



Written by on August 31, 2008

Recreating Riots

The assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. (in April) and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (in June) were flash points punctuating a months-long series of deadly race riots, student riots, and violent demonstrations: Detroit (43 killed, 1,189 injured, over 7,000 arrested); Newark (23 killed, 725 injured, 1,500 arrested); Washington, D.C. (12 killed, 1,097 injured, over 6,100 arrested, more than 1,200 buildings burned); and additional death, destruction, and tumult in more than 120 other cities and dozens of college campuses.



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Far from being spontaneous affairs, testimony and evidence presented in various government hearings showed that time after time these conflagrations had been lit by organizers of the Moscow-directed Communist Party USA, the Beijing-directed Progressive Labor Party, and the Trotskyite communist, Havana-aligned Socialist Workers Party, usually operating through front groups such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The leaders of these “student” groups were not students at all, but professional revolutionaries in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. Many had attended courses in riot-making and revolution in Communist China, Russia, North Vietnam, Cuba, and Czechoslovakia. For them, the “nonviolent” label was purely a cover.

Sol Stern was one of three dozen radicals who joined SDS leader Tom Hayden on a trip to the Czech city of Bratislava to meet with communist leaders after the deadly Newark riots. Stern later wrote that the other SDS leaders understood the Newark riots and the violent Columbia University demonstrations were part of “Hayden’s grand project to ‘bring the [Vietnam] war back home.’ The whole point was to provoke a confrontation” with the police.

“For Hayden and the various violence-prone SDS factions,” noted Stern, “Columbia was a dress rehearsal for the biggest showdown of all — the Chicago Democratic Convention. Hayden and Rennie Davis, his closest ally at Bratislava, set up shop in Chicago and spent four months planning a massive confrontation with the ‘war machine,’ otherwise known as the Chicago Police Department.”

With large swaths of American cities in ashes and ruin, Tom Hayden drew an illustration of a Molotov cocktail — the weapon most utilized to effect the devastation — for the cover of the *New York Review of Books*. And he wrote in favor of “organized violence,” in which the “conscious guerilla” would “carry the torch ... to white neighborhoods and downtown business districts” — and “shoot to kill.” Just before the convention, Abbie Hoffman, co-founder with Jerry Rubin of the Yippies, published a call to action in the July 7, 1968 issue of the counter-culture magazine *The Realist* in which he said, “We will burn Chicago to the ground!”

The Instigators

It is part of the liberal myth that the violence that erupted in Chicago in August 1968 resulted from



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actions by a brutal and overzealous police force against rambunctious — but mostly peaceful — demonstrators. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley is scorned for turning the city into an “armed camp” with thousands of police officers and National Guard and Army troops. However, in view of the widespread deadly violence in the preceding months and the efforts to disrupt the Republican National Convention in Miami a few weeks before — as well as the open threats from the likes of Hayden and Hoffman — Chicago city officials decided to err on the side of caution.

The show of force undoubtedly saved many lives. The 100,000 demonstrators Hayden and company had hoped for never materialized. According to other activists and leaders of various groups, they stayed away for two reasons: they disagreed with the SDS-Yippie push for more violent confrontation; and they were frightened off by the announced large police presence. So the 10,000-plus “students” who did show up in Chicago tended to be the more aggressive *provocateurs*. And provoke they did: attempting to break through police lines, surrounding and attacking isolated groups of police officers, smashing police car windows, defying orders to disperse illegal marches. Eyewitness accounts — by spectators, convention delegates, news reporters, as well as police officers — reported many instances of demonstrators hurling missiles at police, including rocks, bottles, golf balls studded with nails, wooden spears, flaming rags and sticks, firecrackers, beer cans filled with urine or caustic chemicals, and plastic baggies filled with feces.

Around 200 police officers were injured and more than 80 police cars were damaged or destroyed. Slightly more than 100 demonstrators were reported injured. Considering the times and the circumstances, the police reacted with remarkable restraint. But you wouldn't know that from most of the media accounts. Many of the reporters there clearly sided with the demonstrators and some TV camera crews actually helped stage events, ignoring the volleys of missiles being thrown at police and only showing the “brutal” police reaction against the “peaceful” protesters. However bad the cropped newsreel footage may have cast the police, the final tally is this: no one was killed, no police officer fired his weapon (though some would have been justified in doing so), injuries were minimal (compared to riots of the period), and Chicago was not “burned to the ground” (as the riot leaders had threatened, and as they had proven capable of doing in other cities).

Recreating 1968

Will the August 24-27 Democratic National Convention in Denver see a repeat of the violence and mayhem that marked the party's infamous Chicago convention 40 years ago? Denver officials and DNC organizers have certainly been considering that possibility. Recreate '68, an umbrella organization representing diverse groups that are planning demonstrations during the convention, has given cause for concern, announcing that it would make the Chicago chaos of '68 look small by comparison.

Recreate '68 spokesman Glenn Spagnuolo, who has become the regular face and voice of radical demonstrations in Colorado in recent years, has several times issued threats that ring ominous. In March, when Recreate '68 lost out in a lottery drawing for a permit to use the Civic Center as its staging ground for protests, Spagnuolo promised a massive conflict that could turn violent. “We're having our protest at Civic Center,” the *Denver Post* reported “a livid Glenn Spagnuolo” as saying, upon learning that he would not receive the permit. “We're not going to give up Civic Center park to the Democrats,” he continued. “They are creating a very dangerous situation.”

“When things blow up because the police have to enforce a permit that the Democrats got, don't blame us for that,” Spagnuolo warned. “Blame the Democrats for trying to silence dissent in the city of Denver.” The Recreate '68 organizers say they are expecting 25,000 to 50,000 demonstrators to pour



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into Denver. And according to Spagnuolo, "If the cops try to stop us, we'll see what happens."

Stung by public criticism of these provocative threats, Recreate '68 leaders point to their "statement of non-violence and principles," which proclaims: "We are resolved that our group will not instigate violence against human beings as a means to end this system of violence and injustice." However, its member organizations and many of those organizations' individual members have long histories of making similar statements, while instigating violence.

In this, as in so many other things, is the Recreate '68 network merely copying the tactics of their heroes, the radicals of '68? Prior to the 1968 Chicago riots, David Dellinger, leader of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (otherwise known as Mobe or NMC), stated: "Our demonstrations shall be entirely peaceful.... We are not seeking a confrontation." That, of course, was a lie. Several months earlier he had led the violent confrontation at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Dellinger, who had made several trips to consult with communist leaders in Cuba, North Vietnam, and Czechoslovakia, and who described himself as a "non-Soviet communist," saw the "Pentagon siege" as practice for Chicago.

In the November 1967 issue of the pro-communist *Liberation* magazine, which he founded and edited, Dellinger included an article referring to the attack on the Pentagon as a "tactical event to be analyzed and criticized as one possible model for future physical confrontation." It observed that "there will be more occasions for physical confrontations and they ought to be much better planned than the Pentagon was. Can we do better at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago?" By "better" he clearly did *not* mean more peaceful.

The Gang Is All Here

And who are some of the other "peaceful" groups in the Recreate '68 coalition? Unconventional Denver (UD) is a local coordinating group for a national network of anarchists that is planning to disrupt the convention. "We're going to physically stand in the way of what's going to happen," says Tim Simons, one of the UD organizers. "The anarchists who are interested in confronting the Democratic National Convention are interested in doing more than just marching," according to Simons. "We're interested in disrupting the spectacle of the DNC."

Then there is the Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist Movement-Denver (RAIMD), a Maoist group whose website freely admits: "One of the videos on the DVD that we distribute encourages people to 'hate Amerikkka, it's the right thing to do.'" A poster on the site features a sea of red fists surrounding an outline map of United States that is filled in with Stars and Stripes of the American flag. The poster proclaims "Death to Amerika!"

Of course, any attempted recreation of Chicago '68 would be incomplete without the SDS — the badly misnamed Students for a Democratic Society. Not to worry, the fractious, communist-directed organization, which dissolved in 1969, has been resurrected, with some of the SDS old guard serving as mentors to the new generation of revolutionaries. Like many of the other organizations gearing up for Denver, the new SDS plans to follow up their activities in Colorado with similar demonstrations at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul during the first week of September.

In its "Call to Action," the SDS says "we are calling on SDS chapters to both endorse and participate in the direct action strategies for disrupting the DNC laid [sic] forward by Unconventional Action, DNC Disruption, Recreate '68, and Tent State." For the uninitiated, when the SDS and similar folk (like the groups it mentions) use the term "direct action" it usually means illegal — and often violent — activity.



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The SDS “call to action” continues: “We are calling on SDS chapters to embrace a diversity of tactics.... Those participating in direct action to shut down the DNC will be free to shape their actions as they see fit, using the tactics they consider appropriate.”

The coded text is SDS’ way of telling its cadres to be flexible and to use “whatever works” — legal or illegal, violent or peaceful — depending on the circumstances. As to be expected, some of the demonstrators are a little nervous about the talk of “direct action” and the inflammatory rhetoric coming from the SDS/Recreate ’68. Some may be concerned because they are genuinely committed to nonviolence. Others, however, are cagily distancing themselves from the publicly bellicose elements to avoid scaring off peaceful demonstrators, to avoid identifying themselves in advance to law enforcement, and to avoid providing statements that could later be used in court to prove premeditation and conspiracy.

On June 9, the *Denver Post* reported: “Activists who plan to protest at the Democratic National Convention this summer are splitting with the umbrella organization, Recreate ’68, because of concerns over its rhetoric and tactics.” The breakaway groups formed a new coalition called Alliance for Real Democracy, which, the *Post* reported, “is a network of local and national groups, including Code Pink, United for Peace and Justice, the American Friends Service Committee, the Green Party of Colorado,... and Students for Peace and Justice.” However, it is worth noting that the same *Post* story reported that “some of the activist groups will also continue to work with Re-create 68.”

That is all *very convenient*, of course. First, publicly establish deniability of association, then (wink, wink) continue working with those you’ve “disassociated” from. That is almost certainly the case with so-called nonviolent groups such as Code Pink and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) mentioned above. Both groups have long histories of involvement in violent demonstrations.

Code Pink’s co-founders, Medea Benjamin and Jodie Evans, are prime examples of *faux* nonviolent activists who have been playing both sides of the street for years. Both women are actively leading Code Pink’s anti-DNC and anti-RNC activities. Benjamin, a hard-core Castroite, who spent several years in Communist Cuba training under Fidel’s watchful secret police, the DGI, was one of the street managers of the notoriously violent and tumultuous “Battle for Seattle” protests against the World Trade Organization in 1999. Many of the protesters who marched there were peaceable, but the direct action professionals of the Ruckus Society easily manipulated them and used them for cannon fodder, leading to hundreds of injuries, hundreds of arrests, and millions of dollars in property damage. Both Benjamin and Evans are longtime close associates of the notorious Ruckus Society anarchists. Evans sits on the board of trustees of the anarchist Rain Forest Action Network with Ruckus Society founder Mike Roselle.

The Code Pink website not too subtly salutes its infamous anarchist comrades with frequent web page references to “Raising a Ruckus” and “ruckus-raising” activities. In 2006, Benjamin and Evans joined up with fellow Code Pinkster Cindy Sheehan for a journey to Venezuela to schmooze with one of their favorite ruckus-raisers (after Fidel Castro, that is): Hugo Chavez. The three “peace ladies” apparently had no trouble obtaining an audience with El Presidente in Caracas; a photo of the trio (widely available on the Internet) enjoying the warm embrace of none other than the huggable Hugo himself documents one of their “Hanoi Jane” Kodak moments from the trip. Comrade Chavez, of course, smashes political opponents and protesters in Venezuela with an iron fist, but that doesn’t seem to bother the Code Pink leaders.

The American Friends Service Committee’s public disassociation from Recreate ’68 is, likewise,



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suspect. For the better part of three-quarters of a century the AFSC has supported violent and radical causes — both at home and abroad. Most striking has been its consistent support for communist dictatorships, from Mao Zedong's China and Ho Chi Minh's North Vietnam, to Castro's Cuba, the Sandinistas' Nicaragua, and Mugabe's Zimbabwe. The AFSC played a central role in the '68 Chicago riots, providing its office at 407 S. Dearborn as a command post for the SDS leaders and David Dellinger's Mobe. Then, as now, the AFSC activists worked closely with the radical attorneys of the ACLU and the National Lawyers Guild (NLG, cited as "the foremost legal bulwark of the Communist Party" by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1950), providing tactical, logistical, and legal support to the mayhem makers. The ACLU and NLG, naturally, are providing legal counsel to the current protest organizers in Denver and St. Paul.

Whether due to political correctness or intimidation by the ACLU/NLG lawyers, most of Denver's public officials appear to be bending over backward to accommodate the demonstrators' rights of assembly and expression — even though many of those same demonstrators have long public records of denying those same rights to other fellow Americans. Case in point: Recreate '68's Glenn Spagnuolo, a veteran activist of Act Up, the militant (and often violent) homosexual "direct action" organization. For the past several years, he has been one of the chief instigators of the Denver demonstrations aimed at stopping the annual Columbus Day Parade sponsored by Italian-American heritage groups. Spagnuolo and his fellow activists are not satisfied with the right to publicly denounce Christopher Columbus, the United States, Christianity, and Western Civilization. Instead, they have insisted on going a step further, breaking through police lines and physically blocking the parade with their bodies and barricades — to prevent other Americans from exercising the very rights they demand for themselves.

Spagnuolo and his anti-Columbus agitators have been upping the ante each year, forcing the police to make more arrests in order for the Columbus Day parade to continue. At an April 2005 rally, Spagnuolo told the crowd, "Don't sit back and wait for an invitation to the revolution. Riot about something real." It's actions like these, together with calls for riot and revolution, and the expected influx of thousands of like-minded individuals into the Denver area that have officials like Denver City Councilman Charlie Brown concerned.

"Why would anyone want to re-create what happened in Chicago in 1968?" Brown asks. Good question, one that more people should be asking. Brown continued: "There were people hurt and injured — and these people want to make it look 'like a small get-together.' That's a serious threat to our city." That much should be obvious, but it may also present a larger threat to the entire country.

Why Riot?

Whether or not the Chicago rioters of '68 intended it, the effect of their actions was to further empower the government they claimed to oppose, and to further erode the personal freedoms of all Americans. Exploiting the Chicago riots and the string of similar rampages across the country in the preceding months, the media and political elites pushed through legislation that transferred vast new police powers to the federal government. One of the most important results along those lines was the Gun Control Act of 1968. Another was the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act that, among other things, created the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, the main federal agency that has been involved in nationalizing our local police departments over the past four decades.

The more immediate political effect of the Chicago DNC riots was to boost Richard Nixon, running on a "law and order" campaign, into the White House in one of the closest presidential races in U.S. history. Although Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey, then Lyndon Johnson's vice president, lost the



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election, the riots may have helped him, as well, rather than hurt him, as conventional wisdom has held. Humphrey, a lifelong socialist activist, was (unbeknownst to most Americans) a member of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society/League for Industrial Democracy, the organization that created, sponsored, and financed the SDS. However, in comparison to the rioting radicals in the streets, Humphrey looked relatively conservative.

If violent demonstrations occur this year outside the conventions, it should have a similar effect: making John McCain and even Barack Obama look good compared to the anti-establishment rabble-rousers in the streets.



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