

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

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TO ORGANIZERS AND NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

The enclosed report on the New American Movement
(NAM) is for your information.

Comradely,



Larry Seigle
National Office

The New American Movement in Chicago
by Garrett Brown, May 15, 1977

The New American Movement tried for several years to put together a fusion of a number of groups on the left, primarily ex-new left organizations and individuals. These discussions ended some time ago in failure and all involved have since decided to go their own way, with NAM deciding to build itself as an independent and active entity.

Exactly what NAM considers itself to be is something which is still unclear because of its very conscious anti-Leninist position on vanguard parties, democratic centralism, and "party lines." Some in the organization seem to feel that it should be only a federation of local, community organizations, oriented to building "grass roots" coalitions on the local level on local issues that NAM can then inject a "socialist" perspective into. Others apparently feel the need for a national organization.

All are opposed to hammering out a line on virtually any question, defining NAM's concept of socialism and its position on national and international issues on an almost personal and individual basis. Currently the organization is preparing for a convention on August 11-14 and internal discussion bulletins are being circulated on these very issues of organization and orientation.

Their national office is on the north side of Chicago and has four staff members. Rich Healey and Dolores Wilber are on national staff, as are Roberta Lynch and Nick Rabkin. I gather that most of their activity is connected with publishing Moving On and the internal discussion bulletins, organizing finances, and giving some degree of political orientation to different chapters.

They have two chapters in Chicago, one on the north-side and one in Hyde Park/University of Chicago. Both have about 20 members, to my knowledge, but few trade unionists or members of oppressed minorities. They seem to have primarily college educated whites in service type jobs.

Neither chapter is very active in areas where the party is, but they have been recruiting fairly steadily. NAM has played no role whatsoever in any city wide antiracist or ERA work. Several of their members were active on Harold Washington's primary bid in the mayoral election, but I could never tell whether it was officially sanctioned (though

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I suspect it was). Their major orientation seems to be a number of community organizations and issues like housing, public utilities, etc. They pick up members in these coalitions, apparently, but they are less successful in holding them. I know of several people that have quit NAM recently, and the activity of independents around these issues has been very episodic.

The University/Hyde Park chapter has gained a number of new members, but NAM's activities are fairly restricted. They have not been active around South Africa, ERA, or a broad tuition increase coalition. They have been active in a very discredited student government, and they publish a regular campus newsletter. They also sponsor classes on various aspects of Marxism, some rather esoteric in character in my opinion.

I am less familiar with the activities of the northside chapter, which apparently is not linked with any campus. There is a fairly substantial radical community on the northside and a number of limited community type organizations which they seem to relate to. They have something of a forum series on the northside, the last one I attended featured Dorothy Healey on "Popular Fronts and the New Populism."

NAM played a minor role in the Steelworkers Fight Back campaign through volunteering one of their national staff people for full time work in the Fight Back office. They don't have any members in the USWA, nor did they seem to recruit anyone during the course of the campaign, but they were able to keep in touch with developments. They had no influence in any decision making, but were allowed to donate the time of one of their members.

NAM has some influence, after a fashion, in the publication of In These Times. A number of the national staff reporters are NAM members, such as David Moberg, Dan Marshall, and Judy MacLean. Moberg has described NAM's participation in ITT as one of chafing under the politics and direction of publisher and editor James Weinstein. A former professor and author on early American socialism, Weinstein is close to DSOC's brand of socialism.

For a time, as I understand it, NAM thought they would be able to take over the paper, but they have become disabused of that notion and the idea that ITT could be used as an organizing tool. Weinstein recently made a pitch at the DSOC convention for DSOC's franchise, but I do not know results of that effort. The paper has not featured any prominent DSOCer.

One interesting anecdote: I was with a comrade who sold MacLean a copy of the latest Militant with Nancy Cole's response to the ITT article on the NOW convention. MacLean made no bones about the fact she does not care for the SWP and was less than polite in expressing this.

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In summary, this upcoming convention could put the lasting stamp on NAM. The organization is five years old and much of its early uncertainties appear to be disappearing in the minds of the national leadership.

NAM sees itself to the left of DSOC, as evidenced by Roberta Lynch's effective column on DSOC's politics in ITT but it has far from broken with the central ideas of social democracy. At Dorothy Healey's forum the popular front and new "populism" were both given a very favorable accounting. Moberg wrote a sympathetic account of Washington's primary campaign in ITT, and I have had several NAMers tell me that the Democratic Party is just a "shell" whose political content can be changed by the candidate and the issues.

Except for the University of Chicago we run into NAM infrequently in our day to day work. The organization does have an impact on some old New Left types, and their successors today, and we will run into them somewhere along the line.