

LETTERS

What a cop believes

Victoria, B. C.
Dear Sirs: Paul Hoffman's article, "The Blue Backlash" (*The Nation*, Dec. 7), disturbs me. . . . For instance, he states:

Deputy Commissioner Walter Arm said earlier that he knew of no Birchites on the force and did not plan to look for any—virtually an open invitation to the society.

Does Mr. Hoffman suggest that all police commissioners be encouraged to investigate the political affiliations of their officers—and dismiss those whose precise leanings do not gibe with his own? This, it would seem to me, is an open invitation to far more horrifying possibilities. . . .

Witch hunts, whether urged by the Right or the Left, should be opposed. A police officer, like a college professor, has certain duties. If he fails to perform them adequately or fairly, he should be relieved. But it is certainly dangerous to suggest that guilt by association is any more valid in one spectrum of the political scale than it is in another.

George Cuomo
Department of English
University of Victoria

Charlottesville, Va.
Dear Sirs: I read Paul Hoffman's article with interest, and not a little concern. However, police sympathy for the John Birch Society and other right-wing groups and movements should not be too surprising. . . . Policemen, like professional soldiers, are recruited very disproportionately from among "authoritarian personalities". . . whose character structure combines high conventionalism and identification with established authorities and the prevailing social system, on the one hand, with a certain attraction to violence, brutality and bossing people around, on the other. . . . T. Peter Park

Coexistence in Hell

Los Altos, Calif.
Dear Sirs: Not having read the book, *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (fine title that), I am in no position to evaluate Webster Schott's review of it (*The Nation*, Dec. 7), beyond saying his own excitement over the book roused my interest in a figure new to me. But no discernible connection exists between his examination of the book and his various shotgun charges against what he apparently thinks of as the literary "establishment." ("While the palefaces have gone off to Stanford or the Iowa Writers Workshop. . . .") With successful people like Mailer, Baldwin, Bur-

roughs, Rechy, Updike, O'Hara and Donleavy around, it seems curious, even eccentric, to suggest a lack of literature "written from the gut," still less that it is in especial disfavor. Worse, it is depressingly provincial to attack writers indiscriminately because they occupy different circles of hell from one's favorite. It smacks too much of accepting *Time's* very own aesthetic. The bitterest work of all may yet come from the academic writers; where the best will come from, even the most astute critic cannot say.
R. D. Lakin

Rosenberg footnote

New York City
Dear Sirs: Readers of *The Nation*, many of whom must have read Fred Cook's excellent *The FBI Nobody Knows* (Macmillan) were, I regret to say . . . misinformed on the nature of my intervention in the case. In a footnote on pp. 411-12 Mr. Cook states: "The theory that the Communists wanted the conviction of the Rosenbergs and actually conspired to get it has been forcibly expounded by Irwin Edelman, a former West Coast Communist. . . ." Nowhere in anything I have written on the case have I stated or implied anything of the sort. . . . The American Communist Party and its press played an ugly part in the Rosenberg case, but the motivation was not at all what Mr. Cook assumes.

Readers of *The Nation* can get a correct summary of my views on the Rosenberg-Sobell case by reading a transcript of a forty-minute broadcast I delivered last June over radio station WBAI. I shall be glad to mail a copy to anyone in the United States, Canada or Mexico upon receipt of 25c to cover cost and postage. My address is: G.P.O. Box 463, New York, N.Y. 10001.
Irwin Edelman

A press for CORE

San Francisco, Calif.
Dear Sirs: The San Francisco Chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) . . . has carried on the fight for equality in the streets, in the courtroom and at the conference table; it has signed dozens of agreements opening up hundreds of jobs for members of minority groups; it has succeeded in desegregating many of the large rental agencies of this city. . . .

The Public Relations Committee of our chapter is presently engaged in a campaign to raise funds to purchase an offset printing press. Faced, for the most part, with an actively hostile press, the S. F. Chapter urgently needs the means to print and publish. . . .

Checks should be made out to Public Relations Committee, S. F. CORE, and sent to San Francisco CORE, 1686 O'Farrell St., San Francisco, Calif. We will also welcome any donations of graphic arts equipment—T squares, a light table, ortho film, Artype, Phototype, etc. We are even equipped to receive a used press!

Mark Hansen
Public Relations Committee
S. F. CORE

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Journey to Understanding

FOUR WITNESSES TO A MISSISSIPPI SUMMER

Introduction Howard Zinn

Neither a small army of newspaper correspondents, nor all the power of the electronic mass media, has been able to convey to the country at large the reality of Mississippi. Perhaps our senses have been bludgeoned in this century by too many images; fact and fiction have become indistinguishable, and now even the starkest horrors are only scenes in a global theatre of the absurd.

So it was not only desperation, but genius, that inspired the Mississippi civil rights workers a year ago to call for help from Northern ministers, lawyers, doctors, students, teachers, laborers. Their arrival last summer meant that a line of 1,000 people would begin moving back and forth across that desert of indifference (or worse: token concern) which has always separated the rest of the nation from the Deep South. Now—except for the 150 who insisted on staying—they are back North, creating little circles of unrest wherever they move, trying to communicate, as only one living being can to another in the freshness of his own astonishment, what it was like to be in Mississippi.

Those of us who have spent some time in that state return in turmoil and in awe. It is a place that stretches ceilings to their limits. There, in one place, you find the worst and the best of this nation: malevolence matched by courage, life confronting death. What one feels most is not despair, however, but indignation, because Mississippi, unlike South Africa, is part of a nation that professes liberty. Someone returning from Hell might want to convey to the world, not the nature of the Devil, which is already known, but the fact that what he endured took place within sight of God. Those home from Mississippi try to explain to their friends

why it is not enough to belabor the warped officialdom of that state and its murderous deputies, and why the citizenry must press the point of moral responsibility hardest against those in the nation who have both the knowledge of right and wrong, and the power to change the situation. That means the President of the United States and the Department of Justice. There is too little outrage in the country to waste it on less than the federal government which, tomorrow, in all legality, could begin to transform the state of Mississippi as a model of purposeful social change.

In some ways, we ought to be grateful for Mississippi. A nation needs to look at itself in the most revealing of mirrors, and Mississippi is just that for the United States—not an oddity in a glass case, but a particularly ugly reflection of the rest of the country. Because of this, the sojourn there of 1,000 Northerners could have a spe-

cial value. Prodded by what they saw, they now might begin to look with new vision into the mississippian crevices back home: into the back rooms of police stations, the municipal courts and the jails, the ghettos, the factories, the unemployment offices.

Rousseau once wrote: "We have physicists, geometers, chemists, astronomers, poets, musicians, and painters in plenty, but we have no longer a citizen among us."

Who could have dreamed up a better plan to destroy popular government than to divide us all into self-sealing occupational groups and professional societies, each diverting civic energy to its own narrow end? But last summer some uncommon common purpose brought to various Negro communities in Mississippi a New York lawyer, a California carpenter, a Southern white minister, a Negro physician, a Yale philosopher. If we keep rubbing away at the traditional lines that divide us, we may yet build a body of citizens in America powerful enough to make democracy work.

The Lawyer William M. Kunstler

It is impossible for one man to analyze the feelings of others in a given situation. As one of the many lawyers who spent part of the climactic summer of '64 in Mississippi, I can speak only in the most subjective terms. I hope, though, that from my personal experience I can strike chords common to those members of the bar who, like myself, found that being a civil rights lawyer was much more than knowing statutes or understanding precedents.

Recently, I was exchanging views with one of the many young lawyers who had volunteered to serve in Mississippi. "I didn't get a chance to practice much law," he said, "but I never felt more like a lawyer in my life."

In a phrase, this probably best

expresses the feelings of every out-of-state attorney who responded to the call of the National Lawyers Guild and the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee for legal help for the Council of Federated Organizations last summer. The opportunity to participate usefully in a profound social revolution more than made up for the limited access to its courts permitted by the state of Mississippi. And no lawyers ever had finer clients than the hundreds

William M. Kunstler, author of The Case for Courage, Beyond a Reasonable Doubt and other books, teaches at New York Law School and Pace College. He is chairman of the legal advisory committee of COFO and one of three attorneys representing the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

Howard Zinn is the author of *The Southern Mystique* (Knopf) and *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Beacon).