

## Behind the 'Guardian'/'Liberated Guardian' Dispute

By Les Evans

"Guardian Office Attacked" was the headline of the April 18 issue of the New York weekly *Guardian*, once the most widely read radical newspaper in the United States. A few days later a rival publication appeared named the *Liberated Guardian*. Its headline read "Workers seize control."

Both papers provide accounts of a split in the *Guardian* staff and a physical struggle for control of the paper's offices. Some nineteen staff members and part-time employees are reportedly grouped on the side of the *Liberated Guardian*, while eighteen members of the "Guardian cooperative," the old administrative body of the paper, including business manager Irving Beinin and managing editor Jack Smith, remain with the *Guardian*.

According to the Beinin-Smith group, the opposing side took the initiative.

"The *Guardian* was published clandestinely this week," they say in the April 18 issue.

"At this writing, the *Guardian*'s tenement office on East 4th St. in New York City's Lower East Side is empty following the violent invasion of about 50 assorted ultra-leftists, anarchists and other self-styled 'revolutionaries' who broke into the barricaded building about noon April 12 in an effort to prevent this issue of the *Guardian* from going to press."

The "invaders" describe themselves as strikers. They initially set up a picket line outside the *Guardian* offices on April 9. The "clandestine" *Guardian* accuses the "strikers" of seeking to impose an "anarchist" political line on the paper: "A recent *Guardian* Viewpoint condemning individual terrorism is known to have inspired some of the invaders to take action."

The April 20 *Liberated Guardian* in its lead story declared: "We had banded together to overthrow an archaic, undemocratic, elitist structure and to make the *Guardian* serve the new left movement it claimed to represent."

Both papers seemed to be in general agreement on the facts involved in the

April 12 confrontation. According to the "clandestine" *Guardian*:

"At around 11 a.m. three men were observed trying to break into the back window leading into a vacant printing shop on the first floor. Shortly afterward, three other men, carrying knives, began climbing the fire escape to the top floor, which is used for storage, in order to break in from the top. They brandished their weapons at *Guardian* defender Steve Torgoff, 23, who tried to intercept them from a window.

"Moments later the mob broke into the top floor. The defenders — Carl Davidson, 26; Marion Munsell, 65; Leslie Sinsley, 24; Rod Such, 24, and Torgoff — raced to the fourth floor landing with improvised clubs to confront the intruders, who were pouring in by this time, outnumbering the *Guardian* workers about 10 to one.

"Such ran half-way up the stairs, followed by the others. Waving a crowbar, he demanded they leave immediately or 'the first ones down these stairs are going to get their heads smashed. . . . Who wants to be first?'

"The mob was held at bay temporarily and a political debate, laced with insults, ensued. Marion Munsell, a wrench in her hand, climbed to the front of the defense line. . . .

"Someone shouted: 'Get out of the way, Grandma.' . . .

"At this point one of the crowd leaned over the railing and began urinating in the direction of the defenders . . ."

After a further scuffle, Davidson, Munsell, et al., were ejected from the building by the invaders.

The account by the "strikers" is not so graphic. One of them, writing in the April 17 issue of *Rat*, took up where the *Guardian* left off:

"After a long, bitter verbal confrontation, we made repeated entreaties to Marion to move. The women moved down the staircase to try to move Marion and Steve began to strike at them with his crowbar, hitting Marion instead. . . . Finally, one of the strik-

ers dropped a rug from the staircase leading to the roof and knocked the crowbar out of Steve's hand. Two women strikers held Marion while others behind them on the staircase rushed and pinned Carl and Steve. The management team agreed to leave the building."

This use of physical violence in a political dispute inside the staff of a newspaper that calls itself socialist and the dispossession by physical force of the *Guardian* from its own headquarters mark the most serious crisis in the paper's twenty-two year history.

On the side of the so-called strikers there is little to be said. Judging from the testimony of various persons who have been "purged" from the *Guardian* in recent years, there is substance to their organizational grievances. But their demands had nothing to do with wages or hours; they wanted a say in determining the political line of the *Guardian*. This puts in question their claim that this is a legitimate strike action and not a political dispute in the staff.

To attempt to physically shut down a radical newspaper because of a political disagreement with its editors is reminiscent of Stalinist methods.

The present crisis of the *Guardian* reflects the disintegration of the forces around the Students for a Democratic Society for whom the *Guardian* had attempted to become a spokesman.

Smith and Beinin were of the opinion that a mass revolutionary party can be built by attracting an amorphous "movement" to a "radical" newspaper. Instead of setting out with a Marxist program and seeking to construct a revolutionary party on the basis of that program, they substituted a vague anticapitalism, the mystique of pure and simple activism without theory, and an exaggerated notion of the revolutionary capacities of all sorts of spontaneous movements of rebellion in the United States and abroad.

They refused to define their politics

in relation to the existing parties on the left. While generally critical of the Soviet bureaucracy, they never analyzed the nature of Stalinism.

The paper was founded in 1948 as *National Guardian* by three left-wing professional journalists, Cedric Belfrage, James Aronson, and John T. McManus. It was the unofficial journal of the Progressive party, organized the same year as an electoral apparatus of the Stalinists and a number of supporters of Roosevelt—notably former U. S. Vice-president Henry Wallace, the Progressive party's 1948 presidential candidate. Its circulation hinged on the benevolence and peripheral influence of the American Communist party.

In a November 15, 1950, editorial the *National Guardian* explained its view of its role:

"The progressive movement of this country is never going to get to first base unless it can get its program before the people and the truth is that the progressive leadership throughout the nation has thus far failed to take the first, simple step in this direction.

"That step is the building of a publication which will be the voice of the whole movement, which will carry its program and directives to all members at least weekly; and which can be placed in the hands of the general public cheaply and regularly . . ."

Significantly, the same editorial was reprinted by the present editors of the *Guardian* for the paper's twentieth anniversary on December 7, 1968. But what had been the experience with this concept? At the time it was launched, the *National Guardian* enjoyed the backing and real material support of both the Progressive and Communist parties. In 1952, however, the CP decided to dump the Progressive party and return to the Democratic fold. The *National Guardian* refused to go along.

With the collapse of the Progressive party after the 1952 elections, the *National Guardian* found itself on its own. From then until now its editors have tried to use the paper to "re-group" a new radical movement as a basis of support.

With the Khrushchev revelations in 1956 the *National Guardian* faced a low crisis. Part of its staff turned sharply away from Stalinism. They sought to take an objective attitude in partic-

ular toward Trotskyism. They went so far as to collaborate with the Socialist Workers party in running independent socialist candidates, and they endorsed the presidential campaigns of the SWP. But they did not go beyond this.

The current editorial team took over in April 1967, forcing the resignation of James Aronson, the last of the founders. The name was shortened to *Guardian* and Beinlin, a former member of the SWP, became the leading political figure on the staff.

Facing a disastrous erosion of its former base, the *Guardian* under Smith and Beinlin sought in relation to the SDS to repeat the tactics used by their predecessors with the Progressive party.

The *Guardian* pandered to the ultra-leftism of SDS on every important question, albeit sometimes with faint protest. In the 1968 presidential elections the *Guardian* joined SDS in the sectarian demand for an electoral "boycott."

The *Guardian* joined SDS in trying to convert the antiwar movement into a "multi-issue," "anti-imperialist" conglomerate. In a March 30, 1968, editorial, the *Guardian* declared:

"Opposing the Vietnam war in 1968 is not a radical demand. It is a liberal demand, founded on the correct premise that U. S. imperialism is losing in Vietnam."

The *Guardian* advocated meeting the police in an ultra-left confrontation at the Democratic party convention in Chicago in August 1968 when the majority of the organized antiwar movement and such groups as the SWP and the Young Socialist Alliance urged the political inadvisability of such a course. After the event, the *Guardian* voiced some mild criticism of those who had become victims partly because of following the advice previously offered them by the paper.

When factional differences in the SDS broke into the open in the spring of 1969, the *Guardian* lined up with the Weathermen in favor of the bureaucratic expulsion of the Maoist Progressive Labor party. In its July 5, 1969, issue, an editorial declared: "We support the expulsion because PL's line and practice on the Vietnam war and the national question is incorrect . . ." Unlike the line of the Weathermen!

This editorial hailed the "growth of Marxist-Leninist politics" in SDS—and

this only months before the complete disintegration of SDS.

In August 1969 the *Guardian* began to draw back from the ultra-left excesses it had helped to foster. It criticized its own past "mistakes," including "attacking certain actions because they were 'just against the war, and not anti-imperialist.'" This did not stop the *Guardian* from giving prior if somewhat critical endorsement to SDS's "Bring the War Home" fiasco in Chicago in October, called explicitly in opposition to the October 15 Moratorium and the November 15 March on Washington.

Afterwards, as usual, the *Guardian* criticized *the way* the SDS Chicago actions had been conducted.

For a time the *Guardian* supported the Revolutionary Youth Movement faction of SDS against the Weathermen. But now with the collapse of both factions, the paper has reached an impasse.

How did it happen that so many "assorted ultra-leftists, anarchists and other self-styled 'revolutionaries,'" as the *Guardian* describes them, were included in the staff? These were the very people Smith and Beinlin catered to and encouraged and presented in their pages as "the movement."

If Smith and Beinlin now reject "left adventurism," as they put it, can anyone be surprised that some of their protégés rebel?

## Moratorium Gives Up

The Vietnam Moratorium Committee, sponsor of the October 15 antiwar protests that involved millions of people throughout the United States, announced on April 19 that it was disbanding. Some of the committee's leaders will now work to support capitalist "peace" candidates; others have said they will join "community organizations."

The committee's demise comes in the face of indications of a revival of general antiwar sentiment, including a recent Gallup poll that showed support for Nixon's war policy in the U. S. dropped from 65 percent in January to only 48 percent in mid-April.

In a letter to their supporters, the Moratorium Committee said there is "little prospect of immediate change in the Administration's policy in Vietnam."

The Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, now the largest nationwide antiwar organization, has called for a conference of the entire antiwar movement to "discuss and project further nationally coordinated actions against the war."