

The *Platypus Affiliated Society* and new *Students for a Democratic Society* present a public forum on:

40 years of 1968: The problematic drama of the past in the present

Thursday, May 8, 2008, 6PM School of the Art Institute of Chicago 280 S. Columbus Drive main auditorium

Karl Marx wrote in 1852 that "the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (*The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*), and complained of the rehearsal of past historical dramas in the politics of his day. Marx cited Hegel that "great world-historic facts and personages appear twice," but added "the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."

More than 150 years after Marx, in our time, after 40 years, the traditions of the world-historic moment of 1968 prove a problematic legacy. What is to be learned, both positively and negatively, from the 1960s New Left? How has the "New" Left grown old? And can it be redeemed? In what ways must we reconsider and depart from this legacy, in order to have an effective Left for today and the future? How can we avoid becoming trapped in the ruins of the political movements that have preceded us?

Join us for a panel discussion and audience Q&A, with distinguished veterans of the 1960s New Left, as we reflect critically upon the social and political necessities of the present and the obstacles to an adequate emancipatory imagination expressed in the inappropriate masks of the '60s we continue to wear in contemporary politics. -- What would it mean today, more than a generation after the 1960s, to start in the 21st Century what Marx demanded of the 19th Century, to take our poetry from the future?

Panelists: (moderator: James Vaughn, Platypus)

- **Bill Ayers**, former SDS, Revolutionary Youth Movement, Weather Underground
- **Chris Cutrone**, Platypus
- **Atiya Khan**, Platypus
- **Mike Klonsky**, former SDS, Revolutionary Youth Movement, October League
- **Prexy Nesbitt**, former Columbia University Student Afro-American Society during 1968 strike

Questions for panelists:

(Panelists' opening remarks should be at most 5-7 min., or 500-750 words or 2-3 double-spaced pages. Please respond to some of the following questions into your introductory statement. Those points not addressed in your opening remarks may be reserved for subsequent panelist discussion and audience Q&A. Panelists: Please arrive by 5:30PM for set-up.)

For all of the following questions for which this is appropriate, please consider the question in two dimensions: (1) What did you think then (i.e., in 1968); and (2) What do you think now?

1. What was the historical heritage of the preceding, "Old" Left (of the 1920s-30s)? Why was a "new" Left necessary in the 1960s? What inspired and informed this "new" Left? -- What events, movements, thinkers?

2. Why did separatist politics (according to, e.g., race, gender, and sexuality, Black Power, feminism, gay liberation, etc.) become so salient by the late '60s? Why was it necessary, if so, to organize separately? -- How did ideas of "self-determination" affect and inform politics in the 1960s?

Despite such separatism, how was the common "movement" understood? What, if anything, was the basis for the unity and solidarity of the "movement?" (Why, do you think, did all these various diverse aspects of the movement emerge at roughly the same time, by the late '60s?)

3. Why was the labor movement seen more as part of the problem rather than as part of any potential solutions to social and political problems in the 1960s? (For example, the 1960s Students for a Democratic Society broke up in 1969 over attempts to create a "worker-student alliance," with those resisting this orientation striking off on the basis of the "revolutionary" character of "youth.") How, if in any ways, was the labor movement part of the problem? What about the role of labor today? Do we need a "worker-student alliance" today? If so, why not then, or did it turn out to have been necessary, after all?

4. How was the U.S. role in the war in Vietnam understood in relation to other social and political issues? What were the differences between the early and late '60s movement, e.g., from the Civil Rights Movement to the anti-war movement? What impacts did this shift of focus have on the possibilities for progressive politics?

5. It is said that those of you participating in the 1960s movement(s) thought you could have changed the world. How was this change imagined? What kind of transformation would have been involved? What was thought to have been necessary and possible? How and why, do you think, did your attempts to change the world fail? Or did they succeed? How do we now stand as regards such demand for change? What lessons can be learned from this demand and its success/failure?

How, in your estimation, has the world changed since the 1960s? How does your sense of such change inform your thinking now, both retrospectively about what happened then, and about the world as it stands and what might be necessary to change it today?