LNS's international coverage to be a product that the collective had to pawn off on its subscribers: "The hardest stuff for LNS to push was international stuff. The best stuff we did very rarely made it into the underground press."<sup>29</sup> The underground's illiteracy toward Third World Marxism proved to be an embarrassment for LNS when dealing with foreign revolutionaries. When George Cavalletto met with North Vietnamese representatives in Havana in September 1969, for example, he felt ashamed of the alternative media's attitude toward the Vietnam War:

How could I explain the fact that such and such a newspaper had two pages of sex ads, three pages of rock news, but nothing on their war? Was that a revolutionary paper?

How then do you explain to the Vietnamese the uneven acceptance by our press of the revolutionary responsibility of fostering revolutionary internationalism?

What I said was that the papers in general were getting better, were becoming more seriously connected to history, and that more and more of them were and would overcome their own national cultural chauvinism.

But that didn't full satisfy me.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike those at work in the low-budget, community rags that reprinted LNS material, LNSers interacted directly with foreign government officials, activists, and revolutionaries. They did so by daily correspondence, by rifling through foreign press

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<sup>28</sup> Editor's Note to "Ethiopia: 'Someday We Too Will Rise'—A Visit to a Very Poor Land," by Andy Marx, LNS 272 (July 15, 1970), 5. See also, Editor's Note to "The Fourth of July in Kenya: Dangling Hope in the Faces of the Jobless," by Andy Marx, and "Kenya: Marking Time," by Andy Marx, LNS 275 (July 25, 1970), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Feinstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 10 and 11.

<sup>30</sup> George Cavalletto, "A Report to the Radical Press," RMBB, LNS 197 (September 25, 1969), 3.

releases, and by traveling to conferences throughout the world. No wonder LNS felt obliged to push its foreign coverage. But most of the underground did not bite.

Despite these difficulties, LNS's labor to develop reputable international coverage did pay dividends abroad. Marx returned from Africa struck by the respect he received from African liberation fighters.<sup>31</sup> Feinstein echoed this sentiment: "People took LNS much more seriously everywhere else in the world than they did here. . . . Foreign political movements take the political press . . . as their most important task, among all their tasks. In this country, it's always sort of ancillary. . . . The foreigners regarded us as the journalistic organ of this entire, vast movement. Which in a sense, we were."<sup>32</sup> In a sense. But LNS could not push its internationalism on community-based underground rags that maintained local readerships and local missions.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, staff trips abroad functioned as initiation rites into LNS internationalism. This was never more apparent than in spring 1970 as Katherine Mulvihill arrived at LNS. A recent high school drop-out who had worked with LNS while writing for the High School Independent Press Service—an adolescent underground source based on LNS packets—Mulvihill had more recently bounced around New York City selling costume jewelry and books. She arrived in the basement

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<sup>31</sup> Andy Marx and Howard Epstein, interview by David Kerr, February 28, 1977, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 6 and 7.

<sup>32</sup> Feinstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 10 and 11.

<sup>33</sup> Art Kunkin of the Los Angeles *Free Press* emphasized his rag's local mission: "We used a lot of LNS originally and now there's a feeling generally that LNS has become sort of ossified, that they issue, like, proclamations. My conception is that the underground papers have to be very local. The extensive use of LNS makes it less local. If LNS does things like the Columbia [University protest] and they have access to stories like that, then we'll use them. But there's very little of that." Burks, "The Underground Press," 21.



office of LNS just as the collective prepared to send a contingent of staffers to Cuba on the second Venceremos Brigade.<sup>34</sup>

Controversy over whether Mulvihill should begin her LNS career with the Harlem collective or with cane cutters in Cuba quickly arose in a staff meeting. Allen Young argued that Mulvihill would learn more working with her new colleagues in New York; Nina Sabaroff countered by emphasizing the revolutionary development provided by a Cuban expedition. The collective opted to send Mulvihill to Cuba.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps it seems disingenuous to compare the tedium of office work to the rare opportunity to travel to Havana; but LNS had so many opportunities to send staffers to Cuba that it likely would have only been a matter of months before Mulvihill would have been able to make such a trip. Indeed, it was precisely the commonality of traveling to Cuba that allowed participation in the Venceremos Brigade to function as a rite of passage within the collective.<sup>36</sup>

LNS considered its international perspective and experience to be among its signature contributions to the underground; it also functioned as a central ideology connecting collective members. But many underground papers ignored LNS international coverage. While LNS struggled to convince many rags of the importance of Third World Marxism, the collective also trudged through the Movement's most controversial 1969 storyline: the emergent sectarianism of Students for a Democratic Society.

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<sup>34</sup> LNS Reunion Packet, 29.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. See also Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

<sup>36</sup> The best account of the Venceremos Brigade remains, Sandra Levinson and Carol Brightman, eds., *Venceremos Brigade: Young Americans Sharing the Life and Work of Revolutionary Cuba* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971).

Through 1968 and 1969 LNS maintained a close albeit vague relationship with SDS. On the one hand, LNS looked to SDS as the unquestioned vanguard of the Movement. “The growth of the Movement is largely attributable to SDS,” Allen Young told *Rolling Stone* in October 1969. “LNS also believes that organization and collective action are necessary, and that the best organized force—the best *white* organized force—has been SDS.”<sup>37</sup> LNS even organized itself as the Tom Paine chapter of SDS.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, LNS remained outside the fabric of SDS, facilitating a model of impartial reportage that stretched through 1969. As SDS broke into Progressive Labor (PL) and Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) factions, then again into Weatherman and RYM-II factions, and finally into oblivion, LNS remained a free agent that developed ties only as its own politics evolved.<sup>39</sup>

In early 1969, as Marxism-Leninism began to emerge as the central rhetorical anchors of SDS, LNS observed with optimistic skepticism. Following the December 1968 SDS National Council meeting, LNS reported:

The influence of PL inside SDS has teamed up with a growing consciousness of SDS’s place in the history of international socialism . . . . This has led SDS to pick up Marxist-Leninist phraseology. So far, this phraseology has been a substitute for political development—clearly a drawback—but there are signs that people are beginning to develop a clear set of political ideas now.

The search for orthodoxy within the non-PL sectors of SDS, however, often means that people use slogans and quotes (from Marxist-Leninist-Maoist “fathers”) without attempting to apply a Marxist analysis to the world of 1969 and beyond. The point is that the terms (e.g. class struggle) are correct; however, we

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<sup>37</sup> Burks, “The Underground Press,” 21.

<sup>38</sup> LNS recalls this fact in RMBB, LNS 508 (March 14, 1973), 7.

<sup>39</sup> Background sources for the following section on SDS include, Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); and Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973).

are only beginning to develop the ideas behind the terms. If that dynamic can't be completed, we're in trouble.<sup>40</sup>

The blind were leading the blind. But LNS at the very least indicated that they were not to be swayed by rhetoric unaccompanied by coherence and realistic plans of action.

As the June 1969 SDS National Convention in Chicago approached, LNS began to formulate and to articulate a New Working Class political analysis that rejected Progressive Labor's preference for solely organizing the industrial working class. According to LNS, students and college graduates formed a new working class in the United States to the extent that college degrees did not offer a beeline into control over the means of production. LNSer Bob Heilbroner most clearly articulated the collective's espousal of New Working Class theory:

It is simply a myth that a college education is a guaranteed ticket to the ruling class. When most students get out of their colleges, they'll be employees of large private firms, or work for various government or semi-government employers as teachers or social workers, etc. . . . NONE OF THESE JOBS INVOLVES ANY CONTROL OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION. NONE OF THEM OFFERS ANY REAL POWER."<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, LNS proposed to fight racism and anti-working class sentiments among students and the "white collar working class." Whereas PL proposed a staid cultural outlook that would not alienate their conception of industrial workers, LNS favored a consolidation of militant and cultural radicalism: "We have to be ACTIVE, COMMITTED ENEMIES OF THE STATE. We need a counter culture with alternative values. We need to 'clear out' the shit that they fed into us—but it has to be a culture of

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<sup>40</sup> "Sectarianism and Political Development: A Report on the SDS National Council," LNS 127 (January 9, 1969), 21.

<sup>41</sup> Bob Heilbroner, "SDS: What the Noise is All About," LNS 167 (May 29, 1969), 23.

struggle, a fighting culture, if we're gonna turn this society 'round.'"<sup>42</sup> LNS increasingly fell in line with the anti-PL sentiment that resulted in PL's ouster from SDS at the June National Convention.<sup>43</sup>

With the Progressive Labor faction eliminated, the tenuous alliance between Weatherman and RYM-II that had formed in Chicago began to unravel. Weatherman placed black activists at the head of its revolutionary vanguard and dismissed the role of white revolutionaries—despite their own pale skin—to achieve radical change. With white revolutionaries cast in supporting roles, Weatherman called for immediate armed struggle. Meanwhile, RYM-II served as an umbrella anti-imperialist group that sought to immerse itself in and to organize the white working class. Despite much shared Marxist-Leninist ideology, Weatherman and RYM-II differed in the means to the end of revolution and spewed a good deal of vitriol at one another throughout the summer and early fall of 1969.<sup>44</sup>

As another rift seemed imminent, LNS placed itself in the awkward position of promoting separate Weatherman and RYM-II protests at the October “Bring the War Home” offensive in Chicago, an event that would later be known as the Days of Rage. LNS planned to send a team of reporters and photographers to Chicago and called upon its readers to support the Fall Offensive. In the weeks leading up to the event,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>43</sup> For the LNS celebration of the PL ouster, see Allen Young, “Big Changes and Fresh Air: SDS National Convention Report,” LNS 173 (June 26, 1969), 1-3.

<sup>44</sup> Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 70-73.

Weatherman lobbied LNS to promote their agenda and to help print radical propaganda in Chicago.<sup>45</sup>

But as the Weatherman plans for Chicago coalesced around violent confrontation, and as RYM-II found increasing support for a separate Chicago demonstration from the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, LNS shied away from Weatherman's solicitations and pushed an independent yet favorable analysis of RYM-II. LNS's critique of Weatherman throughout the fall and winter of 1969 represented a critical period of ideological formation, political clarification, and emergent independence relative to other Movement groups. Never again would LNS take such a clear editorial stand while intervening in Movement politics.

LNS's critique of Weatherman ideology centered on its race and class contradictions. Despite Weatherman's exclusively white makeup, the faction placed white activists in a subordinate—even reviled—position in the revolutionary hierarchy. Unfortunately, LNS noted, this position “excludes the possibility of organizing a mass white revolutionary movement to join with the liberation struggles of blacks, browns and Third World people in this country and abroad.”<sup>46</sup> As an all-white organization itself, LNS refused to accept that white activists should promote a Movement dismissive of interracial solidarity. The collective was also scornful of Weatherman's privileged background, noting with disdain that “most of the Weather-leaders . . . came from a comfortable, upper-class family.”<sup>47</sup> In the end, LNS dismissed Weatherman's capacity to foment revolution: “Their behavior has been in the comic-book style of Marxist-Leninist

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<sup>45</sup> Marx and Epstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 6 and 7.

<sup>46</sup> “Strange Days in Pig City,” LNS 202 (October 11, 1969), 3.

<sup>47</sup> “FBI Captures First Weather-Fugitive,” LNS 249 (April 18, 1970), 10.

practice in mass organizations. . . . Their continually growing hatred for white people (and their arrogance toward the suggestions of Third World people) will make their actions increasingly small, isolated and, and futile attempts at glorious revolutionary martyrdom.”<sup>48</sup> Historian Todd Gitlin aptly describes Weatherman’s ideological slight of hand: “They permuted class guilt into a theory that permitted them to abase themselves before a stereotyped Third World and yet hold on to their special mission.”<sup>49</sup>

LNS also criticized Weatherman’s excessive militancy and its inadequate anti-capitalist analysis. In an editor’s note that strikingly referred to Weatherman in the past tense—as if dead—LNS acknowledged Weatherman’s influence while dismissing its strategy: “Weatherman’s leanness and grim desire to make the revolution now, not to wait for the ‘right’ day but to act now, sent shudders through the metaphysical fat in our movement.”<sup>50</sup> In the end, LNS rejected Weatherman as mere sound and fury: “The Weatherman analysis has resulted in tactics which fail to define and isolate the enemy—the Empire’s ruling class—and which fail to show masses of Americans how capitalism ruins their own lives and what might be possible without it.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, this statement revealed the apogee of LNS’s revolutionary agenda: to sway the masses against capitalism and imperialism.

LNS’s stand against Weatherman elicited critical comments from several readers and Movement leaders. Terry Becker of Washington DC’s *Quicksilver Times* found LNS’s criticisms to be misguided: “Scorn Weatherman, pay no attention to them, but

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<sup>48</sup> Nick Gruenberg, “Weatherman: An Analysis,” LNS 213 (November 22, 1969), 9.

<sup>49</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 385.

<sup>50</sup> Editor’s Note to “What is the Sound of One Faction Clapping? (A Response to ‘I Hear the Sound of Wargasm’),” by Michele Clark, LNS 206 (October 25, 1969), 20.

<sup>51</sup> “Strange Days in Pig City,” LNS 202 (October 11, 1969), 3.

don't come out harder against them than you do against the capitalist rip-off culture that fucks over all of us.”<sup>52</sup> LNS responded by quoting Mao: “We stand for active ideological struggle because it is the weapon for ensuring unity. . . . Liberalism rejects ideological struggle and stands for unprincipled peace, thus giving rise to a decadent, philistine attitude and bringing about political degeneration.”<sup>53</sup> SDS founder Tom Hayden accused LNS of having “a strong political bias against SDS Weatherman,” despite his own critical stance toward the faction.<sup>54</sup>

The experience of covering SDS's collapse sparked a newfound resolve at LNS to maintain its independence within the Movement. This began at the Days of Rage where LNSers opted to rebuff Weatherman solicitations to help print propaganda. Instead, LNS reported the Chicago events from an uninvolved perspective and devoted at least as much packet space to the RYM-II demonstration.<sup>55</sup> Mark Feinstein remembered it this way: “LNS tried to be relatively critical and independent politically, and it certainly was about the Weatherman, although there was always a conflict about that. There were always those who were more sympathetic and less sympathetic.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed LNS maintained a set of shared political ideals—anti-imperialism, anti-racism, anti-capitalism—but never developed a coherent collective politics. This tendency developed as a direct result of complications and criticisms that arose through LNS's coverage of SDS's self-destruction. By spring of 1970, LNS even apologized for the “tone” of an article critical

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<sup>52</sup> RMBB, LNS 207 (October 30, 1969), 6. For a race-based criticism of LNS's Weatherman coverage, see Earl Ofari “A Reply to Nick Gruenberg,” LNS 217 (December 10, 1969), 11.

<sup>53</sup> RMBB, LNS 207 (October 30, 1969), 6.

<sup>54</sup> RMBB, LNS 227 (January 21, 1970), 15.

<sup>55</sup> Marx and Epstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 6 and 7.

<sup>56</sup> Feinstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 10 and 11.

of Weatherman's class assumptions.<sup>57</sup> Henceforth, LNS would moderate and mediate between Movement groups, but rarely offer strong political analyses or make forthright commitments in Movement squabbles.<sup>58</sup>

### The Ratio

The 1969 dissolution of SDS also pushed LNS into the path of the fast-growing women's liberation movement. At the RYM-II National Convention on Thanksgiving 1969, a faction of women demanded and received an independent leadership role within the organization. Henceforth, at least half of RYM-II executive positions would be filled by women, women's caucuses would exist at all organizational levels, and household and office work would be divided between men and women. As a result, the RYM-II Women's Caucus assumed a position of influence rarely available to women in the male-dominated New Left. The LNS article on the accomplishments of the RYM-II women noted the shift that their victory represented:

It is not surprising that the radical movement has to this point reflected the all-pervasive male chauvinism of bourgeois culture—not surprising, but no less disastrous. While radical men have paid intellectual lip service to the concept of fighting male chauvinism, their own inevitable chauvinist attitudes, frequently unexamined, have allowed them to assign women traditional feminine roles with a sick radical twist—women have been delegated the jobs of “revolutionary” typists, cooks, shit-workers and mommies of revolutionary offspring.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See “FBI Captures First Weather-Fugitive,” LNS 249 (April 18, 1970), 10; and RMBB, LNS 250 (April 22, 1970), 16.

<sup>58</sup> Feinstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 10 and 11.

<sup>59</sup> “RYM-II Women Win Power at National Convention,” LNS 216 (December 6, 1969), 7.



From this apparent enlightenment, however, LNS slipped into a stream of chauvinism and radical machismo that mirrored New Left sexism. The article dismissed the gains of “uppity women” and “petit bourgeois women’s groups.” Furthermore, the article suggested a fundamental opposition between “women’s groups” and “radical groups,” a concept damaging to LNS’s professed conception of a collective Movement. Over and over again the article dismissed women’s liberation, accusing female activists of “endless rhetorical binges” and of failing to accomplish anything “solid.” After the article appeared—without attribution and without the previous notice of LNS women—the collective held a meeting, unanimously decried the chauvinism of the piece, and retracted the article in its next packet. But all was not right at LNS.<sup>60</sup>

Pervasive male chauvinism was part and parcel of the New Left. Female alienation from male activists in a presumptive “beloved community” played a central role in the emergence of second wave feminism. For this reason the women’s liberation movement boasted a strong separatist tendency that placed women’s liberation outside the realm of the period’s other social movements. This was in line with the overwhelming tendency toward separate single-issue movements based on identity politics throughout the Movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s. But not everyone was content to abandon a New Left model based on an inclusive political ideology that sought sexual liberation within a broad-based Movement.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> “IMPORTANT—A RETRACTION,” LNS 217 (December 10, 1969), inside front cover.

<sup>61</sup> For women’s liberation, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); and Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000). For attempts to organize around poverty, see Jennifer Frost, *An Interracial Movement of the Poor: Community Organizing in the New Left in the 1960s* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). For the relationship between white and black feminists, see Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979); and Wini Breines,

When LNS ran this chauvinist analysis of RYM-II's women's caucus, the organization's behavior was consistent with the New Left's male-dominated leadership. But in the aftermath of its RYM-II coverage, LNS veered from the traditional narrative of New Left chauvinism by critically analyzing its male dominance, reassessing its collective structure, and implementing changes based on a newfound appreciation for the challenges posed by women's liberation. Amidst a Movement environment increasingly prone to separatism and sectarianism, LNS provided a model for how the women's liberation movement might interact with the period's other social movements.

LNS's collective structure provided a stable intellectual base on which to build a sexually inclusive Movement model. LNS favored participatory democracy and sought a practical democratic structure within the collective. "[LNS] has attempted to develop a democratic work situation," they wrote in March of 1969, "with all members sharing responsibility for LNS decisions. There are no bosses."<sup>62</sup> In order to increase its collective responsibility for the articles printed in the packet, LNS eliminated bylines on most articles written by staffers in early 1970.<sup>63</sup> This decision illustrated a collective will, in the words of staffer Andy Marx, "To be liberated from selfishness . . . in the direction indicated by the words 'collectively better.'"<sup>64</sup>

The role that women's liberation would play in this movement toward collective harmony, however, was not altogether clear in the aftermath of LNS's embarrassing

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*The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> Thorne Dreyer and Victoria Smith, "The Movement and the New Media," LNS 144 (March 1, 1969), 20.

<sup>63</sup> RMBB, LNS 222 (January 3, 1970), 8.

<sup>64</sup> "My [Deaver Collins'] second conversation with Andy Marx, mid-March, 1973, Amherst," 38, Kerr Research Materials, Box 1, Folder 1.

coverage of RYM-II's women's caucus. As the calendar turned to 1970, the collective's central occupation turned to establishing its position relative to the women's liberation movement.

To that point, many LNSers had not taken women's liberation seriously. With the obvious exception of LNS's coverage of RYM-II's women's caucus, the collective had provided encouraging reports of the women's movement in the pages of its packets. But conditions around the office indicated that this enlightenment remained primarily in the realm of theory. In January 1970, men outnumbered women by two-to-one in the eighteen-member collective.<sup>65</sup> At collective meetings, women generally remained silent as male heavies dominated conversation.<sup>66</sup> Women rarely wrote lead stories. Instead, they read through incoming underground papers seeking stories to rerun. Anne Dockery noted that this tendency created a vicious cycle: "As a result [of the gendered division of labor] women were less developed politically and technically, and all the sexist and male chauvinist tendencies in the men on the staff were reinforced."<sup>67</sup> At their best, Marx recalled, "[LNSers] had been lip-service sympathizers to the women's movement."<sup>68</sup> The problem did not center on overt sexism. But Katherine Mulvihill remembers that "many of [the women in the collective] began to feel that . . . there were subtle ways in which men exerted more power."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> LNS 222 (January 3, 1970), inside front cover.

<sup>66</sup> RMBB, LNS 508 (March 14, 1973), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Anne Dockery, Description of LNS, n.d. [1971-1972], MS 1875, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927," Folder: "Cuba."

<sup>68</sup> Marx and Epstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 6 and 7.

<sup>69</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

Perhaps unavoidably, many of the men at LNS did not believe that the conflict was rooted in a sexual double standard. For Mark Feinstein—one of the few staffers to arrive at LNS from the *New York Times*—the question of sex was secondary to that of creating solid journalism. “Part of the tension that eventually developed,” he began,

was that people like Alan Howard and Allen Young and me and one or two others . . . were into the journalism part of it, aside from the politics, and there was always an intimation that . . . we were more into that than into the politics. . . . But it was always regarded . . . as a male trip. . . . That professionalism was a manifestation of an unhealthy individualism. . . . The “male trip” notion became very important when feminism was really on the ascendancy. . . . It was the time that Alan Howard and I were criticized most strongly for sitting in our offices and writing, rather than going out and doing collective work.<sup>70</sup>

But Feinstein failed to realize that the support needed to allow these journalistic binges consistently fell on the same shoulders of the same women. “Doing collective work,” did not solely consist of building morale and establishing collective rapport, as Feinstein’s dismissal suggests. Instead, “doing collective work” consisted of the nitty-gritty tedium that enabled the collective to produce packets in the first place. Furthermore, while Feinstein argued that professionalism rather than sexism facilitated his journalistic fancy, he did not account for the exclusively male make-up of his newsroom.

As Feinstein’s reluctance toward women’s liberation illustrates, the underground press formed a unique site of contestation over the meaning of second wave feminism. At the Radical Media Conference held in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in July 1969, key underground representatives overwhelmingly passed a resolution on women and the underground press. “It is the sense of this conference that the underground press must undergo revolutionary changes in its relationship to and projection of women,” the resolution began:

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<sup>70</sup> Feinstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 10 and 11.

Therefore we propose the following:

1. That male supremacy and chauvinism be eliminated from the contents of the underground papers. . . .
2. That papers make a particular effort to publish material on women's liberation within the entire contents of the paper.
3. That women have a full role in all the functions of the staffs of underground papers.<sup>71</sup>

With the geographically vast and politically diverse underground press theoretically pushing for women's liberation, it remained for individual rags to implement changes in their editorial policies and collective structures, to implement actual changes to promote sexual liberation. Two routes existed: separation or integration.

New York City's *Rat* newspaper became the focal point of these changes in January 1970 as women from the feminist groups Redstockings, Weatherwomen, and WITCH took over the rag's office to produce a one-time women's liberation issue. Robin Morgan of WITCH penned the issue's centerpiece, an article titled "Goodbye to All That," which pressed its central point from its opening lines. "So, *Rat* has been liberated," she began,

for this week, at least. Next week? If the men return to reinstate the porny photos, the sexist comic strips, the "nude-chickie" covers (along with their patronizing rhetoric about being in favor of women's liberation)—if this happens, our alternatives are clear. *Rat* must be taken over permanently by women—or *Rat* must be destroyed. . . . We have met the enemy and he's our friend. And dangerous.<sup>72</sup>

When the proposed cover for the next issue of *Rat* boasted a cartoon rat unzipping his fly and declaring that "The Old Rat Is Back," Morgan and the women's caucus announced that they were retaining permanent editorial control over the paper. Unlike the *Ladies' Home Journal*, which wrested control back from women's liberationists after agreeing to

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<sup>71</sup> "Women and the Underground Press," LNS 179 (July 19, 1969), 14.

<sup>72</sup> Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," in *The Word of a Woman: Feminist Dispatches, 1968-1992* (New York: Norton, 1992), 57-58. This article originally appeared in *Rat*, February 9-23, 1970, 6-7.

publish a single liberated issue, *Rat* owner Jeff Shero permanently surrendered the paper to the women and the *Rat* became a central women's liberation publication.<sup>73</sup>

LNS immediately responded to the *Rat* takeover by announcing its support for the action and reprinting a *Rat* editorial detailing the coup.<sup>74</sup> But LNS women resisted the separatist tendency displayed at *Rat*. Instead, they set out to formulate a solution to the problems of male chauvinism that promoted an integrated Movement. Their solution would become known as "the ratio."

The first step in this direction came in January 1970, as the collective's women formed an LNS Women's Caucus. The caucus announced an ambitious agenda akin to that declared at the previous summer's Radical Media Conference in Ann Arbor. To begin, the women promised to improve and increase the women's liberation copy and graphics in the LNS packets. Part of this goal included scrutinizing each packet and eliminating offensive material. But the Women's Caucus had no intention of solving the problem of male chauvinism on its own. The group intended to communicate with other women at work in the radical media, challenging them to send critiques of the LNS packets to the collective.<sup>75</sup> In a more aggressive tone, the women added a note to the margins of the LNS packet declaring that "MALE EGO IS ON THE WAY OUT!"<sup>76</sup>

LNS women's intention to include other radical media women in their attack on male chauvinism was not hollow; they organized an East Coast Women's Media Conference for the weekend of April 25 and 26 to explore the sexism faced by women

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<sup>73</sup> For a thorough narrative of the *Rat* takeover, see Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties*, 212-16. See also, Jane Alpert, *Growing Up Underground* (New York: Morrow, 1981), 242- 45.

<sup>74</sup> RMBB, LNS 233 (February 11, 1970), 14-15.

<sup>75</sup> RMBB, LNS 227 (January 21, 1970), 15-16.

<sup>76</sup> LNS 229 (January 28, 1970).

throughout the Movement media.<sup>77</sup> One hundred and fifty women attended what amounted to a consciousness-raising session for the female underground. LNS coverage of the conference emphasized the organic structure of the conference panels and leadership:

The sisters don't need "leaders," you know. The concern that women feel for each other is a beautiful thing to see. The "structure" of the conference was inherent in each of the women themselves. Women separated naturally into workshops to discuss the issues that are vital to our own survival . . . as women newly conscious of our oppression, our need to struggle, and the power of our rage. . . . Women don't need an iron hand to keep them in "order" because they are sincerely interested in what other women have to say, eager to relate it to their own experience.<sup>78</sup>

Women shared "atrocious stories," spoke of the need to form women's caucuses on underground rags, discussed how to formulate a distinctive female writing style, and explored how lesbian and straight women should relate to one another in the radical media.<sup>79</sup> At first glance, the conference fits the dominant separatist trend in women's liberation. But for LNS women, the conference was helpful insofar as it prepared them to effectively relate to men within their sexually inclusive collective.

The Women's Media Conference succeeded in developing a network of committed female journalists, but it did not provide a practical answer for how to combat male chauvinism at LNS or any other underground newspaper. This task remained for the LNS Women's Caucus to tackle on its own.

The first step down this path consisted of adjusting how LNS related to the rest of the underground press, often including subtle yet pointed reminders to their subscribers

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<sup>77</sup> For the announcement, planning, and preparation of the conference, see RMBB, LNS 233 (February 11, 1970), 15; RMBB, LNS 243 (March 28, 1970), 4; and RMBB, LNS 245 (April 4, 1970), 8.

<sup>78</sup> Karen Kearns, "Radical Media Women and How We Grew," LNS 252 (April 29, 1970), 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*; and Barbara Feinstein, "Notes on a Lesbianism Workshop," LNS 252 (April 29, 1970), 7-8.

that new standards of conduct were necessary. When newspapers used the greetings “Dear Sirs” or “Dear Brothers” to begin their letters to LNS, the Women’s Caucus responded: “It’s consciousness-raising time again. It is extremely demoralizing to receive letters that are addressed ‘Dear Sirs,’ ‘Gentlemen,’ ‘Brothers,’ or anything else that totally ignores our existence. Half of every kind of work that gets done around here is done by ‘Dear Sisters.’”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, when a male staffer from the Stockton, California, *Silver Hammer* wrote to LNS complaining about the personal flavor of its women’s liberation coverage, an LNS woman responded with venom: “Your notion that ‘personal opinion’ is irrelevant or is not ‘objective’ is wrong. . . . That you do not *like* [a woman’s] feeling in no way discredits it. . . . That you refer to women’s liberation material as ‘women’s lib shit’ shows that the Silver Hammer has a long way to go in combating its own sexism.”<sup>81</sup> Finally, when the LNS graphics department decided to eliminate individual credits from its photographs in order to decrease the competitiveness and elitism of underground photography, they also began to credit photographs taken by LNS women as coming from the Women’s Graphics Collective; they did this “so that people will be aware that women are doing photography and to encourage other women who may be intimidated by the vast army of male ‘heavy’ photographers running around.”<sup>82</sup> With the newfound strength of an LNS Women’s Caucus and the knowledge gained from the Women’s Media Conference, women in the collective began to forcefully articulate their anger and to demand respect from underground men.

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<sup>80</sup> RMBB, LNS 261 (June 3, 1970), 12. See also, RMBB, LNS 284 (August 29, 1970), 4.

<sup>81</sup> RMBB, LNS 290 (October 1, 1970), 8.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



The tensions surrounding women's liberation did not solely play out within LNS's Harlem office. LNS's Third World Marxist perspective continued to be critical in shaping the collective's political worldview. With the women's liberation movement on the rise in the United States, LNS staffers traveling abroad took the opportunity to gauge the attitudes of foreign activists toward sexual liberation and to either bolster or undermine the legitimacy of sexual politics. But their conclusions were hardly uniform.

Alan Howard spent several months traveling through Latin America in 1969 and 1970 and in part used this trip to take the pulse of Latin Americans toward the North American movement. Howard discovered that he was unable to describe the relevance of women's and gay liberation to the Latin American activists he encountered:

People who go to bed hungry every night will not get too interested in the problems of their sexual identity. . . . Was there no relationship between those "personal" struggles and the struggles for national liberation that are mutilating the monster around the world? Despair, for if there is no relationship, if there is no link that unites these struggles, I know which one I must choose. We must choose.<sup>83</sup>

Howard would choose revolution and class struggle over sexual liberation if the Movement came to this impasse. But Howard's real problem lay in his inability to articulate the relationship between sexual liberation and Third World politics.

Howard proposed that LNS shift its intellectual energy away from the application of sexual politics within the collective itself and toward articulating a coherent sexual politics within the broader movement. LNS's tendency to discuss sex only insofar as it related to the collective's internal operation was problematic to Howard:

Does all the energy we spend in struggling with [questions of monogamy, roles, sexual expression, and objectification] lead us along a revolutionary path? We don't know and can't know as long as these questions are posed and applied only

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<sup>83</sup> Ho [Alan Howard] to LNS, May 18, 1970, MS 1021, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927," Folder: "Foreign Miscellaneous, 1018-1039."

to the relationships that exist among the dozen or so people at LNS. . . . I think a lot of these questions and terms are relevant to a world-wide socialist revolution, but we are playing games with ourselves until we see how they apply to a mass movement.<sup>84</sup>

The prefigurative component of sexual liberation politics was lost on Howard.

Fellow LNSer Barbara Rothkrug discovered a very different attitude toward women's liberation while participating in the Venceremos Brigade cane-cutting expedition to Cuba in early 1970. Rothkrug not only found sympathy for women's issues in Cuba, but discovered a nation that, to her eye, had made enormous strides in the direction of women's liberation: "We had seen Cuban socialism, seen problems like day-care, abortion, birth control, and caring for children well on their way to solution in Cuba. We felt very strongly that a socialist revolution was an enormous step toward women's liberation."<sup>85</sup> Despite gendered divisions of labor and Cuba's thriving machismo culture, Rothkrug noted: "Over and over [Cuban] women described their excitement about being independent contributors to society. . . . Few American women can have such confidence in a future of meaningful work and economic security."<sup>86</sup> Insofar as LNSers explored sexual politics abroad, liberation existed in the eyes of the beholder.

Meanwhile, the collective still faced its most pressing question: how would LNS apply the implications of the women's liberation movement to the internal problem of male chauvinism? LNS's answer to this question determined whether the collective would promote a message of sexual inclusiveness or separatism within the Movement and the underground press. It also represented a distinctive model of *living the*

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Barbara Rothkrug, "On Leaving Cuba," LNS 252 (April 29, 1970), 20.

<sup>86</sup> Barbara Rothkrug and Shari Whitehead, "The Revolution of Cuban Women," LNS 254 (May 9, 1970), 10, 12.

*Movement*. By utilizing sex to create an egalitarian collective structure, LNS provided a pragmatic prefigurative model that could solve many of the sex-based conflicts that pervaded the New Left.

The early autumn of 1970 found the collective in a period of dramatic flux. Over the preceding summer months, Andy Marx and Mike Shuster, and Howie Epstein and Alan Howard had divided into pairs and left New York for lengthy trips to Africa and Latin America, respectively. These trips had been a part of a concerted LNS effort to expand its international coverage and to improve its collective knowledge of third world liberation movements. But the trips had an equally profound impact on the basement offices of LNS, where collective women found themselves outnumbering men by a large margin. They also found themselves homebound while four of the collective's men toured foreign lands. Simultaneously, three men decided to leave the collective in order to become more active in other Movement organizations. In late September, LNS announced that its staff was "attempting to evolve a new structure" and shifted to a less rigorous weekly publication schedule for the next month in order to facilitate this process.<sup>87</sup>

By the first week of October, women outnumbered men in the collective by two-to-one and the LNS Women's Caucus noted positive changes around the office. Morale and communication improved, while the collective shared responsibility for office tedium. The women agreed that this was a welcome development, according to Beryl Epstein: "Those of us already working here felt that only by increasing the proportion of women would the inherently sexist patterns of LNS change. . . . [We] felt that with fewer men, sexist attitudes would be less reinforced, therefore combating them would be

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<sup>87</sup> "Note to Subscribers," LNS 289 (September 26, 1970), inside front cover.

easier.”<sup>88</sup> The Caucus met to decide whether they should replicate the *Rat* take-over and make LNS an all-women’s collective. But they voted this down.<sup>89</sup> Instead, the Women’s Caucus proposed to maintain the collective’s existing ratio of two women for every man.

As men returned from trips abroad, however, the sex ratio inched closer to fifty-fifty. Now what? The entire collective decided to enforce a two-to-one ratio only as staffers left and new recruitment began. No men were asked to leave the collective and all staffers returning from trips abroad were welcomed back.<sup>90</sup> After LNS made this initial decision, more than a year passed before the collective achieved its ideal two-to-one ratio. Nevertheless, LNS had addressed the problems of male chauvinism with an innovative and practical collective restructuring that provided a model of sexual inclusiveness to the Movement and its thriving underground press.

In order to maintain the sex ratio, LNS henceforth implemented sex-based recruiting tactics. The collective never had difficulty finding men who were eager to join the collective. Whenever the collective began to lean too heavily in the direction of women, Beryl remembered, LNS hired men. But these moments were comparatively rare, whereas the recruitment of female staffers was a constant theme. “We have a hard time finding women,” Beryl noted, “and we’ve come to realize that it is mostly because of intimidation. Women just feel that they can’t compete—so often they don’t try.”<sup>91</sup> It was common for the collective to receive a pair of letters and several phone calls from men

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<sup>88</sup> Beryl Epstein to *Borrowed Times*, May 9, 1973, MS 2469, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 1957-2809,” Folder: “2459-2485.”

<sup>89</sup> Marx and Epstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 6 and 7.

<sup>90</sup> Beryl Epstein to *Borrowed Times*, May 9, 1973, MS 2469, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 1957-2809,” Folder: “2459-2485.”

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

inquiring about staff openings in a given week. Such inquiries from women were rare. LNS advertisements for staff openings were invariably sex-specific. “We desperately need more people to join the collective,” read one ad, “but we need *women*.”<sup>92</sup> One staffer half-jokingly remembered this tactic as LNS’s “early affirmative action.”<sup>93</sup> Replete with a quota and implications of male privilege, LNS’s affirmative action mirrored the concurrent national debate, but extracted few hang-ups from disgruntled observers.

The ratio’s most immediate effect was to push LNS women into the collective’s most challenging tasks, which had been tacitly reserved for men. The collective initially asked women to write all of the packet’s major stories and to represent LNS on all trips abroad.<sup>94</sup> When describing the impact of the sex ratio to subscribers, LNS emphasized the skill-set that women acquired under the new arrangement: “People who work at LNS have the opportunity to learn editing, graphics, and printing skills. This kind of opportunity is rarely open to women—the cards are stacked against her from the beginning. We stack the cards the other way; we try to guarantee more than equal opportunity because almost everyone else offers less.”<sup>95</sup> Within a year, Anne Dockery noted, the rules became less rigid: “Now we have attained a more balanced work situation. We no longer have to require that women do all the ‘important’ work, because

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<sup>92</sup> RMBB, LNS 463 (September 6, 1972), 5.

<sup>93</sup> LNS Reunion Packet, 54.

<sup>94</sup> Anne Dockery, Description of LNS, n.d. [1971-1972], MS 1875, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927,” Folder: “Cuba.”

<sup>95</sup> RMBB, LNS 508 (March 14, 1973), 5.

the atmosphere is not so stifling anymore. As women developed, the packet developed too, with more people contributing to it in major ways.”<sup>96</sup>

The ratio also helped to redistribute skills across the entire collective. Katherine Mulvihill remembered that the debate over women’s role was “also about how [to] encourage those of us who have skills to impart them to people who had fewer skills, or different skills.”<sup>97</sup> The transition was dramatic, Nina Sabaroff remembered: “When I came [to LNS in 1968], women were basically glorified typists. When I left [LNS in 1971] we had quite a bit of power and we were helping to run the organization.”<sup>98</sup> In a collective that required both intellectual and manual skills, the capacity to train one another and to share knowledge formed a critical component of LNS’s prefigurative politics.

But the ratio produced some negative reactions. David Fenton—the underground’s finest photographer—left LNS in part due to a collective decision to send two significantly less experienced female LNSers on a reporting trip to Vietnam.<sup>99</sup> He later recalled his departure with disappointment: “This was a very alienating experience for me—the first time that what I viewed as a sectarian ideology stopped me from progressing. . . . I left LNS very depressed, disillusioned and confused.”<sup>100</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>96</sup> Anne Dockery, Description of LNS, n.d. [1971-1972], MS 1875, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927,” Folder: “Cuba.”

<sup>97</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

<sup>98</sup> Sabaroff (Taylor), interview.

<sup>99</sup> Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 261. These collective members were Anne Dockery and Karen Kearns. A debate over whether to publish a book of photographs under Fenton’s name or under the name of the entire collective also motivated his departure. The book was later published as David Fenton, ed., *Shots: Photographs from the Underground Press*, A Liberation News Service Book (New York: Douglas, 1971).

<sup>100</sup> LNS Reunion Packet, 18.

Nina Sabaroff left LNS and moved to Portland, Oregon, when LNS followed the word—though perhaps not the spirit—of the ratio and refused to add Mike Kazin—her boyfriend and LNS comrade—to the collective.<sup>101</sup> These incidents alienated collective members who had devoted much of their lives to LNS. But these incidents also remained isolated. In general, the collective rapidly and smoothly assimilated to the changes required by the ratio.

LNS men quickly adjusted and converted their lip-service sympathy for women’s liberation into genuine trust in the capacity of their female colleagues. Sandy Shea noted that the ratio “helped to attract a great group of forward-thinking men and contributed to the relatively calm and process-driven atmosphere that LNS managed to maintain.”<sup>102</sup> Rather than favoring a confrontational women’s liberation program that would have proved alienating to collective men, the Women’s Caucus had forced inclusive changes that were comprehensible to men.

Not only did the ratio resolve conflicts rooted in LNS’s sex-based division of labor, but it also helped the collective achieve a structure that approached the democratic ideal they professed. Andy Marx remembers the ratio as LNS’s greatest accomplishment:

The clearest and most powerful expression of LNS’s commitment to participatory democracy was “the ratio.” . . . The ratio was a typically pragmatic solution to a highly charged emotional and ideological issue. And it worked. It proved to be a highly effective way to ensure that the people who did the work would not be outtalked in meetings and under-represented in choice, high-profile assignments.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Sabaroff (Taylor), interview; and LNS Reunion Packet, 39.

<sup>102</sup> LNS Reunion Packet, 54.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 4. See also, Ibid., 43, 54.

The two-to-one women ratio was LNS's primary answer to the demands of women's liberation. And this transformation of the collective structure remained in place for most of the next decade, functioning as an LNS calling card within the underground and the broader Movement.

### The Collective Will: Cuba, Gay Liberation, and Prefigurative Politics

The women's liberation movement impacted LNS in a direct and unambiguous manner. The ratio fundamentally altered the outfit's collective structure and the side effects of the transition were few and benign. The gay liberation movement likewise challenged LNS to rethink its collective model. The unexpected overlap of gay liberation and Third World Marxism—in this case centered on Cuba—provided the occasion for LNS to fortify its collective and to clarify the relationship between its prefigurative and its strategic politics.<sup>104</sup> Indeed these 1971 developments offered a prototype of how activists formulated a New Left counterculture that impacted every aspect of their lives. By the end of 1972, LNS had forged a collective structure that would remain in place for the remainder of its existence.

But this evolution alienated many within the collective and the broader Movement. In order to create a unified political perspective, LNS had to rid itself of dissenting voices. This process took place through extensive collective meetings and led to dramatic staff changes. To illustrate these changes, it is necessary to explore how the

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<sup>104</sup> For a dialogue about the tenuous relationship between political progressives and gay liberationists regarding the issue of Cuban homophobia and the controversial film *Improper Conduct*, see Nestor Almendros, "'An Illusion of Fairness': Almendros Replies to Alea," *Village Voice*, August 14, 1984, 40; and Richard Goldstein, "!Cuba Si, Macho No!: Persecution of Gays in a Leftist Land," *Village Voice*, July 24, 1984, 1.



LNS collective impacted the lives of individual collective members and how it interacted with larger Movement forces. Analyzing the political and sexual biographies of Allen Young and the collective eviction of LNSers Rosa Borenstein and Alan Howard provide the means to this end.

Allen Young was the driving force behind LNS's internationalism, and much of his political identity revolved around Latin American politics.<sup>105</sup> Influenced by a sociology course at Columbia University taught by C. Wright Mills—who influenced so many New Leftists—Young increasingly identified with the Cuban Revolution. By the time of his graduation in 1962, Young's "interest in Cuba had blossomed into a full-fledged commitment to a career dealing with developments in Latin America."<sup>106</sup> This allegiance led Young to earn Masters degrees from Stanford University's Department of Latin American Studies and the Columbia Journalism School within two years. In July 1964, Young won a Fulbright grant to travel to Brazil, where he spent the following three years freelancing for the *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *New Left Review*, and other publications.<sup>107</sup>

Young's gay identity developed alongside his emergent fascination with Latin American politics. In Brazil, Young began to live openly as a gay man. "I decided to stop running away from my homosexuality," he reflected. "I knew I wasn't straight and I gave up pretending. It wasn't quite coming out all the way, as I maintained a double existence and I still thought about committing suicide, but at least I was beginning to come to terms

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<sup>105</sup> For a concise summary of Young's political and sexual coming-of-age, see Allen Young, "Red Diaper Baby: From a Jewish Chicken Farm in the Catskills, to the Cane Fields of Cuba, to the First Gay Protests in New York City," *Viet Nam Generation* 7, nos. 1-2 (1996?): 25-33.

<sup>106</sup> Allen Young, *Gays Under the Cuban Revolution* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981), 64.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-70.

with myself.”<sup>108</sup> These changes, however, never infringed upon Young’s professional life, which his status as a freelancer helped to compartmentalize. When Young returned to the United States and began to work at LNS in 1967, he maintained an active, but secret gay life centered on Washington’s gay bars and cruising in Lafayette Park.<sup>109</sup>

This furtiveness began to recede upon LNS’s move to New York, but the collective never provided an atmosphere conducive to Young’s gay lifestyle. Even Young’s coming-out illustrates the ambivalence about homosexuality that he sensed at LNS. After the tragic death of Diego Viñales—a gay Argentine who was impaled on an iron fencepost while trying to escape a police raid at New York’s Snake Pit bar—Young decided to march in protest of police harassment. He had never made such a bold public assertion of his gay identity. When he returned to Claremont Avenue to write a story about the protest, his fellow LNSers put two and two together.<sup>110</sup> Tolerance defined the general reaction to Young’s homosexuality at LNS: “When I told the people at LNS I was gay, they didn’t express any overt hostility to me for that. But the men there steadfastly held on to their own straight identity. I could not even begin to establish a gay identity, could not even begin to struggle with my own sexism and elitism, in such hostile surroundings.”<sup>111</sup> So long as Young’s socialist identity retained primacy over his homosexuality, LNS remained a viable home. But Young’s juggling act began to grow complicated.

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<sup>108</sup> Allen Young, “Out of the Closets, Into the Streets,” in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: Douglas Books, 1972), 9.

<sup>109</sup> Allen Young, interview by David Kerr, May 5, 1977, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folder 5; and Young, “Out of the Closets,” 22-23.

<sup>110</sup> Young, interview.

<sup>111</sup> Young, “Out of the Closets,” 23.

Young identified himself as a full-fledged Marxist-Leninist and Cubophile. But Young had yet to visit Cuba when he joined LNS. When he finally traveled to the island in February and March 1969, his most deeply cherished values violently clashed:

I quickly determined that the Cuban government had a semi-official anti-homosexual policy, and that this policy was rooted largely in the male chauvinist, anti-gay attitudes of generations of Cuban people (fostered by Roman Catholicism and Latin culture). As far as I could determine, the issue was not the legality of homosexual acts. The oppression was not through sodomy laws, but rather through a commitment to creating a society which would have no homosexuals. . . . I was told that homosexuality was an aberration produced under capitalism, that the future generations of Cuba would be free of homosexuals if only the youth of the country could be kept from having contact with acknowledged homosexuals.<sup>112</sup>

Upon his return to the United States, Young struggled to write about his experiences in Cuba. In addition to Cuban homophobia, Young had discovered a host of disturbing conditions during his trip: state control of the press; a faulty educational system; a lack of freedom of speech; and a failure to incorporate feminism and black liberation into revolutionary ideology. Young half-heartedly pecked at his typewriter, focusing on those elements of Cuban life that he had found to his liking.

But Young needed more than a supportive group environment. He lacked a political framework in which to grapple with the apparent contradictions between his political and sexual identities. This soon changed. Young's first trip to Cuba occurred five months prior to the Stonewall riots and the advent of the gay liberation movement. In January 1970, Young attended his first gay liberation meeting and became active in New York's Gay Liberation Front (GLF).<sup>113</sup> This experience reshaped Young's entire political

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<sup>112</sup> Allen Young, "The Cuban Revolution and Gay Liberation," in Jay and Young, *Out of the Closets*, 210.

<sup>113</sup> Young, interview. For the New York GLF, see Terrence Kissack, "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York's Gay Liberation Front, 1969-1971," *Radical History Review* 62 (Spring 1995):

vision: “Finally, I had a political context in which I could begin to understand my experiences as a homosexual, and the experiences of Cuban homosexuals.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, Young inextricably linked these issues.

The conflict soon increased between Young’s belief in the Cuban Revolution and his newfound politics of gay liberation. This conflict, Young realized, inevitably led to rupture. But which political orientation would take precedence? “A curious thing was becoming clear to me,” Young remembered:

As long as my involvement with gay liberation meant confronting the atrocities gay people suffer under the capitalist government of the United States, I was not jeopardizing too much of my privilege and status in the movement; but in confronting Cuban homophobia, and challenging the policies of the Cuban government, I was going beyond an acceptable boundary. I knew that instinctively, and therefore I hesitated, seeking to avoid that crisis. However, I felt I could not be faithful to myself and continue in the dual role of Cubaphile and gay liberationist. Thus the break had to come.<sup>115</sup>

In autumn 1970—with LNS in the midst of reformulating its entire collective structure to meet the demands of women’s liberation—Allen Young left LNS to work full-time in the gay liberation movement. But even this did not last. Within a year, Young left New York City, went back to the land, and established a gay commune and farm in rural Massachusetts. In the late 1970s, Young joined the antinuclear movement.<sup>116</sup>

The politics of gay liberation provided Young with a political framework in which to resolve the dilemma between his homosexuality and his Cubaphilic socialism.

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104-35. For the relationship between New York’s gay liberation movement and Cuba—including Young’s involvement—see Ian Lekus, “Queer Harvests: Homosexuality, the U.S. New Left, and the Venceremos Brigades to Cuba,” *Radical History Review* 89 (Spring 2004): 57-91.

<sup>114</sup> Young, “Cuban Revolution and Gay Liberation,” 214-15.

<sup>115</sup> Young, *Gays Under the Cuban Revolution*, 214-15.

<sup>116</sup> For Young’s perspectives on the challenges of rural gay life, see Young, “On Human Identity and Gay Identity: A Liberationist Dilemma,” in *After You’re Out: Personal Experiences of Gay Men and Lesbian Women*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: Links, 1975), 27-34.

Ultimately, Young's gay identity took preeminence, due in no small part to gay liberation's capacity to promote *both* sexual liberation and socialism, a combination forestalled by Cuban homophobia. Young left LNS knowing that the collective's political ideology contained a contradiction in its simultaneous professions of faith in gay liberation and the Cuban Revolution.

But Young could not have anticipated the 1971 firestorm that took place at LNS over these same issues. After Young's departure, no collective members openly identified themselves as gay. Nevertheless, the conflict between gay liberation and Cuban homophobia soon took center stage at LNS. The collective's response to these issues provides a fascinating counterpoint to Young's resolution of this same dilemma.

During the winter of 1970-71, a letter from an anonymous group of Gay Cubans arrived—via a group of New York gay liberationists—in LNS's Claremont Avenue mailbox. Such an occurrence was not unusual; the collective received correspondence from radical groups from around the world on a daily basis. But the letter's explicit criticism of Cuba's Communist leadership set this document apart from vast majority of LNS correspondence. The letter simply and forthrightly denounced Cuban homophobia:

Since its beginning—first in veiled ways, later without scruples or rationalizations—the Cuban revolutionary government has persecuted homosexuals. The methods range from the most common sort of physical attack to attempts to impose psychic and moral disintegration upon gay people. In theory, at least, the Cuban revolution holds that homosexuality is not compatible with the development of a society whose goal is communism.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "Letter from Cuban Gay People to the North American Gay Liberation Movement," in *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, ed. Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan (New York: Routledge, 1997), 407.

The authors went on describe the specifics of their oppression: abuses in state concentration camps; false arrests and detainments; and ghettoization. The details were grisly and offered a gritty critique of the Western Hemisphere's Communist icon.

What would LNS do with the letter? Print it? Destroy it? This decision forced the collective to establish a hierarchy of political values. Did gay liberation or Third World Marxism hold preeminence in LNS's political worldview?

The debate quickly crystallized existing political divisions at LNS. Mark Feinstein remembered the split this way:

It really ended up along the lines of those who considered themselves more traditional Marxists, or Marxists Leninists, and those who considered themselves more in the tradition of the American easy-going, hippyish radical left, the libertarians versus the democratic centralists. And all kinds of things suddenly blew up.<sup>118</sup>

These complications created a flurry of sparks in the collective. Should the collective continue to expand its international coverage or turn to grassroots social and rank-and-file labor movements? Should LNS politics emphasize Marxist-Leninist dogmatism or continued radical independence? Could LNS support Cuba *and* the gay liberation movement?

As these questions arose, LNS began to receive pressure from gay liberationists to print the letter in the LNS packet. *Come Out!*—New York City's leading gay underground newspaper—attempted to shame LNS into reprinting the letter. "It should be known," *Come Out!* told their readers before reprinting the letter,

That [a group of] Gay North American Brothers gave a copy of this letter to LNS which has heavily identified with the Cuban struggle; LNS somehow lost the letter. . . . All of this sounds suspicious—that certain Gay people, who have so identified with heterosexual Marxism, should give a copy of this letter to a

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<sup>118</sup> Feinstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 10 and 11.

straight-male-dominated group like LNS, before publishing it in the *Gay press*, and that LNS “lose” this letter.<sup>119</sup>

*Come Out!* misapprehended LNS’s male dominance. But the note brought LNS’s dilemma under public scrutiny and increased the visibility of the issue in New York’s gay community.

Despite the complicated political dilemmas that the letter evoked, LNS’s immediate debate centered simply on whether to print the letter from gay Cubans. Mulvihill described the conundrum: “Most of us . . . didn’t see [support for gay liberation and for Cuba] as competing issues. [We believed] that this was a criticism within a supportive and comradely stance. But I don’t think Cuba saw it in that way and some people [at LNS] felt that if we were being forced by Cuba to make a choice that we had to choose in favor of that revolutionary state.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, Mulvihill supported printing the letter because she did not see a contradiction between supporting Cuba and criticizing its homophobic policies. Others did. Failing to achieve consensus, LNS settled on a course of action that pleased nobody: the collective printed an edited form of the letter. To appease the dogmatic Marxist-Leninists—two of whom later referred to the letter as “a slanderous article attacking the Cuban Revolution”—the collective excised the letter’s most critical and most specific pieces of evidence.<sup>121</sup>

What did the dogmatic Marxists insist on deleting? Two deletions stand out. First, LNS removed a closing sentence that noted the necessity of using a false return address in order to protect the authors of the letter. This component of the correspondence carried

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<sup>119</sup> “Cuba,” *Come Out!* 2, no. 7b (Spring-Summer 1971): 4.

<sup>120</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

<sup>121</sup> Rosa Borenstein and Alan Howard, “Liberation News Service: Bourgeois or Revolutionary Journalism?” January 25, 1972, 2, Kerr Research Materials, Box 1, Folder 19.

much pathos because it personalized the persecution of the authors more so than the mass persecutions described earlier in the letter. Second, the collective deleted two phrases that denied the socialist heart of the Cuban Revolution. By deleting assertions that abusing gay Cubans “fundamentally [denies] the postulates of the social and political movement in Cuba,” and that Cuba offered an “uncertain and chaotic pseudo-socialist system,”<sup>122</sup> LNS protected Cuba’s status as a model Marxist state.

Even while publicizing Cuba’s anti-gay policies and practices, LNS protected Cuba’s fundamental political orientation and failed to denounce Cuban homophobia. In fact, LNS seemed intent to blame Cuban prejudices on anybody but the Cubans:

Before long [after the Cuban Revolution], anti-homosexual policies, with varying degrees of repression, became part of the official Cuban way of life. These policies were premised on a desire to be humane (thus, the push for “rehabilitation”), on age-old Roman Catholic prejudices, on notions of bourgeois psychology exported from the U.S., and on Soviet-style anti-sex Puritanism developed under Stalin.<sup>123</sup>

The Catholic Church, the United States, and the Soviet Union—these were popular targets within secular Third World Marxist circles. But LNS refused to blame Cuban machismo.

Neither did LNS’s fence-sitting please gay liberationists, Cuban representatives, or itself. Even after departing LNS for his Massachusetts commune, Allen Young tracked LNS coverage and decried its botched coverage of the gay Cubans’ letter: “That kind of

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<sup>122</sup> “Letter from Cuban Gay People,” 406-07. These deleted phrases are not included in “An Anonymous Letter from Gay Cubans to the North American Gay Liberation Movement,” LNS 354 (June 30, 1971), 4.

<sup>123</sup> “Cuban Congress Calls for ‘Solution’ to Homosexuality; Gay Cubans Protest Policy of Persecution,” LNS 354 (June 30, 1971), 3.



internationalism which is really fawning servility is worthless.”<sup>124</sup> Young correctly noted that LNS had sacrificed its radical independence by serving as an unwitting liaison between Cuba and the American Movement. Despite its professed support of gay liberation, LNS balked at criticizing flaws in Cuban Communism. Young did not relent. “LNS engaged in absolutely inexcusable censorship,” he wrote in a July letter that the collective published in the packet. “LNS doesn’t want its readers to know that political terror is a reality in Cuba for many whose politics is . . . that of . . . gay liberation. . . . LNS apparently can’t accept the fact that there are many people in the world who embrace Marxism-Leninism who are in fact oppressive, reactionary elements. . . . There can be no true communism or socialism without gay liberation.”<sup>125</sup> LNS showed a good deal of mettle in publishing such criticisms of their collective, but such transparency did not resolve the conflicts that had developed within the collective.

By the summer of 1971, the collective agreed that they had botched their Cuba coverage over the previous eight months. Aside from the negative coverage of Cuba’s anti-gay policies, LNS had published nothing on Cuba and the collective sensed that they had presented “a very distorted picture of the Cuban Revolution.”<sup>126</sup> In order to patch up LNS relations with Cuba, the collective sent Rosa Borenstein—who fell on the dogmatic side of the LNS divide—to celebrate the July 26 Cuban independence day in Havana.

But Borenstein’s trip did little to assuage LNS fears of an irreparable rift between the collective and Cuban representatives. Upon her return, Borenstein remained mum on

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<sup>124</sup> Allen Young to LNS, May 4, 1972, MS 1340, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Causes: Arms Control to Homosexuality,” Folder: “Causes: Homosexuality.”

<sup>125</sup> RMBB, LNS 363 (July 31, 1971), 8.

<sup>126</sup> Ted Franklin to Companeros, October 15, 1971, MS 1872, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927 (with gaps),” Folder: “Cuba.”

the details of her trip; the collective attempted to dig for details. Ted Franklin spoke for most of the collective in expressing his confusion over the trip: “Instead of restoring a close, cordial, and communicative relationship between the LNS collective and our comrades in Cuba, she seems to have planted seeds of mistrust . . . Our collective relationship with Cuba had become more obscure than ever as a result of her trip.”<sup>127</sup>

Borenstein also refused to publish any articles on Cuba following her trip. In October, the rest of the collective discovered a final confusing result of Borenstein’s trip: she had arranged for another collective member to attend a January 1972 radical media conference in Havana without consulting the rest of the collective.

What on the surface appeared to be a comparatively minor offense infuriated the remainder of the collective, already suspicious of Borenstein’s surreptitious dealings with Cuba. One LNSer described Borenstein’s offense this way:

Now I’m not into the word “collective” as a mystical force—I don’t think it’s necessarily the only unit you can work in politically. But at LNS, where so much of our work is our politics, where our practice is at *least* a 15 hour a day job—polarizing the collective, manipulating, using deception, misrepresenting the collective to other people, cultivating private political contacts at the expense of the collective are *political* offenses by anyone’s definition.<sup>128</sup>

In other words, LNS’s collective structure could not abide by the promotion of individual wills or individual politics. Indeed, the personal and the political had become lodged so firmly in the collective as to be indistinguishable from one another. The result was a

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<sup>127</sup> Ted Franklin to Robert and Margaret Cohen, November 1, 1971, MS 1879, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927 (with gaps),” Folder: “Cuba.”

<sup>128</sup> Anonymous letter, November 5, 1971, MS 1871, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927 (with gaps),” Folder: “Cuba.” Andrew Marx echoed this sentiment: “We felt that . . . we’re a collective, we should decide who would go to represent the collective and who is somebody who could represent the concerns that the collective had rather than having [Cuba] choose somebody. So it was both a matter of the collective process and then also of the relationship of the collective to the Movement in the US. It came to a head in that sort of dispute.” Marx, interview.

steadfast collective will that expected complete and utter transparency in all components of life.

It was in the name of the collective will that LNS ultimately resolved the conflict between Borenstein and the collective majority. At an October 1971 collective meeting, Borenstein and Alan Howard—close friends who agreed on a loose conception of how individuals should relate to the collective and who asked to be to be treated as a single unit—were asked to leave LNS by a vote of nine to three, with three abstentions. Their offense had been violating “the collective will.”<sup>129</sup>

Of the dozens of staffers who left LNS between 1968 and 1981, none left with more bitterness or a lengthier list of collective criticisms than Borenstein and Howard. Between October 1971 and January 1972, Borenstein and Howard composed an eighty-one-page critique of LNS titled “Liberation News Service: Bourgeois or Revolutionary Journalism?” that proposed an alternative vision of LNS based on a rigid Marxism-Leninism. The document provides a unique look inside LNS at a critical turning point in the collective’s maturation.

Borenstein’s and Howard’s central criticism of LNS centered on the collective’s confused conception of Marxist-Leninist theory. Rather than develop a coherent revolutionary philosophy, they argued, LNS “reached alarming degrees of political confusion and journalistic incompetence.”<sup>130</sup> The core of this confusion centered on a general failure to historicize Movement events and to relate contemporary politics to their

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<sup>129</sup> Ted Franklin to Robert and Margaret Cohen, November 1, 1971, MS 1879, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927 (with gaps),” Folder: “Cuba.”

<sup>130</sup> Borenstein and Howard, “Liberation News Service,” January 25, 1972, 2, Kerr Research Materials, Box 1, Folder 19.

roots in class struggle.<sup>131</sup> If Borenstein's and Howard's vision of LNS had won out, the entire mission of the organization would have shifted toward a more explicit production of propaganda:

A publication can vilify the rich, glorify the poor and the oppressed, but it is not revolutionary (in the socialist sense of the word) unless it constantly explains how the actual ruling class has outlived its usefulness to human society and directs that explanation toward the only class capable of overthrowing the actual rulers. . . . Every piece of propaganda we produce must be an antidote to bourgeois ideology, which means that revolutionary propaganda must not only present the facts as they are but at the same time must challenge the prevailing mythology of fundamental class harmony in capitalist society and of the negation of the socialist nations as a progressive and necessary historical force.<sup>132</sup>

If the 1968 categorization of LNS's New York faction as "vulgar Marxists" had been disingenuous, the phrase perfectly captured this vision of LNS as an explicitly ideological propaganda organ.

The eighty-one-page paper focused on competing notions of LNS's audience as the collective's key problem. Borenstein and Howard argued that the LNS collective appealed to a lowest common denominator of activists:

The predominant tendency at LNS [is] to see the material aimed at a relatively young and unpoliticized audience who can only understand the subject . . . if it is presented in the most simplified form. . . . The consumers are imagined to be alienated young people who must be "turned on" to the idea of revolution as an experience to be enjoyed rather than explained as a historical necessity.<sup>133</sup>

Without a coherent, rigid, and forthright Marxist-Leninist analysis, Borenstein and Howard insisted, LNS politics could not help but confuse readers: "It is [the] bewildering variety of political views that produce the eclectic and impressionistic LNS packets and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 25, 57.

leaves one totally confused as to what LNS thinks is going on in the world and what to do about it.”<sup>134</sup>

Borenstein and Howard went on to argue that much of this political “confusion” emerged because “heavies” simply left LNS when political disagreements arose. Despite LNS’s promotion of political diversity in the pages of its packet, they claimed, the collective rarely resolved the tensions created by the political differences of its own members. Borenstein and Howard directly related this trend to the rise of “the collective will”:

As a result of this process, ideological struggle, that harsh and often unpleasant conflict of opposing ideas that caused such hard feelings among people, gradually became one of those bad things, like imperialism and sexism, that LNS was against. The collective forgot that it was only on the basis of those political ideas that we were a collective at all and that therefore *there was nothing more important* than being clear about those ideas and adhering to the dictates of their logic. Instead, there was a new “political” idea elevated above all others, the idea of the “collective will,” the collective as an “end in itself,” in which a certain superficial cordiality in relationships among the collective became the ultimate authority on all important questions.<sup>135</sup>

If a genuine collective will existed at LNS, they argued, it had only arisen through a process of purging collective members who significantly veered from a confused vision of “good politics.”

Most LNSers agreed, however, that collective politics should focus on radical independence rather than Marxist orthodoxy. The collective—for example—might simultaneously adhere to Marxist-Leninist ideals and criticize a preeminent Marxist state. This malleable politics had its advantages. Contrary to the claims of Borenstein and Howard, LNS had established the parameters of its political orientation: “We are anti-

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 66.

capitalist, anti-imperialist . . . anti-sexist [and] anti-racist.”<sup>136</sup> The collective had more difficulty positively defining its political program: “When we talk about revolution we mean toppling the monopoly capitalists from power in this country—but we have no fixed scenario in mind. . . . We can expect the racial minorities and the industrial working class will play a major role but we aren’t about to write off other sectors of society.”<sup>137</sup> As a result of this unwillingness to take a positive stand in political philosophy, LNS encouraged “diversity and experimentation” and tried to “provide material for [a] whole diverse range [of strategies lest we] wind up talking to a small group of people who really think as we do.”<sup>138</sup> Rather than establishing and promoting a forthright political line, LNS functioned as a mirror of Movement politics. Some decried this as political confusion. But such eclecticism facilitated the rapid dissemination of news and politics otherwise impossible to achieve for New Leftists.

Nevertheless, Borenstein and Howard were correct to note that the collective functioned as “an end in itself.” According to the collective, Borenstein’s sin had not been political deviance, but violating LNS’s egalitarian impulse by asserting an unhealthy individualism in her surreptitious dealings with Cuba. In their eyes, her violation of collective trust warranted her eviction. Transparency and openness—even more than “good politics”—formed the heart of the collective. This was LNS’s prefigurative politics.

In the aftermath of Borenstein’s and Howard’s departure, LNS continued to reshape its collective structure in order to promote egalitarianism and to protect itself

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<sup>136</sup> “Special RMBB: State of the Onion,” LNS 417 (March 11, 1972), 26.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

from the potential damage caused by excessive specialization. The case of LNS printers best illustrates this development. As early as 1970, LNS printers began to feel unappreciated and abused by other collective members. As the collective's sole manual laborers, printers began to apply LNS's anticapitalist critique to the collective itself. In particular, the printers drew attention to the editor's common practice of dumping the entire packet of material on their desk at once—often after midnight—leaving them to work a maddening stretch until early in the morning.<sup>139</sup> The printers insisted that they formed a proletariat to an editorial intelligentsia. In summer 1970, they held a largely symbolic printer's strike. As a result, the collective began training all LNSers as printers and teaching additional skills to designated printers. Mark Feinstein noted this as a central shift in LNS's operation: "At the beginning . . . we had a strong feeling that duty should be clearly delineated. . . . During the great democratization period, the idea of specialization of any sort was out of the question. . . . So, before it was appropriate for somebody to be the person in charge of foreign news . . . now everybody was going to do that, it would just get rotated around all the time."<sup>140</sup> Feinstein—who prided himself on journalistic professionalism and specialization—thought that this new arrangement "turned to mush very quickly."<sup>141</sup> He left in June 1971.

Nevertheless, the printer's controversy remained only partially resolved when Borenstein's and Howard's departure forced LNS to continue grappling with how specialization would impact its egalitarian collective. How could LNS maintain close ties to Movement groups, boast specialized knowledge, and prevent the collateral damage

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<sup>139</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

<sup>140</sup> Feinstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 10 and 11.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

that could result from losing focused experts in a particular field? The answer—LNS announced in 1972—was to spread specialized skills and knowledge evenly across the collective. LNS implemented a new structure that rotated staffers between positions as officers and editors.<sup>142</sup> Henceforth, all collective members—including printers—would be involved in every stage of the production process. LNS had finally established a collective structure that matched its political ideals.

Those who remained at LNS in 1972 saw the emergence of a collective will as LNS's primary appeal. Beryl Epstein tied this shift to the structural changes facilitated by the departure of LNS politicians: "Now in LNS there are substantially no heavies. So people feel generally on a fairly equal footing, and . . . there isn't that sense that everyone's waiting for one person to speak, or that they're going to know what the right line is."<sup>143</sup> The leveling of hierarchy and the democratization of the collective reached into every aspect of collective life. Even childcare duties were split between collective members; every staffer spent at least five hours per week taking care of Safra Epstein, the first LNS baby, who was born November 22, 1970.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, Mulvihill considered the collective to be a "refuge [and] and a substitute family."<sup>145</sup> By 1972, LNS's increasing collectivity created an environment that emphasized interpersonal—even familial—harmony as much as political or technical precision.

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<sup>142</sup> See "Special RMBB: State of the Onion," LNS 417 (March 11, 1972), 23.

<sup>143</sup> Beryl Epstein, interview by Deaver Collins, March 12, 1973, Kerr Research Materials, Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>144</sup> For these developments, see "Special RMBB: State of the Onion," LNS 417 (March 11, 1972), 22-26.

<sup>145</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.



The letter from gay Cubans provided the impetus for LNS to reassess its position in Movement politics and its collective structure. By printing an edited form of the letter, LNS had alienated itself from gay liberationists and Cuban officials alike. By running Borenstein and Howard out of the collective, LNS had further isolated itself from revolutionary Cuba. But these events were consistent with the thrust of LNS's evolution during this period. Between 1968 and 1972, LNS increasingly used Movement events to spark internal collective change. Indeed, LNS exemplified a prefigurative politics that pragmatically organized everyday life around its political ideals.

#### Conclusion: "The Great Democratization Period"

Borenstein and Howard were ruthless and accurate in their criticisms of the LNS collective. Ironically, they criticized the impersonality of LNS's "collective will," while simultaneously proposing an alternative rigidity in the form of Marxism-Leninism. Granted, LNS packets were impressionistic and lacking clear political analysis. LNS selected stories that would appeal to New Leftists, rarely provided analysis of Movement events, and never formulated a coherent political philosophy. But advancing such a narrow political strategy would have likely amounted to suicide for an underground news service that required a broad audience to warrant its continued existence. In fact, LNS eclecticism provided much of its appeal to the Movement.

But LNS's restructuring was in many ways out of touch with the New Left. The tendency toward single-issue identity movements in American activism had already been in evidence as LNS implemented the ratio and grappled with the letter from gay Cubans.

Did a Movement even exist to support LNS? By 1970, SNCC and the Black Panther Party had moved African-American activism toward black separatism, the Young Lords had created an agenda for Puerto Rican nationalism, and the American Indian Movement had begun to form a radical agenda that would lead to the 1973 Wounded Knee occupation. In sexual politics, women's and gay liberation groups had begun to move away from critiques that placed sexual repression within a wider socialist critique of American society, moving instead toward separatist radicalism. Even politicians and socialist feminists within the women's movement formed separatist organizations. By 1972, it no longer remained clear that a Movement existed. But LNS surely *conceived* of such a Movement. In fact, the collective directed its entire operation toward promoting the growth of a Movement.

LNS rejected the separatist tendency within the New Left in favor of broad-based vision of a collective Movement. LNS reflected this eclecticism within the pages of its news packets and increasingly reflected this tendency within the structure of its collective. Mark Feinstein dubbed this "the great democratization period" due to the collective's efforts to level hierarchies based on its political principles.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, what is most striking and most significant about LNS's collective structure is how it represents the successful internal implementation of a broader social vision. Rarely in New Left circles had an organization succeeded in creating a prefigurative politics that matched its strategic politics with such precision. Nevertheless, LNS's challenges had only just begun.

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<sup>146</sup> Feinstein, interview, Kerr Research Materials, Box 2, Folders 10 and 11. For LNS's schedule change, see RMBB, LNS 412 (February 5, 1972), 9.

## Chapter 4

### **No Nukes: Montague Farm, Antinuclear Activism, and Alternative Energy, 1973-1980**

The winter of 1973-74 passed like any other at Montague Farm: the autumn harvest provided a bounty of produce; snow blanketed the land; and the busy season of physical labor gave way to quiet months of introspection. One detail, however, scarred Montague's physical and psychic landscape. Less than three miles from the farm, a 500-foot aluminum alloy tower pierced the skyline, emitting a pulsating strobe of white light visible for up to seventeen miles in every direction. When Sam Lovejoy first saw the tower upon returning from a trip to the Pacific Northwest, he turned to Dan Keller and said, "Someone's gotta knock that thing down."<sup>1</sup>

In May 1973, Northeast Utilities (NU)—a public utilities holding company that provided energy for much of the Connecticut Valley—had constructed the tower in accordance with federal regulations requiring a yearlong environmental impact assessment prior to construction of nuclear energy plants. Seven months later, NU announced final plans to construct twin nuclear reactors on the Montague Plains. The tower measured atmospheric wind patterns and would help NU form evacuation plans in

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Lovejoy, "Somebody's Got to Do It," in *Time It Was: American Stories from the Sixties*, ed. Karen Manners Smith and Tim Koster (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 420. For details on the tower, see Richard Asinof and Gary Nielson, "The Montague Tower: A Metronome of Progress Blinking On and Off in the Nuclear Night," *Valley Advocate*, November 24, 1976, 12-15; and Stephen Diamond, "Sam Lovejoy's Nuclear War (A New Age Morality Play in Three Acts)," *New Times*, October 18, 1974, 30-36.

the event of a meltdown. The tower's unforeseen consequence, however, was to galvanize the dormant activism of Montague communards.

In the mid-1970s, Montague Farm pushed to the forefront of American activism by organizing direct-action antinuclear protests.<sup>2</sup> And Lovejoy became the firebrand of this nascent grassroots movement. With the evaporation of the antiwar movement and the decline of American activism in the mid-1970s, the antinuclear movement—along with women's liberation and the broader environmental movement—emerged as a vanguard of the nation's grassroots political action. In fact, the antinuclear movement's emphasis on nonviolent civil disobedience initiated many of the most creative and innovative American protest forms since the early civil rights movement.<sup>3</sup> Montague Farm—more than any single source—functioned as the seedbed of the fight against the multibillion-dollar nuclear power industry. Furthermore, the commune advanced a visionary

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<sup>2</sup> Packer Corners, meanwhile, remained communally, culturally, and agriculturally oriented. But Montague's sister farm did extend further into the southern Vermont community. Verandah Porche remembers this transition: "In the '70s, I got to a point when I decided I didn't want the New Age to come. I became more interested in learning how to root myself here than making pronouncements about the way the planet ought to go." Verandah Porche, "The Queen of Poesie," in *Generation on Fire: Voices of Protest from the 1960s, An Oral History*, ed. Jeff Kiseloff (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 240-41. Verandah held writing workshops in the region, various Packer Corners communards became involved in local politics, and the entire commune established the Monteverdi Artists' Collaborative to unite local artists and to further inspiration and education in southern Vermont. Packer Corners also became enmeshed in the local cultural scene by creating the Monteverdi Players, an outdoor theater production company that held performances on the farm of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and other plays. With the primary exception of Marty Jezer, however, Packer Corners communards rarely returned to the political activism that defined many of their lives prior to arriving at the farm. Richard Wizansky, interview by author, June 19, 2008, Guilford, Vermont. Thus, our present attention will shift away from Packer Corners and exclusively toward the advent of commune-based activism at Montague.

<sup>3</sup> See Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Epstein, "The Politics of Prefigurative Community: The Non-violent Direct Action Movement," in *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s*, vol. 3, *The Year Left*, ed. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1988), 63-92. For the impact of Montague Farm's activism on liberal politics in Massachusetts, see Robert E. Surbrug, "'Thinking Globally': Political Movements on the Left in Massachusetts, 1974-1990," Ph.D. Diss., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2003.

alternative energy agenda. Indeed, this was not only a movement of opposition to nuclear energy, but a movement of advocacy for a decentralized solar energy infrastructure.

The communards fused their radical politics and their communal values through the antinuclear and alternative energy movements. Like Montague Farm itself, the antinuclear movement emphasized prefigurative politics. No nukes activism advocated local autonomy and consensus decision-making, while attracting activists from across the political spectrum. Indeed, the movement's basic strength lay in its power to cut across economic, political, and social barriers by focusing on shared ideals. As Steve Diamond nicely summarized, "Radiation knows no political boundaries."<sup>4</sup>

The activism of Montague communards began by spearheading the local fight against the proposed Montague nukes, before advancing to regional work through the Clamshell Alliance, and national politics by organizing Musician United for Safe Energy (MUSE). This activism was a widening gyre. But a common thread ran through all of these activities: Montague Farm insisted that local organizers fight the no nukes movement at the grassroots. Ultimately, the communards built an activist community that spread the farm's prefigurative democratic ideals across the antinuclear movement. But they also proposed a visionary American economy that placed energy independence in the hands of local communities.

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Diamond to Corliss Lamont, August 17, 1978, Antinuclear Activism Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Library.

## Lovejoy's Nuclear War

Northeast Utilities' courtship of Montague as a site for twin 1150-megawatt reactors was a brief and passionate affair between unequal partners. On one side, NU had immediately become New England's largest utility upon its formation in 1966, boasting a billion dollars in assets and nearly a million customers. An observer for Amherst's *Valley Advocate* called NU "a huge octopus with many gigantic tentacles . . . that illusory giant that always swims in muddy waters."<sup>5</sup> On the other side, the town of Montague bore an aging population of 8,400 people and a depressed economy. NU wooed Montague selectmen and citizens throughout 1973 by promising hundreds of new jobs and sizable tax breaks as a result of the proposed \$1.52 billion construction of the Montague Nuclear Power Station. NU planted the 500-foot meteorological tower in the Montague Plains in May 1973 and officially announced its selection of Montague as the designated site for the reactors in December 1973. Pockets of opposition slowly formed within the town, but the opening salvo in the war against the Montague nukes was fired by a lone communitarian on a frigid February night in 1974.<sup>6</sup>

By 1973, Lovejoy was confident that Montague Farm's social and agricultural stability could provide the base necessary to support renewed political engagement. Although the communitarians had remained outside of activism for nearly five years, the political potential bound up in a farm of Movement refugees seemed limitless. Indeed, this was precisely the farm's initial appeal to Lovejoy: "I believed in the communal

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<sup>5</sup> David Truskoff, "Northeast Utilities: An Octopus Finds Itself Sinking," *Valley Advocate*, May 11, 1977, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Harvey Wasserman, "N.O.P.E. in Mass.," in *Energy War: Reports from the Front* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1979), 27-31.

lifestyle because it was a way to do as much political work as possible and self-study and at the same time share what meager incomes we needed in order to just survive the system that existed. . . . I felt one of the things that had to happen was that there had to be a base structure to the farm so that it sort of had a momentum of its own.”<sup>7</sup> Most important, this base structure had maximized the commune’s agricultural self-sufficiency. As one of the few communards at Montague to grow up on a farm—helping tend apple and peach orchards near Springfield, Massachusetts—Lovejoy had immediately helped the farm increase its bounty when he arrived in 1969.

Seen in this light, the tremendous efforts to maximize agricultural production and social cohesion between 1968 and 1973 were less about counterculture escapism and more about establishing a new lifestyle that would facilitate continued activism. The farm enabled Montague’s communards to continue *living the Movement* in every aspect of their lives. “We needed a financial base, a home, a taproot from which we could then spring,” Lovejoy recalls. “That the farm became a stable agricultural and financial unit, a home, gave us the freedom and the love back home to feel like you could go out, change the world yet again or work on an issue that is going to help change the world for a better place yet again.”<sup>8</sup> The strobe lights on NU’s meteorological tower were the signal that triggered this transition.

As the specter of nuclear energy loomed over Montague, Lovejoy spent the latter half of 1973 pouring over texts covering the pros and cons of nuclear energy. By the time he began his research, Lovejoy had already been swayed by news of a recent leakage of 115,000 gallons of radioactive waste from storage tanks at the Hanford nuclear facility

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<sup>7</sup> Sam Lovejoy, interview by author, June 22, 2008, Montague, MA.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

near the Columbia River in central Washington.<sup>9</sup> Influenced by John Gofman's and Arthur Rodale's seminal antinuclear text, *Poisoned Power*, Lovejoy quickly veered into the no nukes camp.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, Lovejoy learned of the spotty safety record of nuclear plants and the limited legal recourse available to antinuclear citizens and citizen groups. As he began to complement his scientific and legal texts with the writings of Thoreau and Gandhi, Lovejoy realized that the war against nuclear energy must take place outside of Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) safety hearings.

For practical and symbolic reasons, toppling the tower emerged as the perfect strategy for Lovejoy's civil disobedience. In the practical realm, destroying the tower would prevent NU from acquiring the requisite meteorological data to begin plant construction. The time won by this delay could then be used to educate the community and to rally antinuclear support. In the symbolic realm, an attack on the tower—representative of the massive nuclear energy industry—attracted Lovejoy for its sheer audacity and clarity.

Early on the morning of February 22, 1974—George Washington's birthday—Lovejoy snuck onto NU's fenced property on the Montague Plains. With a simple set of tools, he disconnected three of the four guy wires that steadied the tower and that held it in place. He then watched as the tower crashed to the earth. Walking away from the scene, Lovejoy hitched a ride to the Franklin County police station from two local officers. Upon turning himself over to the authorities, Lovejoy provided a written statement declaring his responsibility for toppling the tower. The four-page statement

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<sup>9</sup> "Company Criticized by A. E. C. On Leak of Radioactive Waste," *New York Times*, August 5, 1973, 36.

<sup>10</sup> John W. Gofman and Arthur R. Tamplin, *Poisoned Power: The Case Against Nuclear Power Plants* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1971).



provided the earliest articulation of Lovejoy's and Montague Farm's antinuclear opposition. Because the letter quickly circulated through the local media, it also reveals how Lovejoy sought broad citizen support for his antinuclear fight.<sup>11</sup>

Lovejoy placed his act of civil disobedience squarely within the American intellectual tradition. Steve Diamond argued that the letter evoked "a language reminiscent of Tom Paine, with strong hints of Thoreau, John Stuart Mill and that particular jargon which emerged as a national dialect from the radical left of the late '60s."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, a radical bent is apparent throughout the document. But Lovejoy did not explicitly invoke radical thinkers. Despite his intellectual debt to Thoreau and Gandhi, Lovejoy distanced himself from any taint of rabble-rousing. Instead, he appealed to the broadest possible constituency by citing documents of irrefutable patriotism and consensus.<sup>13</sup>

To this end, Lovejoy generously cited the founding documents of the United States and Massachusetts. At the outset of his statement, he quoted the Declaration of Independence's call to action "whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends . . . of safety and happiness."<sup>14</sup> But he reserved his most compelling analysis for the Massachusetts Bill of Rights. To begin, Lovejoy quoted from the document to illustrate the authority of the body politic: "The people alone have an incontestable unalienable and infeasible right to institute government; and to reform, alter or totally

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<sup>11</sup> For a general narrative of Lovejoy's tower toppling exploit, see Lovejoy, "Somebody's Got to Do It," 415-33.

<sup>12</sup> Diamond, "Sam Lovejoy's Nuclear War," 32.

<sup>13</sup> Lovejoy, "Somebody's Got to Do It," 423.

<sup>14</sup> Sam Lovejoy, "Sam Lovejoy's Statement on Toppling the Tower," *WIN*, June 27, 1974, 14.

change the same, when their protection, safety, prosperity and happiness require it.”<sup>15</sup>

Again, the maintenance of safety and happiness on behalf of the community emerged as the central tenets of Lovejoy’s justification. But he also cited the Massachusetts Bill of Rights to issue a critical appraisal of corporate corruption: “No man, nor corporation, or association of men have any other title to obtain advantages, or particular and exclusive privileges, distinct from those of the community.”<sup>16</sup> This statement provided a none-too-veiled attack on Northeast Utilities and the corporate and governmental structure that stood to gain from the construction of the Montague plant.

Not only did Lovejoy assert his civic-mindedness, but he vilified Northeast Utilities. In particular, Lovejoy targeted NU vice-president Charles Bragg for his insistence that local opposition to the plant would not impact NU policy. “We would have to go ahead with [plant construction],” Lovejoy quoted Bragg, “even if there was a protest movement mounted by the citizens of the areas.”<sup>17</sup> Lovejoy went on to attack NU’s use of political and economic bribery to sway the local citizenry. This portrait of Northeast Utilities treachery forced Lovejoy’s readers to weigh a single act of civil disobedience against a pattern of corporate behavior that disregarded local autonomy.

Ultimately, Lovejoy’s critique of Northeast Utilities extended to the broader nuclear energy industry and the entire system of American corporate capitalism. “The energy crisis, so-called,” Lovejoy insisted, “is an obvious signal for the need for immediate and nationwide introspection and re-evaluation. . . . We must bring to an end to the greed of the corporate state. We must see that profit, as the modus operandi of our

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

society, is defunct.”<sup>18</sup> In Lovejoy’s analysis, the nuclear energy industry practiced a corrupt despotism, wherein rural Americans serviced an urban addiction to unlimited energy. This was a risky critique that advanced a bold and radical analysis. But the stark realities of America’s energy crisis and Montague’s economic vulnerability enabled Lovejoy to attack corporate America without fearing local backlash.

Lovejoy’s persuasion also hinged on his investment in the local community. But Montague Farm always held an ambiguous position in the town. The communards called Montague home, but locals remained wary of the hippie farmers down the road. Recognizing local ambivalence, Lovejoy drew attention to the ten years that he had lived in the Pioneer Valley “that I am wont to love.”<sup>19</sup> Lovejoy furthered his local appeal by emphasizing his proximity to the land: “As a farmer concerned about the organic and the natural, I find irradiated fruit, vegetables and meat to be inorganic; and I can find no natural balance with a nuclear plant in this or any community.”<sup>20</sup> To rationalize speaking on behalf of Montague’s silent opposition, Lovejoy positioned himself in the role of concerned fellow citizen and cast Northeast Utilities as a foreign agent imposing its will on Franklin County.

In the end, Lovejoy’s statement sought one thing: antinuclear support from Montague citizens. He pointed to his lone act of civil disobedience as one type of responsible citizenship: “Through positive action and a sense of moral outrage, I seek to test my convictions.”<sup>21</sup> But he solicited a broader community response: “I believe we

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

must act; positive action is the only option left open to us. Communities have the same rights as individuals. We must seize back control of our own community.”<sup>22</sup> Empowering citizens and restoring local autonomy formed Lovejoy’s central goal.

Taken in its entirety, Lovejoy’s statement—which the *Greenfield Recorder* reprinted locally and *WIN* magazine reprinted nationally—perfectly synthesized New Left and counterculture critiques of American mass society, albeit in a form that was palatable to a broad population. By combining an anti-capitalist critique of the energy industry and an organic approach to family and community life, Lovejoy created a personal politics with far-reaching implications for the nascent antinuclear movement.

But Lovejoy still faced trial and a potential five-year prison sentence on charges of malicious destruction of personal property. Hoping to create a headline-grabbing forum to debate the merits of nuclear energy, Lovejoy ratcheted up the courtroom drama by announcing that he would defend himself in court before a jury of local citizens. Lovejoy planned a three-pronged attack for his defense: “I had to lay out to them, one, the health dangers, two, the fact that I had no recourse, and, three, that therefore the only way I that could confront this society was to destroy a certain kind of property.”<sup>23</sup>

To begin, Lovejoy invited Dr. John Gofman to testify to the health dangers associated with nuclear power. Superior Court Judge Kent Smith surprised Lovejoy by requiring Gofman’s testimony to occur on the record, but without the jury present.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> *Lovejoy’s Nuclear War*, directed by Daniel Keller, produced by Daniel Keller and Charles Light (Turners Falls, MA: Green Mountain Post Films, 1975).

<sup>24</sup> Judge Smith questioned the admissibility of Gofman’s testimony because Lovejoy had no prior relationship with Gofman. Despite Lovejoy’s protestation that reading Gofman’s seminal antinuclear tract *Poisoned Power* had established a relationship between the two men, Judge Smith required Gofman to testify on the record, but without the jury present. This would not taint the jury, while making the testimony

Gofman had become something of a hero to Lovejoy and his biography made him an ideal candidate to attack industry safety. In 1963, the Atomic Energy Commission had asked Gofman to undertake a long-range study of the health impact of nuclear energy. When he had returned to the AEC with findings that illustrated alarmingly high increases of cancer rates under existing permissible-radiation doses and asked for a tenfold reduction of this dosage, Gofman became the victim of harassment at the Commission and was slowly pushed out of his job.<sup>25</sup> At Lovejoy's trial, Gofman offered a scathing indictment of the AEC and the entire nuclear power industry.

With the legitimacy of his safety concerns established, Lovejoy set out to illustrate the lack of realistic recourse available to a concerned citizen. In essence, Atomic Energy Commission safety and licensing hearings provided the only recourse available to an individual attempting to halt construction of a nuclear reactor. But Lovejoy discovered that the AEC was “a kangaroo court . . . a panel that acts as promoter and regulator, judge, jury, and thief all rolled into one.”<sup>26</sup> This claim was not mere sound and fury. In fact, Congress passed the Energy Reorganization Act of 1974 precisely to dissolve the conflict of interest present in the Commission's dual capacity as promoter and regulator of nuclear energy.<sup>27</sup> Citizen recourse in the face of a federal bureaucracy charged precisely with advancing nuclear power was a sham.

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available to the State Supreme Court, which—should the jury find Lovejoy guilty—would determine the admissibility of the testimony prior to sentencing. See Wasserman, “Nuke Developers on the Defensive,” in *Energy War*, 34-36.

<sup>25</sup> Anna Gyorgy, *No Nukes: Everyone's Guide to Nuclear Power* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 17-19. See also, Gofman and Tamplin, *Poisoned Power*.

<sup>26</sup> Wasserman, “Nuke Developers on the Defensive,” in *Energy War*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 23-24.

With safety concerns and faulty recourse established, Lovejoy turned his attention to the legitimacy of civil disobedience. In order to provide expert testimony on civil disobedience, Lovejoy called Boston University historian Howard Zinn to the stand. Again, Judge Smith required expert testimony to occur without the jury present. Zinn later summed up his trial testimony with characteristic wit and insight:

If my trial testimony had an essence—I like to think it did—it was about the necessity of civil disobedience in times of danger to life and liberty and health, and how historically, in the United States, we have seen many, many times how the ordinary institutions of government, those hallowed things presented to us in the fourth grade as the three branches of government, are really very inadequate in protecting us. . . . From time to time, when grievances became too deep, groups of people had to go outside the machinery of government, had to break the law, had to commit civil disobedience in order to dramatize something that was happening.<sup>28</sup>

Through this analysis, Zinn established the long historical roots of civil disobedience and its legitimacy in the American intellectual tradition. Next, he framed Lovejoy's act as the natural progeny of 1960s-era antiwar activism:

It seemed to me that after the most recent acts of civil disobedience, that is, against the Vietnam War, maybe the time is right now for people to look closer to home at the dangers to our lives posed by corporate control of our lives. . . . The enormity of what [corporations] are doing to us, the very air we breathe, the very water we drink, the very space we occupy, and now with the special dangers of atomic radiation and our kids and leukemia and all of that, the time is right for people who are against this to really do their act of protest for all of those people who in the past hundred years were not able to feel the issue deeply enough or did not have the capacity or the ability to do anything about it.<sup>29</sup>

With Zinn's help, Lovejoy argued that health and safety concerns coupled with the absence of citizen recourse legitimated civil disobedience. His act represented a last line of defense that should not be punished, but praised. On moral grounds, Lovejoy presented a compelling case.

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<sup>28</sup> *Lovejoy's Nuclear War*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

But legal cases are not decided on the basis of morality; they are decided on the basis of statutes, charges, and evidence. Lovejoy had successfully turned his trial into a public forum on nuclear power, but he had failed to turn Judge Smith into a moral witness. Had Lovejoy's lack of legal expertise caused him to formulate a faulty defense?

Surprisingly, the legal definitions of two terms—"malicious" and "personal property"—provided the basis for Lovejoy's acquittal. The prosecution had charged Lovejoy with "willful and malicious destruction of personal property." Lovejoy did not contest that his act was willful or destructive. But malicious? By the end of Lovejoy's testimony, there was little doubt that he had acted out of love, concern, and fellow-feeling. Even more to the point, two Montague tax officials confirmed that the tower had been assessed as real property and a Northeast Utilities representative confirmed that the corporation had paid taxes on the tower as real property.<sup>30</sup> This was not personal property. The jury—under orders from Judge Smith—acquitted Lovejoy, though not on the moral grounds that he had hoped to place at the center of his defense. Nevertheless, Lovejoy had opened a public forum that enabled the informed community of Montague to evaluate the nuclear energy industry.

Since their arrival in Franklin County, the communards at Montague Farm had attempted to integrate the farm into the local community. This goal, Lovejoy recalls, was driven by pragmatism: "If you can't talk to your next door neighbor, there isn't gonna be a revolution."<sup>31</sup> Lovejoy's fight against Northeast Utilities surely alienated the farm from many folks in the community, but it also illustrated the commune's genuine concern for

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<sup>30</sup> Wasserman, "Nuke Developers on the Defensive," in *Energy War*, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Lovejoy, interview.

the community's health and economic destiny. Montague Farm's evolving relationship with town locals was an ongoing project. And the commune's work had only just begun.

### Montague's Nuclear War

At first glance, Lovejoy's act of civil disobedience appeared solitary and isolated. His lone figure at the front of a courtroom battle further contributed to this impression. But a movement was afoot. Indeed, in the seven months between Lovejoy's tower-toppling and his acquittal, the town's citizens had learned that Montague Farm envisioned a multifaceted assault on the proposed nuke. Beyond Lovejoy's bold move, the fight would take place across the local political scene. The communards and other antinuclear advocates began local organizing efforts to educate the community regarding the perils of nuclear power and they rallied local political interest at the ballot box and the town meeting.

In fact, the fight against the Montague nuke had modestly begun a few months prior to Lovejoy's action. Even before the formal proposal for the twin nukes went public, Montague Farm and other local communes formed an umbrella antinuclear organization called Nuclear Objectors for a Pure Environment (NOPE). NOPE quickly advocated unqualified nuclear prohibition and established a grassroots education movement to garner local support.<sup>32</sup>

With the bump in attention paid to the antinuclear cause following Lovejoy's destruction of the tower, NOPE decided to expand into the arena of formal politics. The Nuclear Objectors (NO) Party forwarded a slate of candidates for Montague Town

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<sup>32</sup> For NOPE, see Harvey Wasserman, "N.O.P.E. in Mass." in *Energy War*, 28-29.



offices, including communards Anna Gyorgy for selectperson and Lovejoy for town meeting member. Meanwhile, the party had also succeeded in placing a referendum proposal on the Montague ballot, which asked whether twin nukes should be built in Montague. NO Party candidates garnered a scant 6 percent of the local vote. The initiative in favor of construction passed by 3-to-1. Despite these meager electoral returns, the NO Party—composed primarily of Montague communards—had succeeded in further publicizing its antinuclear agenda and considered its modest gains that winter and spring to bode well for a prolonged antinuclear campaign.<sup>33</sup>

Having made progress in town, the communards ratcheted up their efforts across Franklin County. To this end, the Franklin County Alternative Energy Coalition (FCAEC) formed in June 1974. The organization's first goal centered on continuing electoral initiatives. By canvassing door-to-door, the FCAEC collected enough signatures to place a dual referendum on the Massachusetts Senate District ballot. The proposition asked the state senator to oppose the Montague plant and to sponsor a resolution to close and dismantle nuclear plants at Rowe, Massachusetts, and Vernon, Vermont.<sup>34</sup> In November 1974—two months after Lovejoy's acquittal—47.5 percent of State Senate District voters opposed the Montague plant; in Montague alone, the number of voters who opposed the twin nukes rose by nearly 40 percent between the spring and fall elections. Shockingly, more than a third of voters actually voted to dismantle the existing plants at Rowe and Vernon.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the initiatives had been defeated.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 30-31; and Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 394.

<sup>34</sup> Wasserman, "Nuke Developers on the Defensive," in *Energy War*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

So early in the fight against Northeast Utilities, electoral gains were only a small part of the FCAEC's battle plan. Indeed, its primary goal was to raise voter education and awareness of nuclear energy. Success in this regard proved difficult to gauge, but communitarian Anna Gyorgy saw progress: "People began to realize that you didn't have to live on top of a nuke to be affected by it, and that you didn't have to be a physicist to understand the problems of nuclear power."<sup>36</sup> With No Nukes bumper stickers popping up around town, electoral support on the rise, and Lovejoy's acquittal in hand, the communards at Montague were cautiously optimistic.

But they needed help. The commune's established self-sufficiency, core organic values, and history of Movement activism set it apart as a stable site from which to launch Franklin County's antinuclear fight. But the communards found it difficult to find activist types outside of the region's young and hip set of farmers. From Packer Corners, Marty Jezer observed the struggle that the Montague family encountered in broadening the FCAEC's activist base: "It was able to break out of its freak / new left / counter-culture / communal base only to the extent that these new settlers began to blend in and work with other segments of the population. Which meant that though gains were made, it was still a small isolated radical group of hard core activists."<sup>37</sup> Thus, it remained unclear whether the Montague folks could expand on their modest electoral gains and promote a sufficient shift in citizen consciousness and political acuity to force Northeast Utilities to halt construction of the twin Montague nukes.

To broaden its appeal, the Franklin County Alternative Energy Coalition launched an assault on the atomic energy industry by immersing the region in antinuclear

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<sup>36</sup> Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 394.

<sup>37</sup> Marty Jezer, "Stopping the Seabrook Nuke," *WIN*, October 14, 1976, 8.

information. The FCAEC's summer and fall schedule in 1977 illustrates how extensive the group's western Massachusetts presence became in the mid-1970s. Over a span of six months, the FCAEC set up information tables on the Amherst town commons, arranged balloon releases, organized nature walks, disrupted Nuclear Regulatory Commission and state Energy Facilities Siting Council hearings, planned antinuclear conferences, held vigils, and created a Toward Tomorrow Fair to showcase creative energy solutions.<sup>38</sup>

But the FCAEC's largest project that fall consisted of canvassing all twenty-six towns in Franklin County in advance of construction permit hearings planned for the winter of 1977-78. Beginning with a six-person core canvas committee, the FCAEC rounded up 150 volunteers who distributed literature to between three and five thousand homes, added several hundred new members, and raised \$3,000 to ease the cost of printing literature.<sup>39</sup> Canvassing provided the FCAEC with a unique opportunity to outline its antinuclear position and to receive immediate face-to-face feedback from local citizens. The FCAEC's antinuclear critique provides a revealing look at Montague Farm's vision for the movement and for the American economy.

The potential environmental hazards of nuclear energy formed the first premise of the FCAEC's antinuclear position. The particular environmental fragility of the proposed site for the Montague nukes, the FCAEC explained, made the local antinuclear fight especially important: "The Montague Plains is a natural aquifer, filtering and holding

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<sup>38</sup> This list of activities draws from, "August 6-9 USA" *Clamshell Alliance News* 2, no. 2 (August/September 1977), 4; "Montague Nuke Legal Battle Begins," *Clamshell Alliance News* 2, no. 3 (October/November 1977), 1; and Coordinating Committee Minutes, June 4, 1977, July 16, 1977, October 15, 1977, November 19, 1977, and December 3, 1977, Clamshell Alliance Records, Box 5, Folders 1-4, University of New Hampshire Library.

<sup>39</sup> For the canvassing drive, see Anna Gyorgy, Phil Stone, and Rebecca Winborn, "Grass Roots Action: Organizing for a Change," in *Grass Roots: An Anti-Nuke Sources Book*, ed. Fred Wilcox (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1980), 12-26.

millions of gallons of water which contribute to the drinking water supply of nearby communities. An accident in the plant could result in a tragic contamination of the water supply of thousands.”<sup>40</sup> But the FCAEC’s environmental concerns did not solely rest on the occurrence of a freak accident. Even under normal operating conditions, the Montague nukes would recycle—and in the process heat—thousands of gallons of water from the Connecticut River, creating a thermal pollution problem with potentially adverse effects on local shad and salmon restoration programs. These particular conditions in Montague formed the localized expressions of concerns that existed across the nuclear energy industry.

Public health implications also worried FCAEC activists. The range of potential health hazards, they noted, stretched from the subtle to the catastrophic. In the long term, radioactive poisons from nuclear fuel could cause cancer, birth defects, and a broad array of other illnesses. While an accident would have been necessary to leak large portions of nuclear waste into the environment, every nuclear power plant released these toxins in small doses. Scientists debated the impact on the public of this low-level radiation, but the FCAEC preferred caution in the face of this ambiguity. In the short term, large-scale accidents could potentially kill thousands of people and permanently damage the environment.<sup>41</sup>

The FCAEC feared these health hazards because faulty safety mechanisms at every stage in the production of nuclear energy made catastrophe a distinct possibility. Laborers were exposed to the gravest immediate danger in the process of producing

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<sup>40</sup> “Montague Nuke Legal Battle Begins,” *Clamshell Alliance News* 2, no. 3 (October/November 1977), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 72.

nuclear energy. Occupational hazards existed in the mining, milling, enrichment, and fabrication of uranium. Between July 1, 1973, and June 30, 1974, the Atomic Energy Commission discovered a total of 3,333 safety violations at the 1,288 nuclear facilities it inspected and 98 of these accidents posed risks to either laborers or the public.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the widespread presence of uranium mines on Native American lands threatened to place undue dangers on Native American workers.<sup>43</sup> The dangers and technological limitations associated with the transportation and storage of nuclear waste also worried Montague organizers. The scarcity of solid research into the health impact of low-level radiation on people living and working near nuclear reactors also aroused concern. These worries, of course, did not eliminate the looming dangers presented by the occurrence of a large-scale nuclear accident. These fears were not empty. Indeed, the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island represented the culmination of a lengthy history of “close calls” that existed long before Three Mile Island.<sup>44</sup>

Nuclear energy’s economic implications formed the final component of the FCAEC’s critique of the industry. Lovejoy outlined the FCAEC’s position in broad terms: “There’s a capitalist dialectic forcing nukes to be built in this country.”<sup>45</sup> What did this mean? On the local level—in Montague—the promise of low taxes and more jobs amounted to bribery, according to Lovejoy. Wasserman echoed this in more emphatic terms:

This plant would mean economic catastrophe for the Valley. It would force the construction of new roads, raise taxes and utility rates in the towns surrounding

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>43</sup> Harvey Wasserman, “The Issue of Tribal Survival,” in *Energy War*, 190-94.

<sup>44</sup> See Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 71-134.

<sup>45</sup> *Lovejoy’s Nuclear War*.

Montague, bring a crisis in such public services as sewage and schools, and place the area economy on a boom-bust cycle that would once again screw the vast bulk of us for the benefit of the few. Good for the land swindlers, bad for the folks. Good for the people already rolling in bucks, catastrophic for everybody else.<sup>46</sup>

The accusation that Montague Farm leveled against Northeast Utilities focused on the corporation's disproportionate economic bargaining power relative to depressed Franklin County residents. Much of the nuclear power industry's economic fat came in the form of federal subsidies, which largely bankrolled the industry's research and development, insurance, and uranium enrichment.<sup>47</sup> In other words—Montague communards argued—a dialectical relationship between government and industry powers formed an economic front that local residents were hard-pressed to resist.

Because the nuclear energy industry and the state did not see fit to outline the potential dangers of nuclear power, the FCAEC took citizen education as its central task. The dissemination of information across Franklin County began to create an informed citizenry. This was not accidental. In fact, an educated population formed the most basic requirement for the democratic political ideal that the communards hoped to realize.

But the Alternative Energy Coalition went beyond mere opposition to nuclear power and advanced a diverse alternative energy platform, which it presented at the 1975 Toward Tomorrow Fair in Amherst and while canvassing in Franklin County. The energy solutions that FCAEC activists proposed were visionary; many have come to be embraced across the twenty-first-century political spectrum. Their agenda also addressed the specific concerns that formed the base of FCAEC opposition to nuclear power: environmental degradation; public health and safety concerns; and economic viability.

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<sup>46</sup> Harvey Wasserman, "Bringing the War Back Home," in *Energy War*, 46-47.

<sup>47</sup> Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 178-80.

Decreasing energy consumption through conservation and recycling formed the first step in Montague's alternative energy solution. Increased energy efficiency would require action across all sectors of the US energy market. Homeowners would shift away from electric heat, for example, while electric utilities would improve load management and increase cogeneration. However, the FCAEC's conservation program did not force consumers to decrease energy usage or to fundamentally alter day-to-day activities. Neither did it prevent economic growth, Gyorgy insisted: "Conservation offers an alternative form of economic growth, not a substitute for it."<sup>48</sup> Montague promoted the continuation and extension of local recycling programs and bottle bills to simultaneously expand conservation efforts and help maximize energy efficiency.

Increased efficiency would also facilitate the transition to a solar energy infrastructure. When the FCAEC described a solar future, its vision extended beyond solar collectors to include hydroelectric, wind, and ocean energy production. Indeed, the low technology solutions included a surprising diversity of options that could be adapted to the peculiar geographical and meteorological conditions of particular regions. Much of the solar technology needed to effect a transition already existed by the late 1970s, but Gyorgy admitted "that current technology is in the 'dark ages' compared to the advances that will be made when the creative, scientific, technical, and finally, financial resources of this country are dedicated to the [alternative energy] effort."<sup>49</sup> Existing low-tech solutions included passive solar panels, solar hot water heaters, windmills, biomass fuels, and hydroelectric plants. Each of these solutions would be appropriate in particular locales with particular needs. The communards did not shy away from proposing hi-tech,

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<sup>48</sup> Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 225.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

long-term solutions; these included photovoltaic cells; high-temperature photothermal conversion; solar farms; power towers; ocean thermal energy conversion; and geothermal power. But the FCAEC emphasized that energy transition was *already possible* with existing technology and without nuclear power.<sup>50</sup>

How did the FCAEC propose to effect this dramatic restructuring of America's energy economy? To begin, the costs and benefits of the transition would be shared across various levels of government and private companies. Corporate research, federal legislation, state action, and community projects would all play important roles in the orchestrated transition. The result would be an increase in jobs—by a factor of between two and seven—and a more reliable, decentralized grid. The new system would require a fundamental shift in *who* controlled American energy, Gyorgy argued:

Solar technologies threaten [the] traditional and increasing centralization of power. . . . Taken as a whole, the prospect of the solarization of modern society is a crucial challenge to the existing pattern of power production, distribution, and control. At the heart of the challenge is the difference between centralized and decentralized power production, and who controls energy.<sup>51</sup>

They envisioned a thorough restructuring of American wealth and power. In alternative energy just as in antinuclear activism, Montague's communards would provide an imposing opposition to corporate America.

Montague Farm's alternative energy vision placed the commune squarely within the period's Appropriate Technology movement. The key to developing the specific components of an alternative energy system, Gyorgy noted, was to perform necessary

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<sup>50</sup> The communards viewed coal power as an important energy source to ease the transition into the new energy infrastructure. Coal production remained dangerous for miners; strip mining remained bad for the environment; and coal combustion exacerbated air and thermal pollution. Nevertheless, the absence of the long-term storage problems and the absence of potential large-scale catastrophic accidents made coal a more favorable transitional energy source than nuclear reactors. See *Ibid.*, 243-47.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.



research and to ask challenging questions: “Our energy future does not depend on ‘choosing’ one of these [solar] technologies. Instead we must understand their attributes and drawbacks and develop a flexible energy plant for the future based on multiple use. . . . What we must ask is: Whom does it serve; who controls it; and what are its costs in social, environmental, and financial terms.”<sup>52</sup> Through this process, a community could opt for appropriate technology for its particular needs and establish a diverse energy structure to maximize the grid’s reliability. The commune was not alone in proposing a revamped energy system based on appropriate technology. In fact, Appropriate Technology advocates—best exemplified by the creators of *The Whole Earth Catalog*—represented a key segment of America’s counterculture throughout the 1970s.<sup>53</sup> The challenge, of course, was to illustrate to a broader population that the Appropriate Technology movement was not Luddite and was not anti-growth.

Montague Farm not only proposed Appropriate Technology, they also implemented small-scale changes at the farm and educated locals about alternative energy. The communards completely reinsulated the farmhouse. They also constructed solar driers for fruits and vegetables and installed solar heat collectors.<sup>54</sup> In order to widen its audience, however, Montague Farm organized the 1975 Toward Tomorrow Fair in Amherst, which showcased alternative energy technologies and wedded the Appropriate Technology and antinuclear movements in a public venue.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>53</sup> See Andrew Kirk, “‘Machines of Loving Grace’: Alternative Energy, Environmentalism, and the Counterculture,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 353-78; and Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Lovejoy, interview.

By educating locals about the perils of nuclear energy and by promoting a solar energy future, the communards advocated a decentralized energy infrastructure that empowered communities and that prefigured a new society. This formed the core of the communards' aspiration to spread Montague Farm's democratic ideals to the local community.

At the same time that the FCAEC made local inroads, comunard Charles Light advanced the antinuclear movement through documentary filmmaking. Light had moved to Montague Farm in the aftermath of the tragic summer 1970 fire at nearby Johnson Pasture, where he had lived for just over a year. By 1973, Light echoed Lovejoy's sentiment that Montague Farm had become amply self-sufficient to warrant new adventures. So Light mobilized Dan Keller—who still lived at Wendell Farm and who had film experience and equipment—and Steve Diamond to begin a film production company that would soon be called Green Mountain Post Films (GMPF). The crew's first venture was a documentary about nearby trance medium Elwood Babbitt, titled *Voices of Spirit* (1975). In the film, Babbitt channels the spirit of Marshall Bloom at a séance in Johnson Chapel at Amherst College.<sup>55</sup>

But Green Mountain Post Films' primary influence over the nascent antinuclear movement arose due to its second film—*Lovejoy's Nuclear War* (1975)—which Light described as an “organizing tool.” Once GMPF completed the documentary about Lovejoy's tower-toppling and trial exploits, Montague comunards extensively used the film as an educational and organizing tool. As such, the documentary left a fingerprint not only on antinuclear organizing in western Massachusetts, but soon throughout the

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<sup>55</sup> Charles Light, interview by author, June 23, 2008, Turners Falls, Massachusetts. *Voices of Spirit*, directed by Dan Keller, produced by Dan Keller and Charles Light (Green Mountain Post Films: Turners Falls, MA, 1975).

United States. The film contains a wealth of information about nuclear energy, but is most helpful in revealing how Montague Farm understood and narrated local opposition.<sup>56</sup>

The basic structure of *Lovejoy's Nuclear War* bounces back and forth between the arguments of antinuclear activists and nuclear advocates. In practice, this results in a visual and intellectual debate between good and evil. And like any good filmmaker, GMPF carefully constructed their villains on screen. They included shots from interviews with corporate and government executives before undercutting the arguments they presented. NU Vice President Charles Bragg, for example, declared on screen: "I don't believe that potentially [nuclear reactors are] very dangerous. I think it's a question of probabilities. There have been a great many numbers bandied about in prior years that if anything happened to a nuclear plant, well, it would spread for miles and kill thousands of people. I just don't believe that. I just don't see the evidence for that." Immediately, GMPF shifted to a discussion of the Atomic Energy Commission's 1957 document WASH-740, which indicated that the potential consequences of a meltdown include thousands of square miles of destruction and up to 3,400 dead and 43,000 injured. This information called Bragg's statement on safety into question and raises the specter of nuclear catastrophe before Montague.

Subtle accusations of corporate profiteering, economic bribery, and murky accounting ran throughout the film. *Lovejoy* described Franklin County as one of the most depressed areas in all of America. He went on to accuse NU of economic

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<sup>56</sup> The objective content of the films is interspersed with information from textual and oral sources elsewhere in the present chapter. My present concern is with *Lovejoy's Nuclear War* as a documentary film that posits particular narrative interpretations and that reveals how Montague communards understood the movement's strengths and vulnerabilities.

malfesance: “You’re more or less put in the position of a depressed area being offered a giant construction project in which the only way these people can respond is to say, ‘God, we needed jobs and therefore we’re gonna have to take the nuclear power plant. [NU is] more or less bribing the people in the town to vote for a nuclear power plant just to get a tax cut.” Bragg, meanwhile, declared that “I don’t think it’s a numbers game” and Western Massachusetts Electric Company representative William Semanie deemphasized the role of tax breaks in NU’s courtship of Montague town officials. Following Lovejoy’s assertions, these statements reeked of insincerity.

These executives also undermined their own authority by willfully ignoring public sentiment against commercial reactors. Bragg, for instance, refused to state whether Montague and Franklin County ballot results would impact NU’s decision to proceed with plant construction. GMPF further exaggerated this disenfranchisement by emphasizing the vast corporate and government apparatus aligned against citizen recourse through Atomic Energy Commission hearings. Whether the \$100,000 legal general intervention fee, the pittance of five minutes granted the citizen before committees via the citizens limited appearance intervention, or the vast army of officials that await a citizen at safety hearings, GMPF made clear that all recourse through the AEC was stymied by the overwhelming economic and judicial power of the atomic energy industry.

Meanwhile, *Lovejoy’s Nuclear War* carefully asserted that antinuclear sentiment appealed not only to intellectuals and communal farmers, but to a broad Montague constituency. Lovejoy described Franklin County as the most conservative district in all

of Massachusetts. Meanwhile, he pointed to the movement's appeal across the political spectrum:

This nuclear power plant movement, antinuclear movement, in the country has every range of American involved with it—liberals, conservatives—they're worried about nuclear power plants killing people in their area. . . . The environmental movement, the whole ecology movement, and all these different segments of society that are fighting the no nukes campaign, are all starting to become politicized.

To press this point, the films featured interviews with a broad array of Montague locals on both sides of the nuclear power issue. The film was careful to distance Lovejoy from leftover notions of the “sixties radical” and to assert that all manner of people are impacted by commercial reactors.

*Lovejoy's Nuclear War* narrated the no nukes movement with a particular organizing ideal in mind. GMPF's first goal was to undermine the opposition by juxtaposing the arguments of nuclear advocates—and particularly corporate and government executives—with the health and economic arguments at the core of the antinuclear movement. This established both the moral and the intellectual superiority of no nukes activism. But GMPF did not stop there. They emphasized that the local will—across Montague's political spectrum—opposed nuclear energy and that executive authorities willfully ignored this will. It was precisely the local nature of the antinuclear movement that GMPF emphasized.

It is difficult to gauge the impact of Montague Farm's antinuclear and alternative energy organizing in contributing to the fate of the Montague nuclear energy project. But NU's financial prospects for completing the project spiraled progressively downward over the course of the 1970s. In 1973, when NU initially announced plans to construct a plant in Montague, the project's estimated cost ran to \$1.35 billion. Within a year, the

estimate jumped by \$170 million. Soon, NU suggested that the plant might cost \$2.3 billion, while the Energy Facilities Siting Council of Massachusetts argued that the real cost would be closer to \$3.3 billion.<sup>57</sup> Clearly these numbers did not bode well for Northeast Utilities. The gold rush on the nuclear energy frontier had given way to the realities of America's economic and energy crises. And the cries of the Montague communards and their comrades—long dismissed by NU's bullish executives—had grown to a pitch where they could no longer be ignored.

Montague's opposition saw progress in the drawn-out battle to halt NU construction of the twin nukes on the Montague Plains. The day after Lovejoy's acquittal, Northeast Utilities announced a one-year delay in construction plans. A few months later—on the one-year anniversary of Lovejoy's tower-toppling—NU announced a new three-year delay. And in 1977 NU announced a final, four-year delay.<sup>58</sup> The plant would never be built.

By the time that Northeast Utilities announced the cancellation of the Montague nukes, the communards at Montague Farm had already moved on to the next battle in the no nukes fight. "We rang a big bell in Montague," Sam Lovejoy recalled, "and then we immediately focused on anti-nuclear organizing outside of Montague."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "Five Reactors in Doubt," *Clamshell Alliance News* 2, no. 4 (January/February 1978), 3.

<sup>58</sup> Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 394.

<sup>59</sup> Lovejoy, "Somebody's Got to Do It," 431.

## Seabrook's Nuclear War

On July 9, 1976, construction began on another set of twin 1150-megawatt reactors, this time in Seabrook, New Hampshire—one hundred miles northeast of Montague. Despite the fact that the Environmental Protection Agency had yet to issue its final environmental impact statement on the proposed site, officials from Public Service Company of New Hampshire (PSCo) ordered workers to begin clearing the site in advance of construction. Within days of these developments, thirty-two New England activists—Sam Lovejoy among them—gathered on the seacoast to draw up the founding principles of the Clamshell Alliance, a regional umbrella group of local organizations devoted to halting the Seabrook reactors.<sup>60</sup>

The Clamshell Alliance shared Montague Farm's principles of nonviolent direct action and local autonomy. But the Alliance fundamentally altered the fight against nuclear power by expanding the scope and structure of antinuclear activism. The movement soon spread nationwide.<sup>61</sup> Montague farmers and Packer Corners' Marty Jezer played key leadership roles throughout the Clamshell Alliance's history. Lovejoy, Gyorgy, and Harvey Wasserman traveled throughout the United States speaking about the no nukes movement and Clam activism.<sup>62</sup> Using these platforms, Montague

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<sup>60</sup> "Clamshell Alliance, History and Philosophy," Clamshell Alliance Papers, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire Library, Box 1, Folder 1; and *The Last Resort*, directed by Dan Keller, produced by Dan Keller and Charles Light (Turners Falls, MA: Green Mountain Post Films, 1978).

<sup>61</sup> Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, 9-10.

<sup>62</sup> Further indicative of Montague Farm's centrality, when *WIN* Magazine wrote a letter to its readers boasting of its spectacular antinuclear coverage, it prominently featured the communards: "WIN has filled its pages with writings by the most knowledgeable and active [no nukes] people: Marty Jezer, Harvey Wasserman, Sam Lovejoy, et al." "Letter to WIN Readers," *WIN*, May 19, 1977, 2. Barbara

communards drew attention to what they saw as the movement's central themes: decentralization and consensus; local grassroots organizing; and community autonomy.

In other words, they emphasized the Clamshell Alliance's prefigurative politics.

It took little time for the Clams to settle on the organization's guiding philosophy and founding principles. The Clamshell Alliance's founding statement concisely delineated these ideals:

Recognizing:

- 1) that the survival of humankind depends upon preservation of our natural environment;
- 2) that nuclear power poses a mortal threat to people and the environment;
- 3) that our energy needs can adequately be met through utilization of non-nuclear energy sources;
- 4) that energy should not be abused for private profit; and
- 5) people should not be exploited for private profit,

THE CLAMSHELL ALLIANCE, A New England Organization, has been formed to:

- 1) stop construction of a nuclear power plant in Seabrook, N.H.;
- 2) assist efforts to halt plant development in New England;
- 3) re-assert the right of citizens to be fully informed, and then to decide the nature and destiny of their own communities; and
- 4) to achieve these goals through direct, non-violent action, such as one-to-one dialogue, public prayer and fasting, public demonstrations, site occupation, and other means which put life before property.<sup>63</sup>

In light of health, safety, environmental, and economic concerns, the Clams proposed to halt construction of nuclear reactors by non-violent direct action. These principles mirrored many of the core concepts that had guided the antinuclear fight in western Massachusetts for nearly three years. Indeed, Montague Farm and the FCAEC left a significant thumbprint on the Clamshell Alliance.

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Epstein is correct to assert that "the movement has few if any texts." *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, 20. But the communards at Montague and Packer Corners Farms produced a goodly number of texts, accounting for a large proportion of the basic No Nukes material.

<sup>63</sup> "Clamshell Alliance, History and Philosophy," Clamshell Alliance Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.



Of course, the inclusion of “public prayers and fasting” and “site occupation” as two of the Alliance’s protests methods hinted at some of the other influences on the Alliance. Quaker ideals formed the Clam’s key philosophical influence. Elizabeth Boardman and Suki Rice from the Cambridge office of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)—a Quaker organization—were two of the earliest and most influential Clams. While not officially representing the AFSC in their capacity as Clams, Boardman and Rice advocated nonviolence and community as core Clam values and established a Quaker influence on the seacoast.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, a West German model of site occupation emerged as the Alliance’s central protest tactic. In early 1976, two members of the FCAEC visited Wyhl, West Germany, where twenty-eight thousand citizens had been occupying the site of a proposed nuclear reactor for more than a year and would soon force German courts to cancel the project. When the FCAEC activists returned to the United States with a film on the Wyhl occupation and a first-hand report on the West German movement, plant occupation quickly emerged as the Clamshell Alliance’s basic protest method.<sup>65</sup>

With activists in agreement about theory and practice, the Alliance began to formulate its organizational structure. The sheer size and geographical vastness of the Clamshell Alliance—as a regional umbrella group—required a substantial organizational structure that had never been necessary in Montague. Furthermore, the original Clams agreed that decision-making within the organization—both during occupations and during the long stretches of planning between occupations—must occur by consensus. In

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<sup>64</sup> Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, 10, 63-64.

<sup>65</sup> Marty Jezer, “Stopping the Seabrook Nuke,” *WIN*, October 14, 1976, 8-9; and Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 324-25.

other words, a single dissenting voice among the thousands of Clams in dozens of New England antinuclear organizations could block any decision. Nevertheless, the Clam decision-making structure remained efficient in the organization's early days.<sup>66</sup>

Two methods facilitated consensus within the Clamshell Alliance. First, a coordinating committee composed of representatives from each affiliated New England antinuclear group met regularly between 1976 and 1978. This system of a hub in Seabrook with spokespeople who communicated directly to affiliated local groups maintained a maximum of efficiency and decentralization. Any major decision took at least two weeks, but this inconvenience proved worthwhile due to the unifying and involved nature of consensus decision-making. In essence, the coordinating committee functioned as a clearinghouse of proposals and a rubber stamp for ideas originating in local groups. Decentralization also empowered local groups to continue their autonomous work while coordinating efforts around the Seabrook nuke.<sup>67</sup> Second, the use of affinity groups at Clamshell occupations facilitated the training of activists, maintained consensus, and promoted community formation, especially in the face of large-scale arrests and drawn-out stays in New Hampshire armories. Wasserman outlined their function:

The affinity groups became functioning units, providing the background and personal support that turned the occupation "army" into an organized community. Each affinity group had a spokesperson who would represent it at decision-making huddles along the march route, on the site, and in prison. Each group had its medical and media people and at least one person who would avoid arrest and serve as outside liaison through protracted occupations or incarcerations.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, 63-68.

<sup>67</sup> Harvey Wasserman, "The Clamshell Alliance: Getting It Together," *Progressive*, September 1977, 16.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. See also, Marty Jezer, "The End of Do-Your-Own-Thing Demonstrations," *WIN*, October 14, 1976, 9-10.

In essence, the affinity groups mirrored the Clamshell Alliance's broader organizational structure in miniature.

The Clam system functioned to perfection during the organization's first year. On August 1, 1976, eighteen Seabrookers marched down the railroad tracks that led to the reactor site and were arrested after planting a small grove of pine and maple saplings on PSCo property. Nearby, six hundred people rallied in support of the attempted occupation. Three weeks later the number of Clams attempting to occupy the reactor site grew tenfold. Clams also held an Alternative Energy Fair in October 1976 to educate the Seabrook community about safe energy. These early activities were mere prelude to the occupation planned for the following spring. Throughout the winter of 1976-77, affinity groups trained in the principles of nonviolent direct action to prepare for the upcoming occupation of April 30, 1977. Only individuals who attended these workshops were allowed to participate in the April occupation. The third occupation fulfilled the Clamshell Alliance's wildest expectations: 2,400 protestors marched onto the site; 1,400 were arrested; and hundreds—all within the supportive protest community of affinity groups—remained imprisoned in New Hampshire's armories for two weeks. New Hampshire Governor Meldrim Thomson had hoped to douse the Clamshell Alliance's enthusiasm with these incarcerations, but the strung out affair brought unprecedented attention to the Clams and helped build a stronger protest community.<sup>69</sup>

Where were Montague's communards in this rapid Clam ascendancy? A symbiotic relationship existed between Montague Farm and the Clamshell Alliance. The communal nature and family orientation of Montague's *karass* influenced the Clamshell

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<sup>69</sup> Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, 64-66; and Gyorgy, *No Nukes*, 396-98.

Alliance's community formation and collective structure. But the Clamshell Alliance influenced the communards as well. Harvey Wasserman noted: "The early Clam was like the early farm. Everybody was with everybody else. It was just kind of a roving commune of people from the six New England states. . . . The early Clam was very much linked to the farm. . . . And we loved all the people we were meeting from New Hampshire. The family just got bigger."<sup>70</sup> Like all families, conflict eventually arose within the Clamshell's Alliance. And Montague's particular vision of Clam activism played a central role in the division that ultimately led to the organization's downfall.

*The Last Resort* (1979)—Green Mountain Post Films' second antinuclear film—provides a perfect starting point for tracing Montague Farm's particular understanding of the Clamshell Alliance's mission. The documentary tracked the Alliance's first year of organizing and—like *Lovejoy's Nuclear War*—operated as an organizing tool. Because GMPF completed *The Last Resort* in 1979, the film scarcely impacted Clam organizing. But the documentary nicely rendered Montague Farm's retrospective vision of the no nukes movement.

The Clamshell Alliance's broad local constituency formed the heart of *The Last Resort*. GMPF carefully illustrated the working-class origins of New Hampshire's no nukes advocates. The occupations of each interviewee appear on the screen and included a diverse lot: retired mechanic, welder, shoe factory worker, employment counselor, police officer, carpenter, and several female representatives of service groups. Furthermore, the documentary focused on the local constituencies at the movement's core. All the interviewees in *The Last Resort* were New Hampshire activists. While the Clamshell Alliance was a regional organization, GMPF suggested, non-New

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<sup>70</sup> Harvey Wasserman, interview by Tom Fels, summer 2006, Tom Fels Personal Papers.

Hampshirites only gained legitimacy when they enacted the local will. Montague Farm sought to educate and to empower the local citizenry, not to impose its will on a town one hundred miles from home. *The Last Resort* illustrated the extent to which Montague communards—despite their importance in the Clamshell Alliance—deferred leadership in Seabrook’s antinuclear movement to those directly invested in the outcome.

GMPF personalized this narrative through a nuanced and crafty portrait of Seabrook Police Chief Rayenold Perkins and his wife Raelene. We first meet Chief Perkins during excerpts from an interview that are interspersed with images of the August 1, 1976, arrest of Clam activists. During the interview, Chief Perkins looks away from the camera while declaring his unqualified opposition to direct action: “Civil disobedience, that’s one way to put it. I call it breaking the law.” But the Police Chief’s redemption begins in the very next scene when Raelene states her support for civil disobedience, bluntly asking, “How else are you gonna win?” On the question of nuclear energy, Chief Perkins smilingly abstains from declaring his personal views, while Raelene expresses opposition due to the terrors of atomic radiation. Chief Perkins, then, begins the film as an enigma—a man with clear views on law and order that place him in opposition to the Clamshell Alliance, but who retains the hope of redemption, presently personified in his wife’s antinuclear sentiments. Indeed, the film’s sympathy begins to shift in Chief Perkins’ favor only when Raelene declares that “I think he’s done a pretty good job [dealing with Clam protestors].” Chief Perkins final appearance comes during the August 22 Alliance occupation. As the protestors approach the site by way of the railroad tracks, Chief Perkins meets them in plain clothes and responds to a Clam inquiry about potential arrests: “You should be really talking to Public Service, I’m not even here as far as I’m

concerned till Public Service asked me to be here. . . . I'm gonna remove anybody from this site, but I'm asking you to move for Public Service. Okay?" As the camera moves away from Chief Perkins' face, he smirks. The entire scene answers—albeit vaguely—the question the viewer has asked throughout the film: What is Perkins' personal view of nuclear power? By specifying that he will arrest people only on PSCo orders to protect their private property—and by implication *not* due to his own opposition to their actions—Perkins emerges as a closet Clam supporter, a redeemed no nukes skeptic.

*The Last Resort* narrates the no nukes movement with a particular organizing vision in mind. This ideal emphasized broad local support. By placing a cross-section of working-class antinuclear advocates onscreen, GMPF emphasized that the local will—across Seabrook's political spectrum—opposed nuclear energy. It was precisely the local nature of the antinuclear movement that Montague Farm strove to emphasize.

As *The Last Resort* indicated, Montague Farm emphasized that the Clamshell Alliance should advocate and amplify local opposition to the Seabrook reactor. Everything hinged on the citizens of Seabrook. Without local support, Montague communards argued, the Clamshell Alliance had no right to exist. "This movement is built from the bottom up," Gyorgy argued. "Here the movement starts with the town. There is no other way."<sup>71</sup> Wasserman saw this as a critical lesson from earlier antiwar activism: "If we learned anything from Vietnam, it was that meaningful, lasting change can only come from the bottom up. Nothing really moves in society until the people as a whole are convinced that it should."<sup>72</sup> As antiwar, civil rights, and student movement

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Harvey Wasserman, "Nuclear War by the Sea," in *Energy War*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> Harvey Wasserman, "Carter's Choice—And Ours," in *Energy War*, 68.

veterans, Montague communards understood the centrality of grassroots support and emphasized this component of Clamshell Alliance activism over and above all else.

If town votes are any indication, there was a significant groundswell of antinuclear sentiment in Seabrook. In March 1976—only four months before the creation of the Clamshell Alliance—the town of Seabrook had voted 768 to 632 to oppose construction of the plant. A year later, Seabrook voted to ban the transportation or storage of nuclear waste from commercial reactors and gained support from many surrounding towns.<sup>73</sup> These non-binding town-meeting votes did not necessarily indicate local support for Clamshell Alliance tactics, but they did indicate that the Clamshell Alliance could count on grassroots support for its basic antinuclear philosophy. In other words, this was not a case of outsiders forcing radicalism on a powerless local community.

Nevertheless, the Clamshell Alliance did face challenges in building Seacoast support. Marty Jezer—who remained at Packer Corners and worked with the Energy Coalition of Southern Vermont in Brattleboro—sensed that the local shift from opposing nukes to supporting the Clamshell Alliance would be a challenge:

Building local support will not be easy. Though the public is generally hostile towards the utility companies for their high rates and their broken promises, there is no tradition for mass political action. . . . Workers on the construction site and in New England, in general, truly believe that their economic well-being is dependent on the construction of more nuclear plants.<sup>74</sup>

Convincing citizens and workers of the need and economic wisdom of antinuclear activism was critical to Clam success.

The Alliance's repudiation of violence served to buttress local support in the aftermath of the April 30, 1977, occupation. "The tactics of peaceful action had opened

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<sup>73</sup> Wasserman, *Energy War*, 65.

<sup>74</sup> Marty Jezer, "Stopping the Seabrook Nuke," *WIN*, October 14, 1976, 11.

the gates to the site when any other approach seemed certain to have kept them closed,” Wasserman noted. “It also maintained for the occupation an overwhelming base of credibility and popular support against which the Thomson administration was simply unable to respond.”<sup>75</sup> He also argued that nonviolence appealed to a broad constituency: “Nonviolent civil disobedience is quintessentially human and utterly revolutionary. It is a tactic meant to combine the best of the political world with the highest of the spiritual.”<sup>76</sup> Clam nonviolence appealed to folks whether they participated in the occupation for community, political, or spiritual reasons.

Indeed, Montague communards insisted that local support made the April 30 occupation possible. With thousands of activists descending on Seabrook from across New England, Wasserman noted, local accommodations were essential to Clam success:

[Seacoast residents] provided the occupiers with crucial staging areas, gathered a barnload of food and created an atmosphere of appreciation and support. They neutralized the local police. They lined the streets to cheer. They flashed signs: “Seabrook Voted No Nukes” and “We Live Here—And Are Scared!” . . . The real key to the stunning success of the April 30 Seabrook occupation was that . . . a majority of the New Hampshire seacoast population not only supported it, they loved it.<sup>77</sup>

*The Last Resort* likewise captures moving images of Seabrook locals lining the streets as Governor Thomson’s bus made its way toward PSCo property to celebrate the reactor’s ground breaking ceremony

As the protests grew in size, however, the communards began to discover the distinction between supporting the Clam and participating in Clam occupations. Even in

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<sup>75</sup> Harvey Wasserman, “High Tension in the Energy Debate—The Clamshell Response,” in *Energy War*, 76.

<sup>76</sup> Harvey Wasserman, “The Power of the People: Active Nonviolence in the United States,” in *Energy War*, 97.

<sup>77</sup> Harvey Wasserman, “The Opening Battles of the Eighties,” in *Energy War*, 78-79.



the celebratory aftermath of the April 30 occupation, Jezer noted some troubling developments that called into question the breadth of the Clamshell's appeal:

In a well-intentioned effort to create a broad based movement against nuclear power, the Clamshell Alliance has emphasized the single issue of stopping nukes at the expense of everything else. In principle, the common denominator of nuclear protest should attract support from diverse groups of people—for the danger of nuclear power cuts across class, race, sex, and ethnic lines. But, in practice, Clam politics and the style of organizing excludes people.

The Seabrook occupation drew most of its participants from students, liberal, middle-class environmentalists, and those sixties radicals who in recent years have settled in rural New England. This is the same basic constituency as the anti-war movement, and the great flaw in that movement was that it never reached beyond.<sup>78</sup>

The limits of Clam appeal had begun to show.

Pronuclear advocates noted these cracks in the Clam constituency and rose to the occasion. In the summer of 1977, the ad hoc organization New Hampshire Voice of Energy held the nation's largest pronuclear rally in nearby Manchester. Three thousand nuclear advocates—primarily construction and utility workers—marched through the streets of Manchester and listened to a torrent of speakers bash the Clamshell Alliance and agitate for nuclear reactor development. In particular, the rally denounced nuclear opponents as being no-growth advocates. The gauntlet had been set.<sup>79</sup>

During the winter of 1977-78—as the folks at Montague struggled over how to attract the Seacoast's labor constituents—a debate raged within the Clamshell Alliance. In the aftermath of the April 30, 1977, occupation, PSCo placed a fence around the Seabrook reactor site. As the Clams prepared for a June 24, 1978, occupation, deep divides arose within the Alliance about how to move onto the fenced-in site.

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<sup>78</sup> Marty Jezer, "Learning From the Past to Meet the Future," *WIN*, June 16 and 23, 1977, 18.

<sup>79</sup> Wasserman, *Energy War*, 88.

The basic controversy centered on the role of civil disobedience and property destruction. Many new Clams—largely Boston-based youth who had rushed into the organization following the 1977 occupation—favored fence-cutting in order to break onto the PSCo site should the gate be locked on June 24.<sup>80</sup> This contingent became known as Hard Clams. Montague’s communards and most of the Clam’s old guard—Soft Clams—opposed fence-cutting. Wasserman outlined the Soft Clam perspective:

Some felt that destruction of property should itself be considered a violent act. Others argued simply that in a mass situation, the fence-cutting might touch off an unwanted confrontation with police or construction workers—a potential powderkeg with unpredictable consequences. Given the conservative, volatile political climate in New Hampshire, such a confrontation might go a long way toward undercutting the Alliance’s hard-won mass base.<sup>81</sup>

Hard Clams, meanwhile, began to attack the Montague contingent for exercising leadership in a presumptively leaderless movement.

Gyorgy, Lovejoy, and Wasserman had undoubtedly become national no nukes leaders. The use of *Lovejoy’s Nuclear War* as an organizing and educational tool within the Alliance placed a spotlight on the communards. Montague’s no-nukes activists extensively traveled, spoke throughout the United States, and published widely on the antinuclear movement. The fact that neither Gyorgy nor Wasserman nor Lovejoy had been arrested at any of the Clam’s first three occupations further fueled the Hard Clam charges of Montague’s elitism and illegitimate authority.<sup>82</sup>

But Montague’s communards had gone to significant lengths to write themselves out of Clamshell Alliance history in the vast body of writing and film that they produced.

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<sup>80</sup> Marty Jezer prophesied the potential strength that Boston activists might gain in the Clamshell Alliance in “The End of Do-Your-Own-Thing Demonstrations,” 9.

<sup>81</sup> Wasserman, *Energy War*, 107.

<sup>82</sup> For a thorough discussion of Hard and Soft Clams and the debate over fence-cutting and Clam leadership, see Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, 69-75.

*The Last Resort*, for example, features many Seabrook locals without placing a single Montague communitard on camera. Charles Light indicated that this was not accidental: “We were very hooked into the local people. . . . *The Last Resort* . . . really focuses on the local, sort of itinerant, poor opposition, people in trailer parks, this guy Tony Sannasuci and his wife, various people who were just local Seabrook people.”<sup>83</sup> Even the communitards’ refusal to be arrested at Seabrook occupations, Lovejoy recalled, centered on their sensitivity to the Clamshell Alliance’s leaderless nature:

One thing that I was very sensitive of—this is when I’m talking about leadership—I refused to get arrested in Seabrook. And it was for a very simple reason. I didn’t want the first paragraph [of media stories] to say, “200 people are arrested, including Sam Lovejoy, the maniac that knocked over the tower.” Because suddenly everything gets perverted and twisted and it becomes my movement. And that’s not it. . . . I refused to do interviews unless everybody else was being interviewed. And I didn’t get arrested.”<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, Hard Clams stood firm in their accusations of elitism.

Montague communitards, meanwhile, began to adapt their message and their goals in order to attract labor support and to broaden the Clamshell Alliance’s appeal beyond Jezer’s crew of “students, liberal, middle-class environmentalists, and sixties radicals.” Detailing the Clamshell Alliance’s particular pro-growth vision became central to the goal of attracting Seacoast laborers. Anna Gyorgy insisted: “We’re not no-growth. What we advocate is a different kind of growth, one that’s equitable and environmentally sound.”<sup>85</sup> Wasserman insisted that “solarization” would offer a decentralized, broad-based economic expansion, built on stable energy supplies and prices, and a vastly expanded

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<sup>83</sup> Light, interview.

<sup>84</sup> Lovejoy, interview.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Harvey Wasserman, “Unionizing Ecotopia,” in *Energy War*, 211.

labor market.”<sup>86</sup> In fact, Environmentalists for Full Employment argued that solar energy could produce seven times the jobs per dollar as nuclear energy.<sup>87</sup>

Solarization and the transition to clean energy alternatives, the farmers continued, would also empower local communities by decentralizing energy ownership. Jezer insisted:

The basic problem of energy [is] who owns its generation and distribution, and who benefits from the methods used. . . . Local and democratic control of utilities does not automatically lead to socialism or even solve some of our more pressing energy problems. But it is the kind of structural reform that provides people with a model for winning and exercising control over something that directly affects virtually every aspect of their life.<sup>88</sup>

However, publicizing this democratic alternative energy message in Seabrook became difficult because Clamshell Alliance protest strategy heavily favored boisterous occupations. As a result, the conflict between Hard and Soft Clams promised to undermine Montague Farm’s goal of widening the Clam constituency. The state of New Hampshire soon brought this conflict to a head and threw the Clamshell Alliance into disarray.

In an attempt to test the Clamshell Alliance’s consensus decision-making, New Hampshire Attorney General Thomas Rath offered the organization a simple proposal in May 1978: the state would grant the Clamshell Alliance access to the PSCo site in exchange for the Clams agreeing to peaceably leave following a weekend-long occupation. Within the divided Clamshell Alliance, it would be impossible to reach consensus on whether to accept the Rath Proposal.

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<sup>86</sup> Wasserman, *Energy War*, 206.

<sup>87</sup> Harvey Wasserman, “Creating Jobs from Environmentalism,” in *Energy War*, 205.

<sup>88</sup> Marty Jezer, “Power for the People,” *WIN*, April 14, 1977, 4, 8. For a slightly more Marxist argument about energy decentralization, see Jezer, “Learning from the Past to Meet the Future,” 19.

Montague Farm was unanimous in its support for the Rath Proposal because it represented the will of the Seabrook population. Wasserman noted that accepting the proposal “would create an opportunity for outreach to the more conservative local opponents who would never break the law, but who might join with the Clamshell in a legal rally, especially if it were actually held on the Seabrook site.”<sup>89</sup> Light agreed: “This was too good of an opportunity for the local outreach, for the New Hampshire outreach, for the people on the seacoast who were actually going to live with the plant to not take seriously.”<sup>90</sup> For Montague Farm and the Clamshell’s founding group, the local imperative superseded all other concerns.<sup>91</sup> Hard Clams insisted that indefinite site occupation—rather than a bounded weekend festival—represented the sole hope of realizing the Alliance’s original goal—to permanently halt reactor construction.

Once it became clear that consensus was impossible, that the local population would not support the occupation, and that a legal energy fair on the site would attract a large audience, the Clamshell Alliance Coordinating Committee announced that they would accept the Roth Proposal. But the announcement came before local Clam groups had approved the acceptance. The Coordinating Committee had willfully violated the organization’s commitment to consensus. The Alliance’s decline had begun.<sup>92</sup>

By most standards, the June 24 and 25 rallies seemed to be a smashing success. On Saturday, six thousand trained Clam activists stormed the construction site. They

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<sup>89</sup> Wasserman, *Energy War*, 110.

<sup>90</sup> Light, interview.

<sup>91</sup> Barbara Epstein argues: “The founders of the Clamshell understood that people living near the Seabrook site had a privileged place in Clamshell decision making, but this understanding had never been formally endorsed by the Clamshell as a whole.” *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, 78.

<sup>92</sup> See Wasserman, *Energy War*, 109-11; and Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, 75-78.

pitched tents, sang songs, distributed no nukes, recycling, and conservation literature, and displayed windmills, solar ovens, and a geodesic dome. On Sunday, twelve thousand closet Clams and locals joined the rally. Furthermore, the presence of labor-union speakers indicated that the Clamshell Alliance had made headway in attracting workers to the alternative energy coalition. Finally, the Clam acceptance of the Rath Proposal coupled with recent electric rate hikes destroyed Governor Thompson's public appeal. Thompson had staked his political career on taking a hard line against the Clam and on lowering taxes for New Hampshire residents. He had failed on both fronts, leading to his defeat in the 1978 gubernatorial election.<sup>93</sup>

But the Clamshell Alliance had fallen victim to its own success. Clams discovered the same lesson that confronts all successful grassroots movements: organizational growth invariably challenges the ideals forged during an organization's humble infancy. The Coordinating Committee's disavowal of consensus decision-making, the irreparable philosophical divide between Hard and Soft Clams, and the practical problems created by the Alliance's exponential growth meant that the Clamshell Alliance had organized its last large-scale event. While the organization would continue into the late 1980s, the involvement of Montague communards—and most other Clams—quickly tapered off after June 1978.

The Clamshell Alliance's practical accomplishments are ambiguous. The battle against the Seabrook reactor would continue for more than a decade after the heyday of the Alliance. By 1989—ten years after the proposed completion date—one of the two

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<sup>93</sup> Wasserman, *Energy War*, 122-25.

reactors at Seabrook Station went online; PSCo cancelled the second reactor; and the \$7 billion final cost led PSCo to declare bankruptcy.<sup>94</sup>

The impact of Clam activity on Montague's communards is easier to evaluate. The Clamshell Alliance's primary lesson, Wasserman argued, reinforced Montague Farm's original beliefs: "As an umbrella organization, the Clamshell Alliance had learned that the fight for decentralized, democratic energy would be won first and foremost in the neighborhoods and communities where energy efficiency would be improved, utility bills resisted, and renewable power generated. Centralizing organizations could come and go; it was people at the grass roots who would finally win the war."<sup>95</sup> In light of Montague Farm's emphasis on the local base of antinuclear activism, the communards' next step in no nukes activism came as a surprise.

#### Rock and the City: Musicians United for Safe Energy

In the aftermath of the Clamshell Alliance's decline, Montague communards turned their no-nukes organizing in new directions. Most prominently, Lovejoy, Wasserman, and Light helped organize a five-day No Nukes concert series at Madison Square Garden through Musicians United for Safe Energy in September 1979. Such a glitzy event would seem to belie the communards' emphasis on local activism. But MUSE's mission emphasized grassroots activism by creating a national antinuclear organization that utilized the political capital and fundraising connections of prominent

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<sup>94</sup> For the long history of the Seabrook Station project, see Henry F. Bedford, *Seabrook Station: Citizen Politics and Nuclear Power* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990).

<sup>95</sup> Wasserman, *Energy War*, 129.

rock stars to buttress local groups. By increasing the visibility of the antinuclear movement, Montague communards sought to swell the ranks and coffers of local organizers across the country. FCAEC and Clamshell activism had been the lifeblood of commune life through 1978. How would the latest swirl of antinuclear activity impact Montague Farm?

Musicians United for Safe Energy formed a unique alliance between politically inclined rock musicians and culturally radical antinuclear activists. John Hall, Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, and Graham Nash teamed up with Lovejoy, Howard Kohn, Tom Campbell, and David Fenton—who had continued his radical photography and worked with *Rolling Stone* after leaving Liberation News Service in 1971—to produce five concerts, a live album, and a concert film to raise money for local antinuclear and alternative energy groups across the country.<sup>96</sup> The MUSE concerts set the gold standard for political concerts. Jann Wenner insisted that “it was the largest, most impressive gathering of musicians ever assembled for a non-profit event, and it was a stunning testimony to the depth of the shared beliefs of the generation that came of age in the Sixties.”<sup>97</sup>

MUSE had rather modest roots. In the summer of 1976, a group of musicians—including Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt—held a series of concerts to raise money in support of California Proposition 15, the nation’s most public nuclear safeguard referendum. While California voters rejected Proposition 15, many of the artists from these shows joined forces to create the Pacific Alliance, a non-profit fundraising conduit

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<sup>96</sup> Daisann McLane, “MUSE: Rock Politics Comes of Age,” *Rolling Stone*, November 15, 1979, 9-14.

<sup>97</sup> Jann Wenner, “Editorial,” *Rolling Stone*, November 15, 1979, 14.



for grassroots antinuclear organizations. Meanwhile, musicians on the east coast began to form another network of no nukes rockers. In spring 1978, fifty artists—among them future MUSE musicians James Taylor, Carly Simon, Bonnie Raitt, and John Hall—signed a petition of nuclear concern at a well-publicized press conference in New York. An accompanying concert raised \$16,000 for various antinuclear causes. David Fenton had one foot in this circle of musicians and another foot in a circle of activists; before long he brought the two together to create MUSE.<sup>98</sup>

When it came time to choose the president of MUSE, musicians and activists agreed that Lovejoy made the best fit. As the most visible no nukes activist in the country, he brought immediate political currency to the project. Lovejoy remembered: “They wanted political cover. They also wanted political credibility. And again, this was Sam, it was the tower topper, it was the guy who started it all. . . . So I agreed to be that credibility.”<sup>99</sup> He also had legal experience, which helped him efficiently structure the organization.

Lovejoy saw the MUSE concerts as a critical event in the antinuclear campaign and in the ongoing struggle to perfect the union between rock music and politics. He hoped that adding musicians to the no nukes bandwagon would create an ongoing celebrity component of the future movement. At the very least, Lovejoy understood, the concerts would be a huge media event. But he also hoped to redeem and to legitimize rock and roll benefit concerts. In the aftermath of a fundraising scandal tied to George Harrison’s Concert for Bangladesh, Lovejoy aimed to run a tight ship and to funnel all

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<sup>98</sup> MUSE Annual Report, October 14, 1980, Musicians United for Safe Energy Records, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Library.

<sup>99</sup> Lovejoy, interview. See also, Light, interview.

concert proceeds directly and transparently to grassroots groups through the MUSE Foundation. This would hopefully establish a new fundraising bulwark for the no nukes movement.<sup>100</sup>

The concerts were a smashing success. Running from September 19 through 23, more than 90,000 people attended the five Madison Square Garden shows. The list of performers included Jackson Browne, The Doobie Brothers, Chaka Khan, Graham Nash, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Bonnie Raitt, James Taylor, Carly Simon, and Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band. MUSE week culminated in a nationally-televised Battery Park City rally attended by 200,000 people in the shadows of the World Trade Center. The concerts raised \$300,000 dollars for antinuclear groups, with more to follow from album and film sales. Harvey Wasserman told *Rolling Stone* that the concerts were a new twist on Clam-style protest: “MUSE is just another form of occupation. We’re occupying Madison Square Garden for five nights.”<sup>101</sup>

In fact, the scarcity of overt politics distinguished the MUSE concerts from Clam occupations as organizing events. “The political and musical aspects don’t mesh,” *Rolling Stone* insisted. “When the music has an antinuclear theme . . . it seems heavy-handed, forced. When the music has no political content—which is most of the time—it seems like just another rock concert, and a slow one at that.”<sup>102</sup>

Bruce Springsteen epitomized the onstage diminution of MUSE politics. Before agreeing to perform, Springsteen insisted that no politicians appear onstage and that MUSE proceeds not benefit any political candidate. He was also the lone musician to

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<sup>100</sup> Lovejoy, interview.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in McLane, “MUSE,” 9.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

refrain from issuing a personal statement of opposition to nuclear power in the MUSE program. Nevertheless, Springsteen's presence was crucial to MUSE's success. Because the concerts overwhelmingly featured Los Angeles-based artists, Springsteen's drawing power in New York was essential. *Rolling Stone* noted that "with Springsteen on the program, the political nature of the concerts is lost; his crowd doesn't particularly notice the antinuclear theme."<sup>103</sup>

With a bit of effort, however, the MUSE concertgoer could find plenty of antinuclear material. The MUSE program was the first place to look. Glossy, colorful, and artistically designed, the program contained a wealth of information on the perils of nuclear energy. The MUSE "Statement of Purpose" synthesized the Movement's core arguments and individual entries on the public health, safety, economic, and social concerns detailed the history of nuclear energy and antinuclear activism. Each artist—minus Springsteen—detailed personal reasons for opposing nuclear power. These rationales ranged from Tom Petty's lighthearted sentiment—"There really are people (some in positions of great power) stupid enough to annihilate the planet. And this will cut in drastically on Rock & Roll, roller skating and other popular pastimes"—to the lessons of Bonnie Raitt's informed childhood—"I was raised as a Quaker and my friends and family were connected with the nuclear disarmament issue. So from an early age I was aware of the dangers of nuclear power."<sup>104</sup> Either way, David Fenton indicated, MUSE employed a simple strategy in putting together the program: "We work on the theory that people will assimilate this information best when it comes from their culture

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> "The MUSE Concerts for a Non-Nuclear Future, Official Program," insert-4, 35, MUSE Records.

heroes.”<sup>105</sup> This form of antinuclear persuasion drew from the credibility and capital accrued to rock stars, but the program also provided a good dose of solid no nukes information.

Green Mountain Post Films monopolized the presentation of antinuclear politics onstage by producing *Save the Planet*, a fifteen-minute film montage projected at each concert. If the MUSE program in part drew its strength from the mock-fluency of rock stars, *Save the Planet* relied on the emotional persuasiveness of images to sway its viewers. Light recalls that GMPF approached *Save the Planet* very differently from its earlier no nukes films:

This film was made specifically for an audience in Madison Square Garden, an audience of . . . younger people in their earlier twenties, rock and roll fans who weren't that interested in either becoming politically active, or environmental. It was an educational opportunity. It was geared to that level. It wasn't going to be a big intellectual discussion. It was gonna be . . . a montage history of the atomic age.<sup>106</sup>

The film includes multiple shots of nuclear explosions and of workers in haz-mat suits handling nuclear waste. The film also placed vulnerable people on camera to discuss their nuclear opposition: a Native American protestor in the Black Hills fearful of the impact of nuclear power on the next seven generations; children describing the accident at Three Mile Island; a black activist discussing the impact of nuclear energy on the poor. By including such a diverse lot of antinuclear witnesses, *Save the Planet* presented an

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<sup>105</sup> John Rockwell, “Rock Stars are Into Politics Again,” *New York Times*, September 16, 1979, D27.

<sup>106</sup> Light, interview.

emotionally charged argument through simple uses of image and voice. Divisions of race, class, and gender, it seemed, could all be overcome through the no nukes movement.<sup>107</sup>

MUSE reinforced the broad-based nature of the movement by carefully distributing its proceeds to an array of antinuclear and alternative energy groups across the country. The MUSE Foundation's board of directors consisted of leading antinuclear and alternative energy activists and delivered funds to groups that worked to stop nuclear power, to stop weapons proliferation, or to promote renewable energy sources. The board funded groups that targeted the entire nuclear fuel cycle and listed its top priority as "developing the transition from an oil-coal-nuclear dependent energy economy to a future based on conservation and relatively clean renewables."<sup>108</sup> In fall 1979, the MUSE Foundation donated \$250,000 from concert proceeds to 210 organizations; in spring 1980, it donated another \$250,000 from album sales to 170 groups.

Regardless of the political influence and publicity of the concerts themselves, MUSE succeeded in providing a financial shot in the arm for the antinuclear movement. The glamour of working with headlining musicians contrasted starkly with Montague Farm's earlier no nukes organizing. But communards advanced local organizing efforts across the country by establishing a fundraising conduit often lacking for community groups. Nevertheless, the consequences of this new direction in antinuclear activism slowly began to be felt back home at the farm.

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<sup>107</sup> *Save the Planet*, directed by Daniel Keller, produced by Charles Light (Turners Falls, MA: Green Mountain Post Films, 1979).

<sup>108</sup> MUSE Annual Report, October 14, 1980, MUSE Records.

## Meanwhile . . . At the Farm

Montague's antinuclear activism had a paradoxical impact on commune life. No nukes organizing simultaneously proved to be the lifeblood and the poison of the farm.

By 1973, Montague Farm had achieved a high level of stability and self-sufficiency. But Light recalled that role differentiation became increasingly apparent as the no nukes work got underway: "Certainly when the nuclear thing happened, there were certain people . . . who kept doing the farm work, or more farm work, and sort of established Sam's image and our image as organic farmers. And certain people like myself just did film work or, later on, political work."<sup>109</sup> Lovejoy remembered this as a natural development based on personal interests and talents:

There were several people living at the farm in the early to mid 70s who basically really got into the cow and the crops and the garden and the flow pattern of the thing and improving the house, which was a wreck, and fixing the barn, which was truly a wreck, and we had a lot of friends around and so to the extent Sam was not there, didn't have a huge impact because there were other people willing to help. . . . Everybody was more or less on the same page on why they were at the farm.<sup>110</sup>

Nevertheless, Light recalled that toward the end of the 1970s Montague increasingly relied on formal work schedules: "In the early days . . . there were no schedules. . . . Towards the end of [the 1970s], it was more like, 'everyone should cook, there should be a rotation, this and that.' I think, in a certain way, people either acclimatize themselves to having that sort of schedule. It was more informal before, and maybe it was more unfair,

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<sup>109</sup> Light, interview.

<sup>110</sup> Lovejoy, interview.

in terms of who did what.”<sup>111</sup> This formal division of labor represented a dramatic shift from the anarchism that defined Montague Farm’s early work.

The communards agree that their organizing with MUSE hastened Montague Farm’s decline. Wasserman simply stated: “I didn’t have any serious issues at Montague Farm until MUSE really started to happen.”<sup>112</sup> Lovejoy discovered that it was impossible to work part-time for MUSE and found himself in New York more than at the farm. By October 1980, he told the MUSE Board that “on the personal side, I am pretty much getting to the end of my rope.”<sup>113</sup> Personal lives grew harried and social relations at the farm deteriorated. The creation of a family bond provided Montague’s Farm’s strength in the early 1970s; antinuclear activism slowly eroded this base. To Light, MUSE formed “the seed of the farm’s disintegration.”<sup>114</sup> The contrast between farm life and MUSE activism, he continued, was stark: “[MUSE] was New York, it was rock and roll stars, it was tons of drugs, it was money.” More than a decade earlier, Bloom, Mungo, Wasserman, and Diamond had moved LNS to rural New England because New York City’s toxins had worn them down; perhaps it is fitting, then, that Montague’s return to the City provided the source of its disintegration.

Everybody slowly drifted from the farm over the course of the early 1980s. Lovejoy and his wife Janice broke up, due in large part to the stresses they faced as Sam progressively spent less time at the farm; in 1984, he began to attend law school, while she remained the lone steady figure at Montague Farm. Light remained in the area and

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<sup>111</sup> Light, interview.

<sup>112</sup> Wasserman, interview, Fels Personal Papers.

<sup>113</sup> MUSE Annual Report, October 14, 1980, MUSE Records.

<sup>114</sup> Light, interview.

further developed GMPF. Wasserman continued to publish and lecture on the no nukes movement as he faded from farm life. And Gyorgy drifted into ecofeminist activism, teaming up with other female intellectuals to create Women and Life on Earth, which organized the 1980 Women's Pentagon Action. No longer a vibrant home, Montague Farm remained but a shadow of its former self.

### Conclusion: "Our Lives Must Also Be Politically Relevant"

In March 1977—just as the Clamshell Alliance prepared for its third occupation at Seabrook—Packer Corners communards Marty Jezer and Shoshana Rihn issued a challenging call for America's communards to increase their political activism. The prefigurative component of commune life, they argued, was not enough to revolutionize American life:

It is not sufficient to live a good, honest productive life. Our lives must also be politically relevant and contribute to revolutionary change. . . . We are not saying that politics are separate from our personal lives. The two should be integrated at all levels. Our politics should be carried into our daily lives and shape our conduct; the way that we are ought to be taken as a reflection of our politics. But if we are going to commit ourselves to revolutionary change, we are going to have to evaluate our activities in terms of a wider political perspective. It is not enough to say that we are living morally or decently or even that we are living in a way that we hope all people will live *after* the revolution. The revolution hasn't happened. And it won't happen unless we make it. . . . To change the country we are going to have to build a movement based on political goals, not on cultural lifestyles. . . . A commune that isolates itself from the larger society (as many communes do), even though it is collective in form, is not collective in substance, and is seeking a solution to the problems of society for its own exclusive membership.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Shoshana Rihn and Marty Jezer, "Which Way to the Revolution? Part 2," *WIN*, March 10, 1977, 4-10.



The antinuclear activists at Montague Farm and—to a lesser extent—Packer Corners, aspired to fulfill Jezer's and Rihn's ideal of an engaged commune by utilizing their communal stability to advance a broad political agenda. By 1973, Montague's prefigurative politics had established a farm family based on egalitarianism, organic living, and self-sufficiency. It proved but a short leap from the Farm to an antinuclear movement based on consensus, decentralized alternative energy, and local autonomy. Like the commune, the antinuclear movement created new methods to achieve radical social change.

Despite the communards' five-year hiatus from activism, this political revitalization should not come as a surprise. After all, Montague Farm had been established with political intent. Liberation News Service's failure in rural Massachusetts had not produced a significant diminution in political thought or will at the commune. In fact, once Northeast Utilities erected its 500-foot weather tower on the Montague Plains, the farm's self-sufficiency immediately became the communards' greatest source of political capital.

The farm's collective structure and commune egalitarianism likewise strengthened the antinuclear movement. As Barbara Epstein has noted, Montague played an influential role in the birth and development of the Clamshell Alliance: "The influence of the Montague Farm people was enhanced by the fact that they represented a rural commune in which family merged with community and manual labor was interspersed with political work."<sup>116</sup> The importance of creating a community of solidarity within a protest movement can hardly be overstated. Montague embraced this task by empowering

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<sup>116</sup> Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, 84-85.

local activists and by seeking support from a political cross-section of Montague and Seabrook citizens.

The strategies Montague communards activists advocated further strengthened no nukes organizing. Nonviolent civil disobedience added a moral component to the movement and produced tremendously moving images. Lovejoy's tower-toppling and legal self-defense hit headlines across the country and provided a forum and a central symbol for the movement; the arrest and two-week-long incarceration of Clamshell Alliance activists in New Hampshire helped build community and undermined Governor Thomson's hold on the governorship; and MUSE created a No Nukes cultural touchstone.

By establishing Montague Farm, the communards had created a retreat in the rural countryside. But they never lost sight of the importance of activism to effect political change in the United States. Montague's communards established a setting in which no separation existed between the political and the personal. And while the communards lived the Movement every day at Montague Farm, they remained intimately connected to the grid of American life.

## Chapter 5

### **Left Behind: Liberation News Service and the Demise of the New Left, 1972-1981**

By 1972, the LNS collective had enhanced the lives of Andy Marx and Kathy Mulvihill in myriad ways. Full-time Movement work had enabled Marx to escape moral complicity with the Vietnam War; it had provided Mulvihill with a family life lacking at home. But collective life had not helped them complete their college educations. Marx had dropped out of Harvard to join LNS in May 1969. Mulvihill had not even completed high school when she joined the collective nine months later. It made sense, they decided, to leave the collective in 1972. They moved in with Marx's parents in Amherst and finally set out to earn their elusive degrees at the University of Massachusetts. Six years later—with degrees in hand—they returned to New York City, where Mulvihill began a career as a social worker and Marx returned to LNS. But these Rip Van Winkles had slept through six years of Movement history and found the collective in an altered state.<sup>1</sup>

Change had impacted every level of collective life. To begin, LNS operated out of a new Manhattan loft rather than the Harlem basement that had housed the collective since 1968. Furthermore, not a single face remained at LNS from Marx's first tour of duty. A quick glance at the titles in the first packet upon his return revealed a host of new Movement issues: "Abortion/Right: Demonstrators Picket 'Right-to-Life' Conference in New Jersey;" "Nuclear/Labor: Nuclear Accident Irradiates Two Trojan Workers;" and

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Marx and Katherine Mulvihill, interview by author, June 24, 2008, Cambridge, MA.

“Prisoners: Marion Brothers Escalate Fight Against Behavior Modification.”<sup>2</sup> None of these issues had been widely covered by LNS prior to 1972. But Marx remembered an even more fundamental shift in the political terrain: “There still was a Movement, but it was much more fractured. There were all sorts of Movement groups that were focused on single issues or were very local. There wasn’t a paramount national issue.”<sup>3</sup> This was a very different Movement than Marx had left just a few years earlier. This was a very different collective.

As early as 1972, the collective heard rumblings that foreshadowed the storms to follow. The decline of the underground, the souring economy, and the transformation of the Movement all signaled the advent of a new political era. But LNS remained committed to building a broad-based Movement; it remained devoted to the ideals of participatory democracy, sexual liberation, and collective accountability. The collective would soon be challenged to adapt its New Left ideals to the political climate of the 1970s. But few Movement groups thrived—or even survived—in this tumultuous decade. The internal structure LNS had established by 1972 provided a potential base for long-term survival and a model for the Movement. But the nation’s new political and economic fundamentals provided an external challenge that would constantly threaten the collective’s existence and erode its sense of community. How would LNS respond?

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<sup>2</sup> LNS 907 (April 14, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

## Hard Times

LNS had always maintained a symbiotic relationship with the underground press. On the one hand, the LNS packet fueled the rapid rise of the underground between 1967 and 1971. Understaffed and underfunded, many papers relied upon LNS for their very survival. On the other hand, the collective required paid subscriptions. While many rags were inconsistent in paying their monthly bills, underground subscribers always remained LNS's primary source of funding. As long as the underground continued to provide a viable network of subscribers, LNS would thrive. But the underground boom times of the late 1960s and early 1970s did not continue.

As early as 1972, LNS recognized a disturbing downward trend in its subscription base. An August 9, 1972, letter from former collective member and then San Francisco correspondent Teddy Franklin nicely summed up the woebegone news:

Bury my heart at Wounded knee, but if I'm not mistaken, the underground press is limping towards its grave. I know there are new papers born in the South and the Midwest yet. But on the East Coast and out West, there ain't much to look at. . . Time has already killed three papers that used to pop up on everybody's ten-best list: Space City, the Berkeley Tribe, and the San Francisco Good Times. . . . I'm hard put to name ten underground newspapers I have any respect for at this point. . . . Let's be honest, we're losing our readers out from under our feet.<sup>4</sup>

Not only were rag-tag underground outlets folding, but the most distinguished and reliable papers could no longer keep their presses rolling. Indeed, by 1972, LNS subscriptions had already fallen from a 1971 height of 895 to 710.<sup>5</sup> While this base

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<sup>4</sup> Teddy Franklin to Pierce Nylund, August 9, 1972, MS 997, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927," Folder: "Sal Ferrara," Contemporary Culture Collection, Temple University Library.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 2, Figure 1.

remained larger than it had been between 1968 and 1970, the downward trend showed no signs of abatement.

The forces behind this decline were many. To begin, America's postwar prosperity began to weaken. As underground veteran Abe Peck wryly observed, "The loose change of the Great Society was drying up."<sup>6</sup> As a result, the Marxist *Guardian* noted, fewer "middle-class youth who had the money and leisure time to explore 'life styles' that posed alternatives to the 'nine to five' work week that threatened to engulf them" wandered into underground press offices in the early 1970s.<sup>7</sup> Increasingly, the triumvirate of advertising, subscriptions, and fund-raising failed to provide enough cash to support the underground. But these rags also failed to adequately respond to sea changes within the Movement. While many underground newspapers mirrored LNS by collectivizing their offices, the *Guardian* noted that few did so with great success:

Anarchistic styles of work, an ultra-democratic approach to decision-making, male chauvinism, individualism and the absence of a proletarian outlook were dominant tendencies. Their influence on the underground press had a destructive effect and prompted scores of hard-fought struggles. . . . In practice, the decision to collectivize usually reaffirmed super-egalitarian and ultra-democratic tendencies and institutionalized countless and endless meetings of the whole collective when a decision had to be made.<sup>8</sup>

If the underground was inefficient, it was also unresponsive to new trends in its sustaining Movement. Indeed, the underground had difficulty recognizing the dispersion of the Movement into single-issue camps. Abe Peck lyrically described this trend:

"Through summers of love and winters of discontent, the papers mirrored their

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<sup>6</sup> Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 268.

<sup>7</sup> John Cook, "The Underground Press: Once In It's Heyday is Now In Decline," *Guardian*, March 14, 1973, 8.

<sup>8</sup> John Cook, "Underground Press: Behind the Decline," *Guardian*, March 21, 1973, 8.

movements. . . . But ‘the People’ had rejected ‘the Revolution.’ As our enclaves shriveled or adapted to less intense times, community-based, multi-issue underground papers began adapting or dying.”<sup>9</sup> Most died.

Throughout this process LNS put a positive spin on underground developments. In a 1973 funding proposal, for example, LNS described the emergence of a new alternative media: “The hey-day of the peace-love-good vibes papers is over. But that doesn’t mean that the alternative press is dead. . . . Today you can find alternative papers among working class, black, and Spanish-speaking communities.”<sup>10</sup> These alternative papers focused on single-issue movements, but LNS emphasized that “these papers also talk about imperialism, racism, and sexism.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, LNS’s broad Movement politics continued to appeal to single-issue papers. The Underground Press Syndicate recognized the development of a more professional and community-based media in 1973 by changing its names to the Alternative Press Syndicate.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, many underground press obituaries ignored small-town, working-class, Southern, and Midwestern rags that popped up later than the papers in major cities and college towns.

By the mid-1970s, however, even thriving newspapers in the South and Midwest were failing. In 1976, Atlanta’s *Great Speckled Bird* canceled its LNS subscription with regrets:

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<sup>9</sup> Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties*, 287.

<sup>10</sup> “LIBERATION NEWS SERVICE, FUNDING PROPOSAL,” 1973, MS 2887, LNS Records, Temple, Box: Off-Site 15, Folder: “Funding Files.”

<sup>11</sup> Liberation News Service, “Underground Press,” *Guardian*, March 28, 1973, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties*, 290. In 1985, Peck went so far as to write: “Surprisingly, there may be as many dissident papers now as there were during the sixties, though the diffusion, ebbing, and absorption of the movements discussed here have led to single-issue focus and smaller circulations. . . . But community papers, women’s papers, environmental papers, rock-politics papers have continued or appeared.” *Ibid.*, 293.

We have suspended publication and gone out of business. Reason: no money. . . . We have enjoyed and greatly appreciated the service of LNS. Your stories and graphics have graced the pages of every issue of the BIRD for 8 1/2 years. . . . May you continue as long as the truth needs to be told, and may you find a secure financial base of support. Lack of financial support is what did us in. You have got to continue!<sup>13</sup>

Financial hardship clearly contributed to the decline of many underground presses, but other factors contributed to the fall. In 1977, Austin's *The Rag* told LNS that they had simply lost the will to produce a weekly newspaper: "*The Rag* is facing imminent demise, principally [due] to a lack of interested people. A volunteer organization without people simply doesn't function. . . . So—that's what's happening. . . . Please do take *The Rag* off your mailing list."<sup>14</sup> Likewise the Detroit *Sun* and Washington *Newsworks*—the conservative *National Review* delighted to report—closed their doors within this brief window of time.<sup>15</sup> By 1976, LNS subscriptions had fallen to 423. Three years later the number dropped to 205.<sup>16</sup>

The struggles of the American underground became even more apparent to LNS when compared to the fortunes of its foreign counterpart. LNS's domestic subscriptions declined remarkably fast compared to the relative stability of its foreign subscriber base.<sup>17</sup> Whereas domestic subscriptions dropped by an average of 20 percent per year between 1972 and 1978, foreign subscriptions dropped by only 6 percent annually over

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<sup>13</sup> *Great Speckled Bird* to LNS, November 22, 1976, MS 1782, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Causes: Mental Health to Youth Organizations," Folder: "Causes: Underground Newspapers."

<sup>14</sup> *The Rag* to LNS, March 7, 1977, MS 2571, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Postal Mailing Subscriptions," Folder: "Postal Mailing Subscriptions."

<sup>15</sup> Kevin Lynch, "On the Left," *National Review Bulletin*, December 17, 1976, B186.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 2, Figure 1.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 2, Figure 2.



this same period. In raw numbers, LNS lost 491 domestic subscriptions compared to only 47 foreign subscriptions.

How do we account for these discrepancies? To begin, it is clear that an underground bubble had pushed LNS's subscription totals well above a sustainable level by 1971. In the boom times of the Movement, the United States could support seven hundred rags. But as Movement momentum ebbed, the underground shrunk apace. Most foreign papers also relied on more reliable funding sources than did their domestic counterparts. Whereas many foreign papers counted on party affiliations and established organizational ties for support, most American papers counted on increasingly unreliable advertising, subscriptions, and grants. Finally, significantly less competition existed between foreign papers than between their domestic counterparts. In 1972, for example, only Canada boasted more than seven foreign papers that subscribed to LNS. Meanwhile each American state averaged more than thirteen underground papers during this year, with significantly greater concentrations in metropolitan areas. Inevitably the cream among American rags rose, leaving the dregs to slowly sink.

LNS served as the lifeline of the underground and the underground provided the lifeblood of LNS. Indeed, the collective felt the impact of the declining underground in every facet of its existence: its network shrank, its morale declined, and its finances dwindled. But many other forces were at work to challenge LNS's financial viability.

In early 1970, the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee chaired by Mississippi Democrat James O. Eastland subpoenaed financial records from LNS. This was not the first time that LNS finances had come under scrutiny by the federal government. Soon after the 1968 split, the Internal Revenue Service had audited the collective as a minor

piece in the FBI's COINTELPRO hassling of the underground media.<sup>18</sup> Neither the FBI nor the Eastland Subcommittee discovered illegal LNS funding. But by 1971 the Senate subpoena publicly revealed that LNS had received substantial funding from the Episcopal Church.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, various Protestant denominations played critical roles in bankrolling LNS. In 1969, the Episcopal Church donated \$5000 to LNS. In 1970, the Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Methodist Churches granted \$14,500 to the collective. But a year later the amount shrank to \$6000. By 1972, LNS's church funding had almost entirely dried up.<sup>20</sup> Why?

Church financing of LNS had not reached public attention prior to 1971, when the Eastland Subcommittee discovered and publicized Episcopal grants to the collective. As soon as this news leaked, criticism of the Episcopal Church followed. *Christian Challenge*—a traditional Episcopal magazine based in Victoria, Texas—broke the story and argued that LNS advanced a Leninist agenda of international communism by “openly [defending] the use of propaganda to promote disruption.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, *Christian Challenge* continued, LNS was “Marxist-Leninist, anti-capitalist, anti-military, pro-Red

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<sup>18</sup> Chip Berlet, “COINTELPRO: The FBI's Zany and Disruptive War on the Alternative Press,” *Alternative Media* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1978), 11. See also Angus MacKenzie, “Sabotaging the Dissident Press,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 19, no. 6 (March/April 1981): 57-63; Geoffrey Rips et al., *UnAmerican Activities: The Campaign Against the Underground Press* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1981); and David Armstrong, *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America* (Los Angeles: JP Tarcher, 1981).

<sup>19</sup> For the LNS view on the Eastland Subcommittee, see “LNS Wins Temporary Restraining Order Against Eastland Subcommittee,” LNS 236 (February 21, 1970), 6; and “Eastland Committee Subpoenas Liberation News Service Records,” February 13, 1970, MS 56, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Financial: Fundraising, etc.” Folder: “Financial: Bank Papers.”

<sup>20</sup> “A PROPOSAL FROM LIBERATION NEWS SERVICE TO THE JSAC CHURCHES,” January 1972, MS 2887, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Off-site Box 15,” Folder: “Funding.” For funding letters from specific church organizations and boards, see LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Causes: Arms Control to Homosexuality,” Folder: “Causes: Churches.”

<sup>21</sup> “Financing the New Left with Episcopal Funds,” *Christian Challenge* 10, no. 6 (June 1971), 11.

Chinese, pro-Viet Cong, pro-Cuban, pro-Black Panther, and anti-police.”<sup>22</sup> Needless to say, this conservative Midwest church group held these as marks against LNS. The *Topeka Daily Capital* noted that the Church had provided money to LNS “with no strings attached.”<sup>23</sup> Episcopal Church officials promised that LNS funding had not represented advocacy for LNS views. But the Church quickly dropped its support.<sup>24</sup> Others followed. Conservative backlash had hit the collective.

So, too, had inflation. LNS income from subscribers dropped from \$55,000 in 1972 to \$45,000 a year later. Over this stretch, only 25 percent of subscriber papers paid LNS *any* money in the average month, let alone their entire \$20 monthly bill. Tightening its collective belt between 1971 and 1973, LNS actually cut their budget by \$22,000 in order to survive. But this was no longer possible when inflation exploded and pushed LNS supplies and costs astronomically upward. During the first three months of 1974, LNS’s electric bill jumped by nearly 40 percent; between November 1973 and April 1974, LNS paper costs increased by nearly 100 percent; and LNS rent on its Claremont Avenue basement ballooned from \$250 a month in 1972 to \$500 a month in 1974. By the end of 1974, the collective was three months behind in paying collective members their scant \$35 weekly salaries that provided their sole sources of income.<sup>25</sup> Con Edison turned

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Scott, “Church Council Gives \$5,000—New Left Gets Support,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 9, 1971.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> “To Our Subscribers,” LNS 604 (April 13, 1974), 1; and “LNS Money Woes,” LNS 605 (April 17, 1974), 1.

off the collective's electricity in June 1975, providing a symbolic coup de grace to a lengthy stretch of financial woes.<sup>26</sup>

The underground media and the American economy simultaneously shook the practical foundations of the LNS collective in the mid-1970s. Ellen Garvey remembered these as the key intertwined trends of the period: "The mid-1970s were years of diminishing funding and dwindling subscriber base."<sup>27</sup> These developments forced the collective to place a newfound emphasis on fundraising, collective economics, and efficiency. Nancy Stiefel simply remembered that "there was a lot more effort needed to be made [in the mid-1970s] to try to just keep the money to keep everything afloat."<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the greatest collective challenge between 1972 and 1977, however, centered on the decentralization of the Movement that justified LNS's existence in the first place.

### A Mirror for the Movement

From its infancy, the collective conceived of itself as a mirror for the Movement. LNSer Sarah Plant described this function in 1976: "When the left changes, so do we. We reflect divisions/problems/developments within the left."<sup>29</sup> By extension the collective's health hinged on Movement success. This relationship remained simple through the Movement's heyday, but by 1973 many activists were uncertain whether a Movement

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<sup>26</sup> "CRISIS: Con Ed Cuts Electricity LNS Holds Meeting in the Dark," LNS 710 (June 21, 1975), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Liberation News Service Reunion Packet, 2000, 20, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy Stiefel, interview by author, August 17, 2008, telephone.

<sup>29</sup> LNS Interviews, [January 1976], MS 510, 29, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Staff: Misc." Folder: "LNS: Staff Interviews."

existed at all. Indeed, the New Left fractured with the decline of institutional New Left groups and the end of the Vietnam War. LNSer Pat Murray concisely recalled: “The movement . . . had splintered a million ways.”<sup>30</sup> This perhaps exaggerated the dissolution, but the Movement broke in at least four directions: the radical liberalization of the Democratic Party burgeoning from George McGovern’s 1972 presidential campaign; the birth of the New Communist Movement; the movement of radicals into higher education; and the emergence of new social movements.<sup>31</sup> If LNS reflected the Left, *which* Left would it reflect?

LNS maintained a consistent theory of media that limited its coverage to concrete gains rather than political theory. One LNSer summed up this stance at a February 17, 1978, collective meeting: “LNS’s de facto position has been [that] we don’t cover something that’s just someone’s ideology, but something that’s a real event [such as] an act of repression against a group [or] a success by a group.”<sup>32</sup> This theory remained unchanging throughout LNS history and would influence how the collective covered the splintering Movement.

The Greensboro massacre of 1979 provides a prime example of how this theory translated into the LNS packet. Andy Marx recalls that the Maoist Communist Workers Party (CWP) continually hassled LNS to cover its organization: “The [CWP] was trying to get us to put out information about them all the time. Their slogan was, ‘Are you ready for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the eighties?’ And we would say, ‘Right.’ They

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<sup>30</sup> Pat Murray, interview by author, September 3, 2008, telephone.

<sup>31</sup> Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 187-210.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes, “Collective Meeting: Political Discussion: Racism and National Question, Part II,” February 17, 1978, MS 2858, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Off-Site Box 13,” Folder: “LNS Collective Meeting Minutes (January 1977-July 1979).”

would come and badger us about how we weren't ready. And we would say, 'We're not so sure it's happening.'"<sup>33</sup> Along these lines, LNS ignored the October 1979 founding congress of the CWP. Nevertheless, when five activists were slain by police-assisted Nazis and Ku Klux Klansmen a month later during a CWP-organized rally in Greensboro, many LNSers traveled to North Carolina to demonstrate and the collective ran an 1850-word article detailing the massacre and the complex local politics that led to the tragedy.<sup>34</sup>

This example illustrates how LNS approached the New Communist Movement in the pages of the packet. In 1973, the collective described its past and future attitude toward forming political alliances with radical organizations: "LNS is not a party and in fact has always been independent of any political organization. . . . We don't define our politics with a platform or a program. But by reading the LNS packets, people can tell where we stand politically."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, LNS carefully crafted its prose to avoid indoctrination. Ellen Garvey placed this ideal as the central tenet of collective life: "We didn't want rhetorical writing. That was the kind of writing we all hated. That was the collective identity, if there was one: a dislike for stories that told you what to think. [If you presented the story right] the information itself would change any reasonable

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<sup>33</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

<sup>34</sup> Pat Bryant, "Greensboro Aftermath: Klan Massacre Leaves Legacy of Division," LNS 974 (November 10, 1979), 9-11. For the CWP's role in the Greensboro massacre, see Sally Avery Bermanzohn, *Through Survivors' Eyes: From the Sixties to the Greensboro Massacre* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003); William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, paperback ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 251-54; and Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002), 235-36.

<sup>35</sup> RMBB, LNS 508 (March 14, 1973), 7.

person's mind."<sup>36</sup> Time after time, LNS emphasized non-rhetorical prose, while dodging the splintering dogmatic shards of the New Communist Movement.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, many LNSers considered themselves to be Marxists. Nancy Stiefel developed a Marxist worldview through her previous work in the progressive labor movement.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, Pat Murray explored Marxism in a Washington, DC, hospital union and in area study groups.<sup>39</sup> Even Ellen Garvey—who did not formally identify herself as a Marxist—participated in a Marxist study group through the local Lawyer's Guild.<sup>40</sup>

Despite widespread Marxism, its precise meaning to LNSers was murky. Clearly, the collective ascribed to a lengthy list of opposition, summed up by Sandy Shea in 1976: “We share . . . a stress on anti-imperialism, anti-sexism, [anti-]capitalism, [anti-]racism, [and] anti-revisionism.”<sup>41</sup> On the same occasion, Sarah Plant admitted that “what we oppose is a lot more clear than what and who we are for.”<sup>42</sup> At least one subscriber decried LNS's philosophy of opposition: “Take a hard look at LNS stories, analyze . . .

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<sup>36</sup> Ellen Gruber Garvey, interview by author, June 11, 2008, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>37</sup> Pat Murray nicely summed up the New Communist Movement: “Pre-party formations and Marxist or Marxist-Leninist study groups sprouted up everywhere, many of which espoused a ‘correct line,’ distinct from everybody else's correct line. Labels flew everywhere: ultra-left, ultra-right, reformist, revisionist, counter-revolutionary, reactionary, blah, blah, ad nauseam. It got totally ridiculous.” Murray, interview.

<sup>38</sup> Stiefel, interview.

<sup>39</sup> Murray, interview.

<sup>40</sup> Garvey, interview.

<sup>41</sup> LNS Interviews, [January 1976], MS 510, 56, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Misc.” Folder: “LNS: Staff Interviews.”

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

their political message. What is contained there but unending criticism? . . . How is that criticism complemented with positive proposals?”<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, LNS maintained a laundry list of opposition. But the collective also advanced a particular vision of the revolution, which it embodied in its prefigurative politics. Mike Shuster argued that American exceptionalism required a new organizational model that LNS embodied: “Looking at the history of the left, dogmatic party structure has made the left suffer. I would like to see our style of politics be embodied in other organizations; develop models other than the traditional organization set up on Marxist-Leninist lines. I don’t think the traditional form can make a revolution in this country.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, American Marxism’s great fault has always been an inability to organize amid the nation’s veneer of great wealth, a high quality of life, and a presumption of classlessness. The New Left’s challenge was to foment change in spite of American exceptionalism. The LNS collective—like the dogmatic party formations then advanced by the New Communist Movement—offered one model for advancing Marxism in the United States.

Furthermore, LNS’s political philosophy centered on its radical independence from pre-party formations that it considered divisive and ineffective. An unbending emphasis on “political lines,” Shuster emphasized, formed a key flaw in American Marxism: “Lines usually are rigid. We can have a political analysis without having a line. We can share our politics.”<sup>45</sup> Radical independence defined LNS’s attitude toward the

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<sup>43</sup> Alan R. Caron of *The Maine Issue* (Portland, ME), to LNS, April 18, 1977, MS 2209, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Correspondence: Numbered 1957-2809 (with gaps),” Folder: “2208-2240.”

<sup>44</sup> LNS Interviews, [January 1976], MS 510, 61, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Misc.” Folder: “LNS: Staff Interviews.”

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*



broader Movement, Lou Taam emphasized, but it also governed the relationships between collective members: “We should be flexible [and] shouldn’t demand a super high level of political unity. We shouldn’t be a place where people try to organize each other toward a political line.”<sup>46</sup> This was a tremendous comfort to Pat Murray when she arrived at LNS:

Attracted to Marxist analysis, yet wary of party formations, dogmatic rhetoric and class wars, I found myself alternately labeled an “ultra-leftist,” a hopeless “revisionist,” even a “closet conservative” [prior to arriving at LNS]. Surely those were confusing times. But while movement groups divided like amoebas over every conceivable “correct line,” LNS commendably remained independent and intact. . . . The commitment to . . . diversity of thought and mutual respect within the collective helped me stay upright, if not always balanced.<sup>47</sup>

In the end, LNS maintained a flexible and independent Marxist analysis that it embodied in its interpersonal relationships and its collective structure. The collective’s prefigurative politics not only created a pleasant work environment, but it represented a revolutionary vision for the Movement. The revolution was about their lives.

While LNS advanced a Movement ideal through its prefigurative orientation, it less successfully developed a coherent strategic politics. This is most evident in LNS’s international coverage, which only haphazardly employed radical independence in the mid-1970s.

To begin, LNS simply avoided dealing with non-American Cold War powers. The Soviet Union, China, and Cuba rarely appeared in the packet.<sup>48</sup> Nancy Stiefel remembered: “[In the height of the Cold War] we couldn’t be critical of some things the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>47</sup> LNS Reunion Packet, 45.

<sup>48</sup> In 1976 and 1977, LNS ran only five articles about China, three articles about China, and no articles about the Soviet Union.

way we felt. . . . That was really walking on a tightrope a lot, trying to figure out how to cover some things critically and some things that we felt we couldn't really come out as critical of."<sup>49</sup> In the end, Ellen Garvey noted: "There were a couple of hot-button issues that we simply avoided and had a lot of trouble talking about how to cover. . . . Russia, China. We just didn't cover them."<sup>50</sup> This was radical avoidance.

The collective struck an even more awkward note in the Middle East. Former LNSers Sheila Ryan and George Cavalletto had established a pro-Palestinian line early in LNS history and the collective never veered from this perspective. In fact, anti-Zionism proved to be one of the few topics on which LNS ever editorialized. In 1973, for example, LNS included an editor's note to a historical analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

The Zionist invasion of Palestine, which led to the creation of Israel in 1948 also led to the uprooting of the Palestinian people and the destruction of most of their cities and villages. The myth invented by the Zionists, and advanced by the American press, is that Israel was built on a barren desert. In fact, it was built on the ruins of an Arab Palestinian culture dating back thousands of years.<sup>51</sup>

LNS piggy-backed upon significant anti-Zionism throughout the American radical left, but carefully distinguished anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism.<sup>52</sup> Despite this forceful Palestinian support, however, the collective never arrived at a consensus view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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<sup>49</sup> Stiefel, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Garvey, interview.

<sup>51</sup> "The Making of Refugees: How the Palestinians were Driven From Their Land," LNS 564 (October 27, 1973), 4.

<sup>52</sup> LNS distinguished itself from what it perceived as a simplistic mass-media handling of the Middle East in 1975: "By failing to distinguish between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, the establishment press has obscured what we feel are the real issues involved—the nature of the Israeli government and its policies towards the Arab people whose land it occupies." LNS 746 (November 19, 1975), inside from cover. If the mass media offered a simplistic reading of the conflict, however, LNS failed to recognize the deeply rooted and interwoven histories of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

If LNS avoided or sloppily handled key international issues, it provided compelling international coverage in other corners of the globe. Critiques of South African apartheid consistently appeared in the packet, as did the Angolan War of Independence and Portuguese decolonization. Ellen Garvey's memory of Augusto Pinochet's 1973 Chilean coup, his suppression of leftists, and his torture of thousands in Santiago's soccer stadium revealed much about the international values LNS esteemed:

I remember being in the office when we were getting the news of what was going on in Chile. . . . The news of what was going on in the soccer stadium was so horrifying and so crushing and so despair-inducing. . . . And those people that were part of the revolution, that were part of the Allende government or part of the popular movement in Chile, were very much the kinds of people that we identified with: they weren't doctrinaire, they weren't identified with old-style Soviet or Chinese notions of a state-run, very state-central revolution, but rather one that was much more open. . . . That was an incredible horror.<sup>53</sup>

Pursuit of these values pushed LNS to seek stories from correspondents around the globe, preeminently in "Third World" countries like Thailand, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.

In its effort to promote American solidarity with foreign movements, the collective consistently tied its international Marxism to home-front labor activism. Lou Taam made this connection most explicit: "The main contradiction in the world is between imperialism and the oppressed workers and nations. In the developed countries the forces involved are the working-class versus the ruling capitalist class. In the third world the forces of imperialism confront the national liberation forces."<sup>54</sup> LNS understood that American imperialism employed different tactics abroad than it did on the home front. But the collective emphasized the connections between foreign liberation movements and American labor activism. Accordingly, LNS complemented its

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<sup>53</sup> Garvey, interview.

<sup>54</sup> LNS Interviews, [January 1976], MS 510, 49, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Staff: Misc." Folder: "LNS: Staff Interviews."

international coverage with extensive treatment of the American labor movement. Indeed, American labor occupied far and away the greatest amount of packet space among LNS's major beats.<sup>55</sup>

Labor coverage became the cornerstone of LNS in the 1970s. Beginning in 1972, the collective launched a program to expand its labor beat.<sup>56</sup> When LNS finances permitted domestic travel for collective members over the next six years, travel overwhelmingly centered on sites of labor conflict. In 1972, Sandy Shea and Howie Epstein visited striking autoworkers in Lordstown and Detroit; Nancy Stiefel's first major LNS assignment sent her to Harlan County to cover the 1974 coal miners' strike with Cidne Hart; and Sarah Plant traveled to Akron in 1976 to cover striking rubber workers.<sup>57</sup>

The collective interest in labor extended beyond mere theory. Many collective members arrived at LNS with union experience. Prior to landing at LNS in 1973, Nancy Stiefel had lost her publishing job at Dover for attempting to unionize her workplace.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, Pat Murray arrived at LNS in 1976 with experience organizing hospital workers.<sup>59</sup> New York City's Local 1199 of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees—perhaps the nation's most influential late-twentieth century union—

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<sup>55</sup> LNS's Marxist analysis extended beyond the labor movement. Perceived government and corporate collusion also led the collective to consistently feature investigative articles on American economics, corporations, government, intelligence, and military. In 1976 and 1977—the only two years in which LNS indexed its packets—these five categories all ranked among the collective's top ten topics. For indexes, see LNS 843 (January 19, 1977); and LNS 895 (January 20, 1978).

<sup>56</sup> Sandy Shea to Jack Nussbaum, December 2, 1972, MS 2240, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Correspondence: Numbered 1957-2809 (with gaps)," Folder: "2240-2268."

<sup>57</sup> "Liberation News Service 10th Anniversary Benefit Concert program," 1977, MS 442, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Financial: Fundraising, etc." Folder: "Financial: Fundraising: Benefit Concert."

<sup>58</sup> Stiefel, interview.

<sup>59</sup> Murray, interview.

occupied a central position in LNS's union universe.<sup>60</sup> In 1978, Stiefel left LNS to take a job with *1199 News*—the union's monthly publication—and soon encouraged *1199 News* worker Tom Tuthill to join LNS.<sup>61</sup>

Importantly, LNS did not view the labor movement in isolation, but as a central piece in a broad Movement program. This largely explains why the collective hailed the unabashedly leftist Local 1199 and the progressive and independent United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America.<sup>62</sup> To encourage Movement and labor integration, the collective attempted—without much success—to reach out to rank-and-file union groups.<sup>63</sup> LNS's recruitment of labor, Stiefel noted in 1976, included a specific agenda: “We want the labor press to connect up with other struggles. We don't want to pander to the fears of certain narrow struggles.”<sup>64</sup>

In a clear expression of the collective's Marxist sympathies, LNS viewed labor as a revolutionary vanguard. But unions were never strong candidates to lead a Movement increasingly prone to identity politics defined by race and sex. Regardless of labor's sentiment toward single-issue politics, LNS embraced the new social movements of the 1970s and particularly privileged the radical prison and antinuclear movements.

LNS featured coverage of political prisoners, political trials, and prison reform movements early in its history and this staple continued through the 1970s. Early stories

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<sup>60</sup> For Local 1199, see Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: 1199SEIU and the Politics of Health Care Unionism*, second ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> Stiefel, interview; and LNS Reunion Packet, 63.

<sup>62</sup> Garvey, interview.

<sup>63</sup> See LNS 759 (January 17, 1976), inside front cover; and LNS Interviews, [January 1976], MS 510, 13, 72, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Misc.” Folder: “LNS: Staff Interviews.”

<sup>64</sup> LNS Interviews, [January 1976], MS 510, 77, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Misc.” Folder: “LNS: Staff Interviews.”

focused on the Chicago Eight and New Haven Nine trials, but LNS prison coverage shifted dramatically with the 1971 Attica uprising. Jessica Siegel and other LNSers visited the Attica prison soon after the uprising to interview inmates. The collective continued to cover the Attica trials and other prison movements, particularly that at San Quentin. LNS also sent free packet subscriptions to prisoners and urged non-prisoner subscribers to correspond with inmates who requested mail. In 1972, LNS prison subscriptions grew to nearly fifty and mail from inmates assured the collective that these packets were widely distributed, read, and tattered.<sup>65</sup> Following the 1975 murder of inmates in Oklahoma, Illinois, and New York, the collective expressed dismay at the breadth of prison violence: “The story on deaths in prisons in this packet could not possibly cover all the reports we receive of deaths and harassment of political activists in prisons. But the three incidents we mention are typical of what happens throughout the country. We often feel swamped with these reports, most of them accounts by other prisoners.”<sup>66</sup> Because 1970s political trials often involved 1960s Movement activists, the radical prison movement formed a logical continuation of Movement activism. But aside from these connections, widespread prison abuses formed a concrete example of state abuses of power and authority.

Unlike many activists in the radical prison movement, LNSers did not glorify prisoners as the vanguard of Movement politics. LNS consistently recognized the distinction between political prisoners—like Angela Davis and George Jackson—and

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<sup>65</sup> “Liberation News Service, Funding Proposal,” 1973, MS 2887, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Off-Site Box 15,” Folder: “Funding Files.”

<sup>66</sup> LNS 703 (May 24, 1975), inside front cover. This note from the collective referenced “Guards Indicted for Prisoner’s Death in Oklahoma; Two Other Prisoner Deaths Reported Elsewhere,” LNS 703 (May 24, 1975), 8. See also “Behavior Modification Conference Set for March 6 in St. Louis—Decision on Closing Marion Prison Control Unit Expected in May,” 769 (February 25, 1976), 5.

run-of-the-mill criminal types. LNS considered “Political Prisoners” and “Prisons” to be separate news categories, though both were among LNS’s most widely covered topics. Political prisoners often provided Movement leadership and writings, while typical American prisoners were often victims of terrible violence and abuse. Both groups merited attention, but for different reasons.<sup>67</sup>

LNS also picked up the early rumblings of the antinuclear movement and pushed environmental activism to the fore of its coverage. When Sam Lovejoy toppled the Northeast Utilities tower in Montague, LNS covered the event and followed up with a series of articles about the nuclear power industry’s spotty safety record.<sup>68</sup> The collective followed all of Montague Farm’s antinuclear activism, including the major Seabrook protests. Not surprisingly, some at LNS began to frame environmental activism along radical lines. At a 1977 collective meeting, Andy Marx expressed encouragement at “the possibility of giving the environmental movement a Marxist content.”<sup>69</sup> This is precisely the type of observation that Lovejoy savored in private, but that the wider antinuclear movement dismissed for fear of alienating a broad public. LNS did not impose a rigid Marxism on its antinuclear coverage, but its critique of the nuclear industry revealed the collective’s economic imperative.

Despite these shifts toward Marxism and new social movements, LNS did not lose sight of its goal of crystallizing an umbrella movement of American radicals. While

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<sup>67</sup> For the failure of prison reform activists to make this distinction and for general information on the radical prison movement, see Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>68</sup> For Lovejoy, see “Nuclear Plant Tower Toppled by Sabotage,” LNS 594 (March 6, 1974), 4. For nuclear energy, see “The Story Behind Nuclear Energy—the Fact, the Fiction, and the Fears,” LNS 602 (April 6, 1974), 1.

<sup>69</sup> Collective Meeting Notes, September 19, 1977, MS 2858, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Off-Site Box 13,” Folder: “LNS Collective Meeting Minutes (January 1977-July 1979).”

labor, prison, and antinuclear activists seemed to form an unlikely and motley coalition, the collective maintained some hope of collective organizing. One cause stands out among LNS's efforts to continue organizing across movement lines: the 1976 Hard Times Conference in Chicago.

The Hard Times Conference represented an ambitious attempt to revive a broad-based Movement around a faltering economy in the aftermath of antiwar activism. Historian Max Elbaum considers the Hard Times Conference to be the period's "most ambitious attempt . . . to organize a broad-based coalition to fight back [against economic failures]." <sup>70</sup> The Conference's list of participating organizations bears witness to the desire to organize across movement lines: "Conference organizers include members of the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, United Black Workers, Puerto Rican Socialist Party, the Twin Cities Women's Union in Minneapolis, the Grey Panthers, Welfare Workers for Justice and many other groups [including the American Indian Movement]." <sup>71</sup> With local planning offices in New York, Chicago, Boston, Seattle, Minneapolis, San Diego, San Francisco, Columbus, and New Orleans, the conference also boasted a geographically diverse base. Further appealing to LNS sympathies, one organizer emphatically distinguished conference organizers from the sectarian New Communist Movement: "The left in this country has been awfully fragmented, isolated, and divided. . . . The coalition that has come together around the Hard Times Conference does not have that same type of sectarian madness." <sup>72</sup> LNS enthusiastically sponsored the

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<sup>70</sup> Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 221.

<sup>71</sup> "Hard Times Conference Scheduled for End of January in Chicago," LNS 754 (December 20, 1975), 6.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*



conference and promoted the event months in advance. The diverse Movement groups planning the Hard Times Conference and the event's emphasis on independent radicalism constituted an ideal LNS formula for the Movement's future. In a period of economic stagflation, it made perfect sense to organize a broad constituency around wages, living conditions, and jobs.

But the Hard Times Conference failed in its basic goal of organizing a lasting coalition. The debate surrounding the Hard Times Bill of Rights provided the clearest example of why the conference failed. Drawn up by conference board members with input from local activists, the Bill of Rights spoke "to the needs of all people hard hit by inflation, unemployment, social service cutbacks and deteriorating living conditions."<sup>73</sup> To promote discussion of the Bill of Rights, conference organizers planned nearly two dozen workshops in which activists could grapple with the document's key issues, including unions, health care, education, welfare, tenants, the military, cultural workers, the elderly, Native Americans, Chile, Indochina, and Angola. Conference organizers clearly operated with values similar to those of the LNS collective. With such a vast agenda, however, some groups fell through the cracks. Caucuses soon formed to protest the exclusion of blacks, women, gays, and immigrant workers from the program. As a result, the Hard Times Conference failed to achieve a lasting coalition. LNS's great hope of recreating a broad Movement had fallen to poor organization, heated recriminations, and—perhaps—the false assumption that stagflation might form the basis for a mass American Movement. This failure perfectly symbolized the state of the Movement.

By 1977, LNS had divested itself of a belief in Movement unity and strength. A September 19, 1977, collective meeting offered LNSers space to vent about the state of

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<sup>73</sup> "2,100 Attend Hard Times Conference in Chicago," LNS 765 (February 11, 1976), 1.

the American Left. Nancy Stiefel described the left as “disunified,” while Sarah Plant chose the word “fragmented.” Judy Rabinowitz echoed these sentiments, but added that the Movement was “isolated.” Cathy Cockrell chose the word “scattered” and Lou Taam bemoaned that the Movement boasted “no single unifying issue.” Even the most optimistic collective members admitted a cyclical downturn in the American left. Andy Marx referred to “a necessary cycle, an experimental phase,” while Barbara Plog described “a contracting rather than expanding period” in a cyclical Movement.<sup>74</sup> This was a Movement funeral sponsored by LNS.

While the September 19, 1977, meeting represented the pinnacle of mounting frustrations, another subtext ran through the gathering: optimism and passion about the state of the LNS collective. Sarah Plant insisted upon the importance of “being able to have control over one’s work,” a sentiment echoed by Andy Marx, who noted that “working at a straight paper [in Amherst] rekindled the feeling of importance of a working collective.” In other words, the collective process empowered the individual. Laura Landy went one step further: “Control over our own work is a model for the future we want to see created.”<sup>75</sup> Indeed, LNS provided a model of *living the Movement* by placing progressive ideals at the center of life and work, relationships and activism. One year earlier, Mike Shuster noted that “the basic thing [at LNS] is working out our politics *through and within* the work process.”<sup>76</sup> Personal politics had always been at the center of LNS, but the collective was now facing an imposing question: how would LNS adjust

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<sup>74</sup> Collective Meeting Notes, September 19, 1977, MS 2858, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Off-Site Box 13,” Folder: “LNS Collective Meeting Minutes (January 1977-July 1979).”

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> LNS Interviews, [January 1976], MS 510, 63, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Misc.” Folder: “LNS: Staff Interviews.”

its collective in response to the new limitations of financial contraction, underground decline, and Movement denouement?

### Collective Politics

The LNS “help wanted” poster that hung at Red Star Books in Cambridge—the one that lured Ellen Garvey away from her job at the Harvard Coop in the summer of 1973—had promised “full-time Movement work.” Yet two years later Garvey found herself “doing the outside job” to support the collective by entering data full time for a New York City hospital. Never before had LNSers been forced outside of the collective to raise money, and the irony of anti-capitalist radicals collecting pay for mind-numbing data entry was not lost on anybody. The position rotated between collective members every few months to evenly spread the tedium of key-punching. But this fact provided Garvey with little solace. She was forced to admit that the participatory democracy of collective life failed to extend to the office. When her boss began to crack jokes about “screwing women in Thailand,” Garvey refused to laugh. She was quickly fired.

Humiliated and ashamed that her stand would further the collective’s financial woes, Garvey returned to the collective, which quickly replaced her with another laborer.<sup>77</sup>

Financial problems had long been a staple of LNS life. Indeed, “panic packets” that included desperate pleas for money dated back to LNS’s earliest days in Washington. But the severity of financial difficulties reached a new level in the mid-1970s and for the first time actually threatened the collective’s existence. By the mid-1970s, underground, economic, and Movement developments outside of LNS control forced the collective to

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<sup>77</sup> Garvey, interview.

either vary its financial fundamentals or face capitalism's equivalent of natural selection. This ushered in an era in which thriftiness and creative fundraising dominated collective life. Unfortunately, many of LNS's spendthrift changes—including the outside job—negatively impacted collective life.

The addition of the outside job to LNS's collective responsibility came about by necessity rather than by convenience and many found the task tiresome. Nancy Stiefel remembered going to great lengths to democratically distribute the burdens of working outside the collective. But she still recalled that the process created friction.<sup>78</sup> Sandy Shea considered wage labor to be alienating and a “backwards way to approach fundraising.”<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the labor LNSers supplied to the outside market might have been more efficiently applied to fundraising, but with decreased returns on a variety of collective funding—church grants, first and foremost—the outside job emerged as a simple method to keep up on paying collective salaries.

The schemes did not end with reputable employment, however. LNS commonly took advantage of federal aid programs to supplement the collective income. LNS laid off staffers and collected unemployment insurance in order to remain current on weekly salaries. Some LNSers went one step further and received welfare funding when their unemployment insurance ran out. At least one collective member felt undue pressure to take advantage of the welfare system despite her misgivings. Setting aside the moral and

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<sup>78</sup> Stiefel, interview.

<sup>79</sup> Minutes, meeting at Nancy Stiefel's apartment, February 3, 1979, green notebook, MS 1703, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Notebooks,” Folder: “Green Staff Notebook.”

legal implications of this practice, collecting federal aid to buoy LNS only added more uncertainty to the already shaky long-term sustainability of the collective.<sup>80</sup>

Within months of beginning the outside job, LNS received word from its landlord of a massive rent hike on its Harlem basement. Not only could the collective not afford the increased rent, but it also faced the reality that it was running out of space. In early 1976, the collective began searching for new digs and soon stumbled upon a 5000-square-foot loft on West 17th Street that doubled its space and shrank its rent. LNS halted publication for two weeks as it constructed its new office space and moved downtown.<sup>81</sup>

LNS's new loft solved some important problems for the collective. With more space and lower rent, the operation remained solvent. But the loft also created a host of new problems. Many staffers simply did not enjoy working there. Ellen Garvey recalled the bittersweet move: "You couldn't hear anything from one [partitioned] room to another. And I just kept feeling so isolated. And it bothered me and I think that may have been part of it, too. It didn't have any of the coziness of constantly being around everybody else. Something was gone with that."<sup>82</sup> Nancy Stiefel simply remembered that "it was a pretty horrible thing to have to do."<sup>83</sup>

The loft's interior space had a negative impact on collective life, but the geographical shift from Harlem to Manhattan threatened to undermine LNS's entire sense of community. In the collective's eight years on Claremont Avenue, a network of

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<sup>80</sup> Due to the potential legal ramifications of this material, my interview source has asked to remain anonymous.

<sup>81</sup> LNS 778 (April 3, 1976); 781 (April 14, 1976); 788 (May 12, 1976); 796 (June 12, 1976); 798 (June 19, 1976); and 800 (July 10, 1976).

<sup>82</sup> Garvey, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Stiefel, interview.

apartments had passed from one generation to the next and most were within a short walk of the basement office. The collective shared communal dinners every evening, as cooking responsibilities rotated between staffers.<sup>84</sup> The move to the loft upset this collective geography. Andy Marx recalled that the sense of LNS “being a hub [and] a real sense of community was dissipated by [the move].”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, LNS’s financial exigencies began to take a toll on the collective spirit.

Simultaneous to the loft move, a host of collective discontent rose to the surface, particularly among LNS women. The role of individuality and specialization within the collective were the central issues at odds between LNSers. Cidne Hart expressed confusion over the meaning of LNS organizing as a collective: “We have to define collectivity. I’m afraid we think we have it and say it’s the only way, but in some ways we don’t practice it. Collectivity doesn’t just happen, it really has to be worked at.”<sup>86</sup> The interpersonal dynamics within the collective had grown tense and few seemed capable of addressing collective problems. Hart bemoaned that LNS consumed the collective members’ every spare moment: “If LNS is one’s *main* activity, I would like to see other things incorporated into it. LNS is too much for too many years. Does anyone consider it a *complete* experience?”<sup>87</sup> Barbara Plog, for one, did not:

I’ve really resented sometimes those long meetings. I haven’t had time to deal with friendships, things going on with friends. . . .

At this point, you basically have to take time out to deal with personal things. This has increased overall since I’ve been here, and points to the contradictions within LNS.

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<sup>84</sup> Garvey, interview.

<sup>85</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

<sup>86</sup> LNS Interviews, [January 1976], MS 510, 7, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Misc.” Folder: “LNS: Staff Interviews.”

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

When I first came to LNS, I never took time out. As I began to need it, I felt like not having any time was fucking me over. I began to resent it, it made me angry.

People that have been at LNS for a longer time have adapted to deal with this. This can end up with people resenting them for having dealt with it. It's fucked up that you have to go through a whole agonizing process to get to the point of saying "I come first." Then you have to deal with all the guilt that comes with finally taking the time out. The final end of this process is leaving LNS. It seems ridiculous because we should be capable of shaping our own working conditions.

I have felt near to leaving.<sup>88</sup>

Virtually all collective members agreed that they dealt miserably with conflict. "We go to a lot of trouble," Ellen Garvey noted, "to keep potential disagreements from coming to the surface. If our bases for working together are so fragile that we're afraid to show ourselves to each other then we have little reason to work together."<sup>89</sup>

In the aftermath of the great democratization period, less space remained for individuality at LNS. While the eviction of Rosenstein and Howard had created a collective where members agreed on LNS's basic political orientation, it also created a collective that required an intense personal investment. Little outside time or space remained for LNSers at the same time that external stress increased on the collective.

Two root causes explain the intractability of the collective's problems. To begin, many felt that LNS democratization had gone too far by downplaying individual strengths and leadership. Indeed, much of LNS democratization had focused on developing skills across the collective. But Ellen Garvey noted assets that the collective was not adequately utilizing. "We should be more capable of recognizing individual

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 6.

strengths, weaknesses, talents, etc.” she argued, “and be able to work with them, instead of just hiding them as much as possible.”<sup>90</sup> Several others echoed her sentiment.

LNS found a simple manner of alleviating the intellectual component of this problem by creating editorials beats. The collective announced the change in the first packet of 1976: “The editors have chosen specific topic areas and geographic regions to concentrate on in an effort to more effectively use our resources. We hope this system will help us establish ties with our subscribers and news sources.”<sup>91</sup> Not only did this strategy tap the particular intellectual resources of collective members, but it also provided stability in the collective’s interactions with other Movement organizations and newspapers by highlighting particular contact people for given issues.

In addition to the questions of specialization, leadership, and individual skills, however, the age-old conflict between men and women reared its ugly head once again. Despite the collective remaining well over two-thirds female in early 1976, Garvey described the collective’s worst—though common—political discussions as “longwinded, passive, avoiding controversy but instead going onto picky tangents, and men talking more than women.”<sup>92</sup> Sarah Plant echoed Garvey’s sentiments, but further hinted at the detrimental impact of male dominance: “Many women don’t have confidence as a result of experiencing oppression. We can’t expect people to have confidence overnight. We have both sides—confident and non-confident—working hard. [You] can’t just say ‘I gave you the chance to talk.’ It’s not just allowing for space; some people must negate

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> LNS 756 (January 7, 1976), inside front cover.

<sup>92</sup> LNS Interviews, [January 1976], MS 510, 1, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Misc.” Folder: “LNS: Staff Interviews.”



some of their space.”<sup>93</sup> And those who lacked confidence were unlikely to raise their exclusion to the collective. “I have memories of sitting through editorial meetings and not understanding the issues being discussed,” Cidne Hart recalled. “I would read the news, but I think I lacked the analytical skills that others had. I was very quiet during the meetings and felt inadequate.”<sup>94</sup> Nearly a decade after the experiences of women in SDS and SNCC helped fuel the advent of women’s liberation, subtle chauvinism remained evident in these free-form “democratic” meetings.<sup>95</sup> Oddly enough, Ellen Garvey suggested that the two-thirds ratio actually contributed to the sexual divide: “The fact of having that ratio resulted in another oddity, which was that the men we brought in tended to be more experienced because that was more selective and for the women there were more slots.”<sup>96</sup> Just as these tensions simmered to the surface, however, the only two men in the collective decided to leave LNS. For the next year—between June 1976 and June 1977—the LNS collective remained three-thirds women.

This year marked a period of intense attention and adjustment to the needs of subscribing papers. In light of LNS’s mission of serving the underground and alternative media, this was surprisingly rare in LNS history. The collective sent out questionnaires to all of its subscribers in late 1976 and began to implement appropriate changes to its production schedule the following March. First and foremost, LNS switched to a weekly—rather than twice weekly—packet schedule, freeing an entire day formerly devoted to packet production. They further streamlined their production schedule by

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>94</sup> LNS Reunion Packet, 29.

<sup>95</sup> Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

<sup>96</sup> Garvey, interview.

beginning to produce a monthly graphics packet instead of the steady stream of labor-intensive graphics that they had formerly produced.<sup>97</sup> LNS's new production schedule better served the needs of subscriber papers—most of which were weeklies—but it also eased the labor burden on the collective, whose membership had shrunk dramatically during the previous five years. The first packet of 1972 listed twelve full-time collective members and six part-time comrades; the first packet of 1977 listed only seven collective members and three comrades.<sup>98</sup> Responsiveness and expedience were co-equal forces in pushing LNS to rethink its production schedule.

LNS again had men on staff by the fall of 1977 and the reworking of the collective continued. The loft provided far more physical space than LNS needed and the collective launched a typesetting business intended to raise funds and to increase collective viability. Spouses Milt and Lou Taam provided the creative impetus for this venture. After leaving Rest of the News—an Ithaca, New York, collective that distributed news to progressive radio stations—the Taams joined LNS in the summer of 1977. They immediately set out to boost the LNS coffers. Their first collective venture was a failed attempt to move LNS into the distribution of audio material to progressive radio stations.<sup>99</sup> But the Taams succeeded in creating an LNS Typesetting collective. LNS Typesetting primarily typeset materials for other Movement groups. But the typesetting collective never became the financial boon that LNS sought. Neither did the typesetting operation contribute to collective life. In fact, it bred resentment. At the same time that

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<sup>97</sup> LNS to subscribers, LNS 847 (February 5, 1977), 1.

<sup>98</sup> LNS 403 (January 5, 1972); and LNS 839 (January 5, 1977).

<sup>99</sup> For LNS attempts to move into radio, see “RADIO NEWS FEATURE PROJECT Funding Proposal,” 1976, MS 2812, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Publication Preparation and Distribution (physical) Box A,” Folder: “Radio News Feature Project Fundraising Proposal.”

collective members were falling months behind on their salaries, Tom Tuthill remembered, LNS typesetters collected weekly pay at minimum wage or better: “[The typesetters] just made everyone uncomfortable.”<sup>100</sup> LNS typesetting did little to improve LNS finances, while complicating collective life and creating a host of problems that lacked simple resolutions.

As soon as the Taams got their feet in the collective door, another component of collective life came under question: the two-thirds-women ratio. The reemergence of internal debate over the ratio and a rethinking of feminism had roots at least as far back as 1975, when socialist feminism rose to collective prominence. By 1975, socialist feminism had emerged as a distinctive thread in the women’s movement. Because socialist feminists simultaneously organized women around sex and class issues, it attracted LNS women as a potential Movement centerpiece. Indeed, LNS sent three women to a July 4, 1975, socialist feminist conference organized by the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union (CWLU). The CWLU, notes historian Alice Echols, emerged as “the first and most successful women’s union in the country.”<sup>101</sup> The conference attracted 1600 women and the LNS women expressed sympathy with a Berkeley-Oakland Women’s Union participant who summarized the basic premise of the movement: “We must organize women in all spheres. A crucial part of this organizing is bringing out the common root of all of our oppressions.”<sup>102</sup> This precisely expressed LNS’s view of how women’s activists ought to relate to the Movement. Nevertheless,

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<sup>100</sup> LNS Reunion Packet, 63.

<sup>101</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 136.

<sup>102</sup> “Socialist Feminist Conference Held,” LNS 714 (July 9, 1975), 8.

socialist feminism remained a minority position within the women's movement and quickly faded into an academic discipline rather than an organizing philosophy.<sup>103</sup>

But one unfortunate characteristic of socialist feminism maintained support among some LNSers, namely the fact—as Echols indicates—“that Marxism was too often the dominant partner in this marriage.”<sup>104</sup> LNSer Pat Murray remembers that “a certain tension did exist between [feminist currents within LNS] and more traditionally leftist (class struggle, anti-imperialist) perspectives.” Murray, however, carefully noted: “I don't mean ‘tension’ in a negative way; the presence of different perspectives is part of what kept LNS in balance. We were speaking and listening to each other, at a time when civil conversation in much of the movement had ceased.”<sup>105</sup> Murray's qualification is certainly apt. After 1972, internecine political wrangling never threatened the collective's existence. But a reconsideration of the ratio threatened to alter one of the collective's foremost ideals.

By the fall of 1977, the collective had divided into two distinct groups regarding the relationship between feminism and socialism. On the one hand, most LNS women argued that the oppression of women *as women* existed independent of the oppression of the working class. This group emphasized—as Sarah Plant indicated at a September 19, 1977, collective meeting—that “socialism does not necessarily equal non-sexism.”<sup>106</sup> A consequence of this view was that LNS must emphasize and fight for women's liberation separate from and in addition to its Marxist interpretation. On the other hand, a

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<sup>103</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 137.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>105</sup> Murray, interview.

<sup>106</sup> Collective Meeting Notes, September 19, 1977, MS 2858, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Off-Site Box 13,” Folder: “LNS Collective Meeting Minutes (January 1977-July 1979).”

significant minority of LNSers agreed with Lou Taam when she insisted “that capital, not sex is the basic contradiction, that the accumulation of capital in men’s names is the source of oppression of women.”<sup>107</sup> Lou’s husband even went so far as to argue that “the point of fighting sexism is that it divides the working class.”<sup>108</sup> In other words, feminist critiques were decidedly secondary concerns that would be cleared up by a proletariat revolution. As with most LNS political discussion, this debate primarily existed in the realm of theory.

But the two-thirds-women ratio brought this dispute uncomfortably close to home. By November 1977, the Taams expressed opposition to the ratio and others indicated support for a more flexible ratio.<sup>109</sup> A February 17, 1978, discussion of “racism and the national question,” however, illustrated precisely why the ratio remained necessary. Of the twenty-nine comments recorded in the collective minutes, a group of three men and one woman accounted for twenty-five. Meanwhile, the collective’s other women sat by idly, offering only four comments—three of which were questions—and watching as the conversation bounced between a verbose—and mostly male—minority.<sup>110</sup> Despite the feeling by some that “oppressed groups [including women] should be the ones to decide what they think best action is when it affects them,” by August 1978, the collective—for the first time since 1972—contained fewer than two-thirds women.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. Note Taam’s use of the singular “point.”

<sup>109</sup> Collective Meeting Notes, November 11, 1977, MS 2858, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Off-Site Box 13,” Folder: “LNS Collective Meeting Minutes (January 1977-July 1979).”

<sup>110</sup> Minutes, “Collective Meeting: Political Discussion: Racism and National Question, Part II,” February 17, 1978, MS 2858, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Off-Site Box 13,” Folder: “LNS Collective Meeting Minutes (January 1977-July 1979).”

Meanwhile, racial politics began to haunt LNS for the first time. Overwhelmingly white despite its emphatic multiracial coverage, LNS consistently included black collective members only after 1978. This movement toward interracialism did not succeed. Ena Fox—a black collective comrade—did not feel welcome at LNS. In 1979, she bemoaned that the packet did not reach “Third World communities” at the same time that she decried “racism within the collective [that was] not dealt with in a forthright way.”<sup>111</sup> Barbara Finkelstein, meanwhile, grew frustrated at hearing about her “white skin privilege” and “narrowly defined interest in racial politics.”<sup>112</sup> These conflicts likely would have led to a dramatic rethinking of LNS collectivity if not for the fact that the collective had begun to shrivel on the vine.

For at the same time that LNS grappled with renewed disputes over the ratio and emergent conflicts about race, Laura Landy expressed a series of interwoven concerns that perfectly illustrated the eroded state of the collective by 1978. With only six collective members on staff in February 1978, Landy found herself as the sole graphics worker at LNS. This circumstance resulted in a series of problems. To begin, Landy remained entirely outside of the LNS editorial process, in which every story the collective penned passed through at least three hands and benefited from discussions between editors. She argued that this lack placed her in an inferior position at LNS:

Editors work collectively, with a person writing a story and [two] more editing it. This method provides the framework for a twofold process, which is healthy and necessary:

a) There is an ongoing dialogue and a sense that people really help each other out with problem areas.

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<sup>111</sup> Minutes, meeting at Nancy Stiefel’s apartment, February 3, 1979, green notebook, MS 1703, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Notebooks,” Folder: “Green Staff Notebook.”

<sup>112</sup> LNS Reunion Packet, 5-6.

b) Positions shift (writer one time, editor the next), allowing for sense of equality in terms of function and weight of opinion, etc.

I am presently experiencing no such collective, role-shifting process.<sup>113</sup>

This give-and-take had previously existed within LNS Graphics, but the lack of human resources and funding had forced Landy into the lone position in the graphics department.

Landy pointed to another fundamental distinction between graphics artists and editors:<sup>114</sup>

There is an underlying inequality of position between graphics and editorial staff, and that graphics people are coming from a position of relative weakness. . . . In general, graphics are used as support for the written word. . . . AT LNS . . . Editors can reject graphics on the grounds that they do not correspond to the sense of politics of the story. Graphics workers are not given this same latitude—to reject a story because it doesn't support the politics of a graphic, or a set of graphics.<sup>115</sup>

Like LNS printers in the early 1970s, Landy felt subject to a hierarchy based on skill; this became magnified by her discontent over the collective move away from the two-thirds-women ratio. The personal implications of LNS's financial woes had also taken their toll on Landy: "I am a welfare recipient, constantly worrying, hassling, running around TO ASK, BEG, PLEAD people for help. And get little for my efforts. Made to feel guilty for asking. This, in conjunction with all the other factors, has brought me to a real crisis point."<sup>116</sup> LNS's collective structure, political direction, and financial quandaries had all taken their toll on Landy, leading to this moment of crisis. Nevertheless, she emphasized that her letter outlining these issues to the collective was "offered in the spirit of

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<sup>113</sup> Laura to the LNS Collective, "A 'POSITION PAPER' (or) 'When is a picture worth a thousand words?'" February 15-17, 1978, MS 2858, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Off-Site Box 13," Folder: "LNS Collective Meeting Minutes (January 1977-July 1979)."

<sup>114</sup> LNS referred to all writers as "editors." This emphasized the collective editorial process that passed every story through several hands before publication.

<sup>115</sup> Laura to the LNS Collective, "A 'POSITION PAPER' (or) 'When is a picture worth a thousand words?'" February 15-17, 1978, MS 2858, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Off-Site Box 13," Folder: "LNS Collective Meeting Minutes (January 1977-July 1979)."

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

underlying solidarity and caring.”<sup>117</sup> This spirit of fellow-feeling and well-intentioned criticism defined the LNS experience over the years.

Unfortunately, Laura’s moment of crisis represented in microcosm the complications facing the entire collective. In March 1978, the collective began to typeset the packet and to increase the number of “shorts” published each week. These changes came in response to subscriber suggestions.<sup>118</sup> LNS also launched a subscription campaign to boost distribution. This formed a last great effort to stave off the tide of underground failures, Movement collapse, and financial woes.

But the verdict was quick to arrive. LNS circulation dropped by an additional 12 percent in 1978. At the same time, LNS began to monitor how many of its stories were picked up by subscriber papers. Between July and October 1978, subscriber papers ran fewer than one-third of LNS stories in any media, anywhere in the country.<sup>119</sup> This was depressingly scarce.

LNS’s sense of community and collective spirit had eroded. Sara Bennett left the Santa Cruz News Collective in 1978 to join LNS and quickly became dismayed by the collective’s failure to provide a supportive community: “The only thing collective about LNS was its name. We ate together, we spent hours and hours together, but we were neither comrades nor friends, just a motley crew with a narrow range of strongly held political views and too little tolerance for each other. The spirit of LNS, as I imagined it,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> See LNS 904 (March 24, 1978); and “LNS Packet Proposal,” March 1978, MS 441, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Misc.,” Folder: “LNS: History of LNS.”

<sup>119</sup> Minutes, meeting at Nancy Stiefel’s apartment, February 3, 1979, green staff notebook, MS 1703, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Staff: Notebooks.”



had probably died before I got there.”<sup>120</sup> Barbara Finkelstein also came to this realization. Likewise arriving at LNS in 1978, Finkelstein hoped to discover the familial environment that had pervaded collective life in the early 1970s. She was disappointed: “I was on the outs with my family, so the LNS loft . . . became my family. The demands of kinship were too much for one organization in the twilight of its existence to bear.”<sup>121</sup> Time and again, new collective members arrived to find that LNS hardly merited the title of collective.

By July 1979, Andy Marx wrote a note to his fellow collective members. It began: “The gradual erosion of personnel, finances, morale and purpose at LNS over the last months and years has clearly reached crisis proportions.”<sup>122</sup> LNS’s endgame had begun.

### Crisis Proportions

In its final packet of the 1970s, LNS reflected on a decade that had not been kind to the Movement, the underground, or the collective. Ten years earlier—the collective wrote—LNS’s “full-time staff of 20 people sent 20-24 pages of news and graphics twice a week to some 800 subscribers. . . . Everyone was riding high on the spirit of the 60s, working 12 hour days, and living on a shoe string.” By December 1979, the collective boasted only two full-time staffers—Andy Marx and newly-arrived Michael Scurato—who mailed the packet every other week to barely two hundred subscribers. Nevertheless,

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<sup>120</sup> LNS Reunion Packet, 55-56.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>122</sup> Discussion of Declining Personnel, Finances, Morale, and Purpose, July 1979, MS 2858, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Off-Site Box 13,” Folder: “LNS Collective Meeting Minutes (January 1977-July 1979).”

they put a positive spin on these developments: “The independent press is alive and well and will rise to meet the challenges of the 80s.”<sup>123</sup> On the eve of a new decade, little evidence existed to support this belief.

By 1980, LNS’s battle to stem the falling tide of the Movement and the independent press had reached “crisis proportions.” How could the collective continue to operate with only a skeleton staff? In January 1980, the collective implemented yet another organizational adjustment to fit its changing circumstances. LNS created a large Editorial Collective of far-flung part-time volunteers to support a Staff Collective—then boasting two members—based at the loft.<sup>124</sup> The collective also moved to shore up its “steady and committed bunch of correspondents and graphic artists contributing first-hand material to us, all the way from California to North Carolina to Chicago to the State of Washington, and in New York City.”<sup>125</sup> But when LNS financial reports revealed outstanding debts of \$7000 in October 1980 and a 1980 budget deficit of \$5000, it became clear that the collective required even more dramatic changes to survive.<sup>126</sup>

Andy Marx still held hope that “manna from heaven” might rescue LNS and his last-ditch fundraising efforts bore some fruit.<sup>127</sup> In early 1981, former collective members Nancy Stiefel and Tom Tuthill promised a matching \$10,000 grant if LNS came up with

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<sup>123</sup> LNS 977 (December 21, 1979), inside front cover.

<sup>124</sup> LNS 978 (January 11, 1980).

<sup>125</sup> LNS 977 (December 21, 1979), inside front cover.

<sup>126</sup> Financial Report, 1980, MS 1710, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Financial: Fundraising, etc.,” Folder: “Financial: Fundraising: Benefit Concert”; and LNS DEBTS, AS OF OCT. 15, 1980, MS 1820, LNS Records, Temple, Box: “Financial: Fundraising, etc.,” Folder: “Financial: Bills.”

<sup>127</sup> Marx and Mulvihill, interview.

a new format, content, and distribution.<sup>128</sup> In May, the collective hastily organized a meeting of alternative media groups in Washington to receive feedback from its subscribers and to reestablish an independent press network with LNS at its heart.<sup>129</sup> But a dramatic revision of LNS and the alternative media never came to pass. Within weeks, LNS sent a letter to its subscribers:

These are the brutal facts: In the last five years, our rent has nearly tripled. So have production costs. Inflation has taken its heavy toll on us as it has on our subscribers, most of whom are unable to pay for their subscriptions.

We deeply regret cutting of the news and graphics service now, when the political situation both in the U.S. and abroad cries out for the kind of information that arms people for radical change.<sup>130</sup>

The cold realities from which LNS had been hiding since the mid-1970s had finally caught up to the collective. No amount of money or meetings could save a news service that no longer held a captive audience.

### Conclusion: Left Behind

Changes to LNS's internal operation had always produced conflict. The LNS split of 1968 centered on disagreements about participatory democracy; the creation of the ratio led some to leave LNS; and the debate surrounding the letter from gay Cubans sent two collective members clamoring to decry LNS's "bourgeois journalism." But prior to

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<sup>128</sup> "S. O. S." LNS 1010 (February 6, 1981), inside front cover; and Nancy [Stiefel] to LNS, May 10, 1981, MS 1818, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Correspondence: Numbered 349-1927," Folder: "Misc. 1814-1822."

<sup>129</sup> RMBB, LNS 1012 (April 24, 1981), 8; and RMBB, LNS 1013 (May 15, 1981), 11-12.

<sup>130</sup> LNS Collective to LNS Friends and Subscribers, [summer 1981], MS 507, LNS Records, Temple, Box: "Staff: Misc.," Folder: "LNS Staff Closing."

1973, LNS could always fall back on a strong Movement, fresh corps of eager collective members, and meaningful full-time work. By 1978, these assets no longer existed.

The collective had always maintained a dual mission. The packet provided a nerve center for Movement groups to communicate. And the collective provided a model of the revolution through its prefigurative politics. But the Movement denouement of the mid-1970s made LNS obsolete. The beloved community that LNS intended to find hope, guidance, and communication in the packet no longer existed. Soon, many of the New Left's most divisive tendencies—including rigid Marxism and racial and sexual antagonisms—seeped into LNS's Manhattan loft. The collective began to question its internal democracy, and the nation's antagonistic political culture exacerbated a firestorm of negative developments.

Where had the Movement gone? And why had it failed? The great irony of 1970s American activism is this: while economic hard times and political chaos should theoretically have proven ideal for radicalism, they actually stifled organizing efforts. In the aftermath of the unifying antiwar movement, many Movement groups—including LNS—banked on economic hardship and worker discontent to inspire revolution and to maintain a vibrant American left into the 1980s. They were wrong.

Nevertheless, LNS politics adapted to the changing Movement and struck a refreshing chord of moderation between the stridency of the New Communist Movement and the separatism of many new social movements. In vain, the collective aspired to hold together the diverse strands of identity politics by convincing activists that they had a stake in the success of other Movement groups and by providing a prefigurative organizational model. Indeed, LNSers had journeyed down a Movement “road not taken”

that offered an inclusive vision of collective activism. When they turned around, however, nobody had followed. They had been left behind.

## Conclusion

### Imagining the Movement at the Dusk of the 1970s

No consensus exists among historians to date the death of the Movement. Those who center their analysis on the national offices of SDS see the Days of Rage as a tragic final rejection of the New Left's founding democratic principles and etch "1969" on the New Left's gravestone.<sup>1</sup> Others argue that a decentralized New Left counterculture carried the Movement mantle to 1973 by entwining political and cultural radicalism.<sup>2</sup> Even at their most generous, historians agree that the New Left no longer existed by 1975.<sup>3</sup> But in Liberation News Service and Montague Farm, we have discovered two counterinstitutions that boast unambiguous roots in the New Left of the 1960s and that continued meaningful activism until at least 1979. This requires a rethinking of the demise of the New Left.

LNS and Montague Farm both embodied the New Left counterculture that carried a meaningful Movement legacy up to 1973. In the aftermath of the SDS implosion, the New Left became decentralized and localized. Back in small pockets of activism—true to the New Left's modest roots—activists turned to prefigurative politics to redress

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<sup>1</sup> Most notably, see Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Doug Rossinow, "Letting Go: Revisiting the New Left's Demise," in *The New Left Revisited*, ed. John McMillian and Paul Buhle (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 241-54.

<sup>3</sup> Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

organizational failures. The process of forging a collective at LNS perfectly encapsulated the tendency toward creating counterinstitutions that embodied Movement values. Furthermore, the underground represented a key site of New Left counterculture, and LNS—more than any other group—facilitated the widespread growth of the underground. Meanwhile, Montague Farm—which had seemingly abandoned activism—illustrated that communal self-sufficiency could support a radical political agenda. Thus, LNS and Montague Farm support key New Left narratives up to 1973. But if we use 1973 to date the Movement demise—rather than to mark a key turning point—we confront two challenges: LNS continued to operate as a Movement publication until 1981; and Montague Farm led vibrant antinuclear activism until 1979. Let us tackle these issues one at a time.

Liberation News Service activists wrote about and believed in the Movement well into the late 1970s. What was the Movement to LNS? To start, it is instructive to distinguish between the New Left—a social movement—and the Movement—a collective self-consciousness. Historian Doug Rossinow argues:

[Between 1969 and 1973] the New Left was largely a white, anti-imperialist, anticapitalist movement with a strong neoanarchist bent and a very prominent feminist component. This movement's existence did not end with a bang, but it did end. . . . A collective self-consciousness [the Movement] is not so easy a thing to trace into oblivion, but after a certain point it simply is no longer in evidence.<sup>4</sup>

LNS fit all of Rossinow's key characteristics of New Left activism in the early 1970s, and LNS's history suggests that such a social movement—at least in some quarters—extended through the mid-1970s. But the LNS collective is even more helpful in tracing Rossinow's elusive collective self-consciousness.

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<sup>4</sup> Rossinow, "Letting Go," 246.

LNSers insisted that they had a grander vision than the New Left; they aspired to an interracial community of men and women—a movement of movements—organized to realize a revolutionary new America. They called this the Movement.<sup>5</sup> To LNSers—and many other activists—this formed a real beloved community. But most historians assure us that such a Movement only existed as a collective self-consciousness.

The underground press is the ideal institution through which to explore this discrepancy, because newspapers boast a peculiar capacity to shape a collective identity. Benedict Anderson—in explaining the origins of nationalism—highlights the centrality of newspapers in creating “imagined communities.” He describes the process of reading newspapers as a sacrament:

The significance of this mass ceremony . . . is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated . . . throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the . . . imagined community can be envisioned?<sup>6</sup>

If we extend Anderson’s framework forward to the 1960s and 1970s, we discover the importance of the underground media in creating the Movement—an imagined community of activists. The underground newspapers of the 1960s and 1970s generally maintained small, localized readerships. But the 1967 creation of LNS fundamentally changed the underground. By distributing a common news packet to small outlets across

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<sup>5</sup> Historian John McMillian distinguishes the Movement as “a much larger constellation of social protest activity that grew out of the New Left,” including such movements as gay liberation, radical feminism, and the hippie counterculture. John McMillian, “‘You Didn’t Have to Be There’: Revisiting the New Left Consensus,” in McMillian and Buhle, *The New Left Revisited*, 6. The LNS collective would have extended this to include, for example, racial identity politics, radical labor organizing, and antinuclear activism.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 35



the country, LNS created an imagined community of readers. All of a sudden, the Movement possessed the means to shrink the geographical divide between the Heartland and the coasts.<sup>7</sup> In other words, LNS was the single most important institution in creating a collective Movement identity.

Whom did this imagined Movement include? The LNS collective covered a broad array of movements. The packet included news on black, brown, red, and yellow power movements; the white New Left; radical feminism and gay liberation; antinuclear, prison reform, and labor movements. Furthermore, LNS received communiqués from groups in all of these movements. Sometimes the collective reprinted these documents in the packet; other times the dispatches would simply influence how the collective thought about particular issues. Either way, such communication with activists embedded LNS in a vast Movement network. Finally, many Movement groups promoted and coordinated rallies, events, campaigns, and fundraisers through the LNS packet. Organizers in all of these movements saw LNS as a vital hub of the Movement, a means of communicating with an unparalleled activist readership.

Activists in these diverse movements also *read* the LNS packet. Organizations and publications of Third World activists—LNS’s designation for minority groups—always represented a significant minority of LNS subscribers. In 1973, for example, nearly as many Third World groups subscribed to LNS as did college newspapers, while the proportion of Third World organizations to underground papers subscribing to the LNS packet remained constant between 1973 and 1977. Furthermore, women’s

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<sup>7</sup> Other media similarly functioned to create a national community, but none possessed the broad, cross-movement capacity of LNS. *New Left Notes*, for example, functioned to create a broad organizational identity, but omitted swaths of Movement activity and died before the Movement’s decentralization of the early 1970s. LNS uniquely covered a broad range of Movement activity, boasted a broad and efficient distribution network, and survived for more than a decade.

organizations were one of the few categories of LNS subscribers that actually increased their subscriptions in raw numbers between 1973 and 1977. The LNS collective was not delusional in their insistent invocations of the Movement. While the decentralizing tendency toward single-issue identity movements defined 1970s activism, LNS remained a unifying source of news. This ensured that activists in diverse movements kept up on the gains and losses of other groups and continued to identify with a broad-based Movement.

For this reason, the Hard Times Conference that LNS promoted in 1976 is of paramount importance in shaping our understanding of the Movement denouement. The Chicago gathering brought together a wildly divergent constituency—including activists from black, Puerto Rican, women's, labor, and senior-citizen's groups—in an effort to translate the Movement self-consciousness into an actual social movement with common goals. The Hard Times Conference failed to achieve this goal. But a remarkably diverse cast of activists believed in the possibility of success and aspired to create a concrete cross-movement alliance as late as 1976. Clearly, white student radicals were not the sole group that hoped to realize a broad-based Movement.

The history of LNS forces us to recast our narratives of the Movement's drift into oblivion and the New Left's demise. LNS's centrality in promoting the Movement indicates that such a collective self-consciousness lingered well into the late 1970s. To be sure, the collective grew frustrated by the Movement's decline. But LNS discussed and promoted its broad activist vision until at least 1978. Of course, LNSers aspired to convert this ideal into a real social movement that would broaden New Left

counterculture and represent a final realization of Movement potential. While this vision remained a realistic possibility until at least 1976, it never came to fruition.

Liberation News Service ultimately failed to translate its imagined community of readers—the Movement—into a concrete social movement. But LNS provided important legacies for activists. The collective revealed how critical prefigurative politics can be to organizational success. Embodying democratic ideals in its everyday operation provided LNS with a constant source of strength and community. To be sure, conflicts arose at the collective. But LNS proved flexible and pragmatic in its application of Movement ideals. If anything, the collective might have more actively promoted its prefigurative ideal to other Movement groups. Furthermore, LNS illustrated the capacity of strong information and communications infrastructures to promote social movements. Finally, LNS eased the transition from a wildly unpredictable underground to a more professional alternative press over the course of the 1970s. In doing so, the collective promoted the democratization of the news and of knowledge that continues to the present in the form of alternative weeklies and even the blogosphere.

LNS remained a dynamic and responsive organization throughout its existence. But the collective overlooked a key component of its prefigurative mission: it never approached self-sufficiency. As a result, LNS remained at the mercy of broader economic, political, and social forces. As long as church funding continued to flow and the New Left maintained its political capital, LNS remained solvent. But the collective, should have more proactively secured its financial security. When the economy soured and the political winds changed, LNS became a defenseless institution.

Meanwhile, self-sufficiency was precisely the genius of Montague Farm. Unlike LNS—which formally advanced its prefigurative component through the ratio, constant collective adjustments, and endless meetings—Montague Farm evolved an informal egalitarian ethic of the earth. Women’s and gay liberation did not make deep inroads at Montague Farm. Instead, labor often divided along traditional gender lines, and gay communards either left the farm or remained content with quasi-closeted lives. Nevertheless, the farm approached self-sufficiency and advanced an organic lifestyle that formed an earth-centered prefigurative politics.

This work created a taproot from which the communards ventured back into the realm of political activism. Five years spent creating a farm family—and away from the hustle and bustle of Movement life—helped Sam Lovejoy and Montague Farm to react swiftly and decisively when Northeast Utilities planted its weather tower in the Montague Plains. By 1974, the commune’s organic values, self-sufficiency, and local investment had become so firmly established that extending its work to include antinuclear organizing on behalf of Montague citizens made perfect sense. Indeed, the contrast between centralized corporate authority based on radioactive technology and Montague Farm’s core values could not have been starker.

The contrast between Montague Farm’s previous communal isolationism and its renewed political activism was equally stark. And the farm’s distance from centers of New Left organizing suggests that its activism of the New Age was indeed divorced from the Movement. But Montague Farm boasted unambiguous roots in the New Left. Not only did the commune directly grow out of the Liberation News Service rift, but nearly all of the farm’s founders had previously been active in campus, antiwar, and civil rights

organizing. The communards believed in New Left ideals. They packed participatory democracy and egalitarianism in their satchels upon moving to the farm, and these values only took a quick dusting-off before the communards applied them to antinuclear activism.

The communards also maintained other strands of Movement thought when they returned to activism in 1974. Like LNS, the commune distanced itself from overt Marxist rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> But the decentralized alternative energy infrastructure that Montague's communards proposed revealed a fundamental critique of American corporate capitalism. Montague Farm also promoted a broad-based Movement with antinuclear organizing at its center. Perhaps this notion was antiquated, vain, and out of touch with the realities of 1970s activism. But in the aftermath of the antiwar movement, antinuclear sentiment posed a realistic shot of drawing a cross-section of activists. As opposed to the racial and sexual identity politics that dominated this phase of activism, antinuclear organizing drew strength from nuclear energy's impact on people across economic, political, racial, and sexual lines. As single-issue organizers, antinuclear activists remained in touch with the contemporary political scene, but their attempt to bridge movement divides represented a vision of cross-movement activism notably absent in the late 1970s. Back in New York, even LNS jumped to support antinuclear activism due to its broad appeal and its anticapitalist assumptions.

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<sup>8</sup> While Montague Farm's antinuclear critique generally shunned rigid Marxist thought, Lovejoy's theoretical proclivities were clear when he argued that "there's a capitalist dialectic forcing nukes to be built in this country." *Lovejoy's Nuclear War*, directed by Daniel Keller, produced by Daniel Keller and Charles Light (Turners Falls, MA: Green Mountain Post Films, 1975). Of the Montague communards, Lovejoy most often slipped into overt anticapitalist rhetoric, despite his general distaste for methods and ideas that would potentially alienate a broad antinuclear base.

If the antinuclear movement maintained a clear New Left lineage, it also rejected many of the Movement's worst tendencies. Recognizing that Movement secularism alienated many Americans, the antinuclear movement drew directly from Quaker philosophy and actively recruited Catholic activists, a critical Clam constituency in Catholic-rich New England. The Quaker influence was particularly evident in the Alliance's preference for nonviolent civil disobedience. Of course, the Clam dissolution largely came about due to deviance from nonviolence, but Montague Farmers—and most of the Clamshell Alliance's founders—remained forthright in their insistence upon nonviolence. In both its religiosity and its emphasis on nonviolence, the antinuclear movement traced key influences to the civil rights movement. Meanwhile, Montague Farm also respected the institutions of law enforcement. Unlike cries of pig fascism that marred components of the late New Left, Montague Farm recognized the force of American law-and-order sentiment. Lovejoy utilized the courtroom as a public sphere of civic discourse, and Green Mountain Post Films sympathetically portrayed police officers. Both tactics provided symbolic and practical utility in the quest for support from constituencies across the political spectrum. The antinuclear movement must be looked at as a refined version of Movement activism that rejected alienating New Left tendencies in favor of broad advocacy.

Montague Farm's antinuclear and alternative energy organizing represented a sophisticated response to the shifting winds of 1970s American political culture. While it was coincidental that Northeast Utilities planted its tower within a stone's throw of a commune so well prepared to lead a social movement, it was not coincidental that the antinuclear movement achieved such widespread support in New England and across the

country. Various trends in American economics and politics combined to buttress the movement. To begin, the energy crisis began to convince millions of Americans that real systemic problems existed within the energy industry. Despite the fact that nuclear energy and oil played significantly different roles in the American energy system, antinuclear activists found less of a burden of proof to attack energy corporations. Economic stagflation further supported no nukes organizing. Rising construction costs forced energy corporations to increase consumer fees, belying industry claims that nuclear energy would result in a financial break for consumers. As a result of Watergate and the American crisis of confidence, activists also found it easier to challenge governmental and corporate claims that nuclear energy would establish a stable energy system. Then—just as the no nukes movement seemed to be reaching its peak—the disastrous accident at Three Mile Island provided tragic evidence of the industry’s health and safety problems. Antinuclear activists who had been warning the nation about these dangers for years suddenly had tangible proof. The time was ripe for a movement against nuclear energy.

Amid this activism, Montague Farm cast a very long shadow. As a central antinuclear institution, the commune influenced the core values and financial viability of the American antinuclear movement. The movement soon spread across the country, promoting both strategic activism and prefigurative cultural revolution.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, it represented a key bridge between New Left and New Age activism. Furthermore, Montague Farm shaped early efforts to promote organic living, eco-consciousness, and conservation. The commune directly pushed New England’s small farms toward local,

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<sup>9</sup> This forms the basic thesis of Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

organic agriculture to promote a small world. Finally, the communards advocated a visionary alternative energy infrastructure that prefigured the paradigm shift only now being embraced across the political spectrum.

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At the dawn of the 1970s, LNS and Montague Farm burst onto radically different trajectories. The LNS collective remained tied to New York City, fighting for the Movement from the belly of the whale. Montague communards, meanwhile, sought to effect change by absenting themselves from the urban malaise and Movement stridency at the heart of their disillusionment. Still, both groups faced the same basic question: How would institutions founded on the ideals of late-1960s activism adapt their politics to survive in the adverse political culture of the 1970s?

In light of their tremendous discontinuities, LNS's and Montague Farm's respective answers to this question were remarkably similar and complementary. Between 1968 and 1973, both groups focused on realizing prefigurative ideals. On the one hand, the LNS collective balanced the tasks of continuing Movement work and forging a collective. And like other centers of New Left counterculture, LNS pushed its internal operation to become politically consistent with its broader social vision. On the other hand, Montague Farm halted its Movement work in order to forge a communal identity and a self-sustaining family. But this mission likewise centered on realizing prefigurative political ideals. LNS and Montague Farm—along with Movement groups, underground outlets, and communes throughout the country—emphasized prefigurative



politics as an immediate method of realizing the revolution. In other words, *living the Movement* became a revolutionary method for here and now. If an American revolution seemed to be slipping away, at least activists could make the revolution about their lives.

But neither LNS nor Montague Farm abandoned their broader revolutionary ambitions. LNS's independent radical analysis aspired to a Marxist revolution that would—in the spirit of the New Left—simultaneously overturn American corporate capitalism and hierarchies of race, class, and gender. Like LNS's dogmatic counterparts in the New Communist Movement, however, the collective never articulated a coherent revolutionary program and never succeeded in uniting its diverse Movement constituency. Meanwhile, Montague Farm pushed an alternative energy system as the basis for revolutionary change. While the communards did not immediately achieve this goal, their vision for a decentralized energy infrastructure that empowers local communities remains a viable path of radical change today.

LNS and Montague Farm both emphasized the broad appeals of their respective revolutionary visions. But as the 1970s unfolded, they confronted the emergence of identity politics as the central ideological inheritor of New Left activism. Radical feminism, gay liberation, and racial identity politics largely arose in reaction to discriminations within the New Left. But they also owed philosophical debts to the movements that preceded them in the 1960s. Nevertheless, the aspiration to create a Movement beloved community remained strong throughout the 1960s. The collective strength and political capital accrued by 1960s activists remained an inspiration and goal for their counterparts a decade later. Precisely this desire to bridge narrow interests motivated LNS's Movement activism and Montague Farm's antinuclear organizing.

These aspirations to create an actual—as opposed to an imagined—Movement amid the diverse identity politics of the 1970s were perhaps doomed, but they were not misguided. LNS helped create an imagined community of activists through its far-flung underground network, fulfilling at least one element of its Movement vision. Meanwhile, Montague Farm saw its antinuclear organizing balloon into a nationwide movement, despite never attaining its ideal diverse constituency.

Nevertheless, both institutions succeeded in transforming the lives of those who passed through their doors; both provided the free space in which activists could organize their lives around *living the Movement*,<sup>10</sup> and both illustrated the importance of prefigurative politics in building social movements. Like groups that espoused identity politics, LNS and Montague Farm responded to the failed egalitarianism of leading New Left organizations. But they did so without abandoning a broad vision of the Movement. The New Left had died by 1976. But activists continued imagining the Movement and living the Movement through the dusk of the decade.

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<sup>10</sup> For “free space,” see Sara Evans and Harry Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

## Appendix 1

### Analysis of Articles Written by Members of Each LNS Faction

Both factions argued that political and cultural differences explained the LNS cleavage. But a content analysis of the articles penned by members of both factions refutes these claims. Instead, such an analysis suggests that the factions shared fundamental political ideals. Table 1 provides a topical breakdown of articles published by the members of each faction between October 1967 and August 1968. These data reveal that LNS factionalization cannot be explained as the logical culmination of conflicts between vulgar Marxists and counterculture freaks.

Table 1. Articles by LNS staffers, LNS 1-99

Topic	Factions	
	LNS/NY	LNS/Montague
Antiwar/Student Movement	14	22
SDS	5	0
Yippie	0	3
Other	9	19
Black Freedom Movement	6	10
Other Social Movements	6	8
International News	3	1
Formal Politics	2	9
Counterculture	2	10
Poetry/Fiction	2	1
Total	35	60

*Source:* Data from LNS 1-99.

*Note:* This table only includes articles with attributed authorship. The vast majority of LNS articles during this period are without attribution. Thus, the articles included in this table represent a scant minority of all articles published in LNS 1-99. Factions were determined by the names included in LNS/NY 100 (plus Allen Young) and LNS/Montague 100 (plus Marty Jezer).

The Bloom faction published nearly twice as many articles as did its New York counterpart. The discrepancy is even more pronounced when we consider that Allen Young penned twenty-four of the thirty-five New York faction articles. This indicates that the factions divided very much along lines of LNS seniority. There are important exceptions to this rule, however. Young himself was one of the earliest members of LNS and—while Sheila Ryan was a relative newcomer to the organization—her first encounter with LNS came as part of the *Washington Free Press* that shared space with LNS at 3 Thomas Circle as early as December 1967. On the flipside, Steve Diamond and Cathy Hutchinson helped found the New York office, but immediately aligned themselves with Bloom and Mungo.<sup>1</sup> Despite these discrepancies, LNS factions generally formed along lines of familiarity and existing friendships.

Next, the statistics on coverage of the counterculture suggest that factions formed along a political-cultural divide. Upon closer inspection, however, these numbers are less conclusive. Admittedly, the Bloom faction published more often on the counterculture. But when adjusted relative to the total number of articles published by each group, the gap shrinks significantly. Furthermore, Bloom and Mungo—the leaders of the faction—penned but a single article about the counterculture. Most important, coverage of the counterculture represented a small minority of the overall coverage of both factions. In fact, the discrepancy in coverage of formal politics is equally large and it would be untenable to describe the factionalization according to how interested each group was in the presidential primaries of early 1968. Finally, although LNS’s “editor of poesie”

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Diamond’s place in LNS factionalization, see Stephen Diamond, *What the Trees Said: Life on a New Age Farm* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), 4-7.

supported Bloom, neither group placed the creation of poetry or fiction high on their list of priorities.

Finally—and more startling than the discrepancy in coverage of the counterculture—is the factions' relative equality in social movement coverage. The antiwar and student movements—often covered in tandem—formed the primary concern of both groups and represented more than a third of their articles. There is admittedly a distinction in the particular segments of the antiwar movement that each group covered: the New Yorkers favored SDS; the Bloom faction favored the Yippies. But even this generalization must be qualified by noting that Young was responsible for all five articles dealing exclusively with SDS. In the end, the SDS-Yippie divide is the most prominent distinction between the news covered by the two factions. More important than this difference, however, is the startling *lack* of a clear distinction in the news that the two groups covered.

## Appendix 2

### LNS Circulation Figures

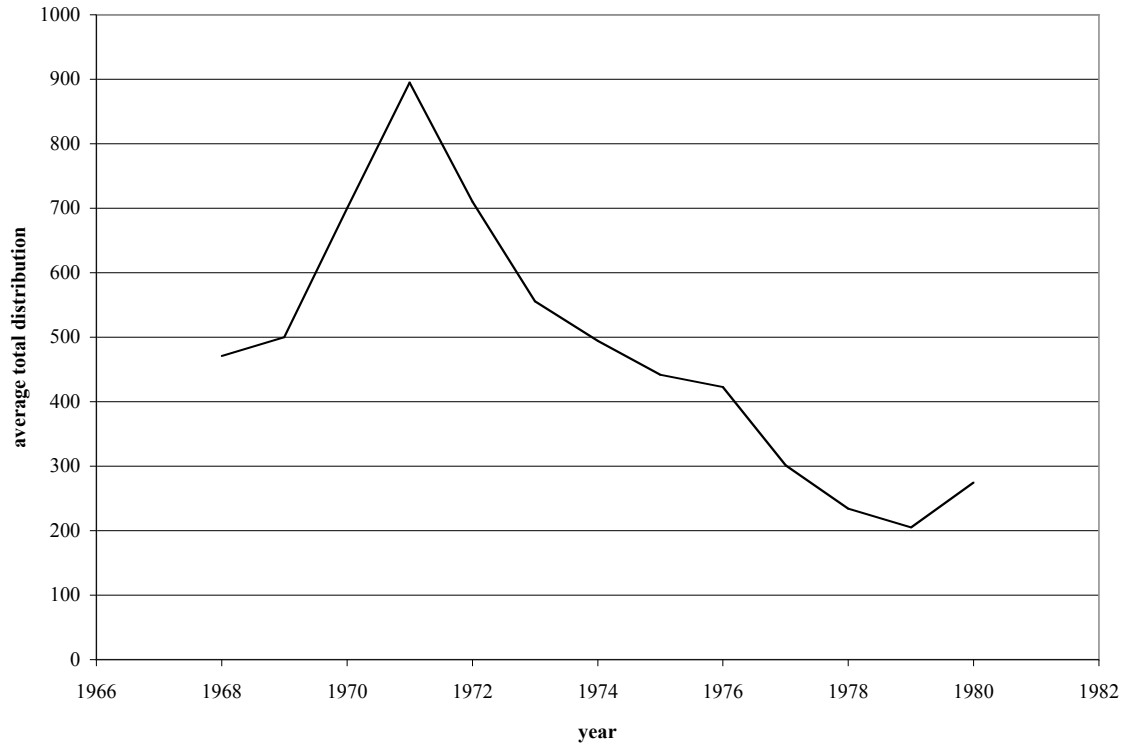


Figure 1. LNS circulation, 1968-1980. Data from LNS 109 (October 9, 1968), 200 (October 4, 1969), 291 (October 8, 1970), 382 (October 9, 1971), 471 (October 11, 1972), 555 (September 22, 1973), 646 (October 5, 1974), 735 (October 8, 1975), 818 (September 29, 1976), 884 (October 21, 1977), 930 (October 6, 1978), 970 (October 12, 1979), and 1003 (October 17, 1980).

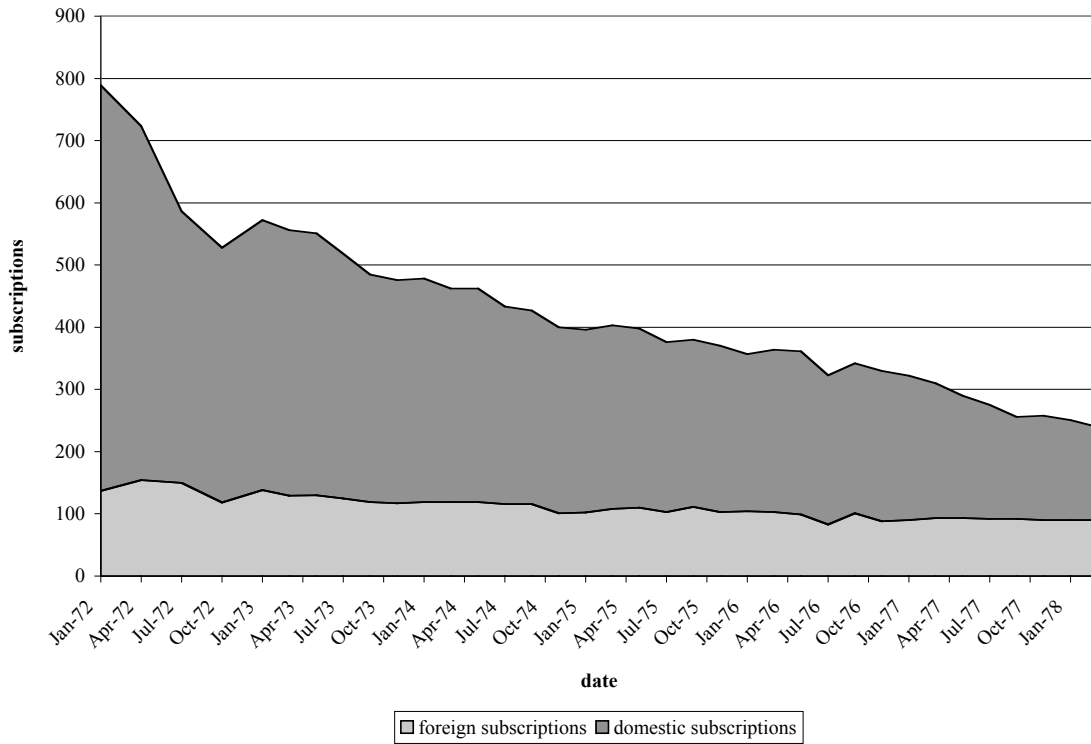


Figure 2. LNS foreign versus domestic circulation, 1972-1978. Data from “LNS Packet Proposal,” March 1978, MS 441, Liberation News Service Records, Box: “Staff: Misc.” Folder: “LNS: History of LNS.”

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