

Date: Fri, 2 May 2008 14:30:04 -0500
From: bblumb@artic.edu
Subject: Re: I'm not participating
To: Mike <michaelklonsky@yahoo.com>

Mike,

The event was not initially conceived as a debate, but rather as a critical reconsideration of the events and politics of the 1960s in light of how they continue to inform today's political imagination. It began to look like it would be a debate after you sent an email which took issue with this basic premise.

You are correct that I didn't let you know that Chris would also be on the panel. For this I apologize, it was an error on my part. Chris has been Platypus's main speaker, and we decided, after I sent you the email with the details, that he should also sit on the panel. I should have informed you of this, but I failed to act responsibly in this instance.

As per why I did not apologize in my last email: I felt that Chris already had addressed the issues you raised. He said that we regret any offense you might have taken to our framing and explained that it was not meant to deride the panelists, or be dismissive of their experiences but was rather an attempt to denaturalize the course of 1960s history. I do regret and apologize for not having consulted you and the other panelists on how you would be identified in our promotional material. We should have informed you of this, but we thought, perhaps inappropriately, that it was readily available information which was meaningful in that it located you the historical moment.

As to the nature of Platypus as organization: I tried to make sure that this was not a mystery to you. I gave you a brief history of our group, including our involvement with SDS, and provided you with links to our website and newspaper which contain in detail everything the group has done and said. Just to clarify, we are not a Trotskyist group, we do not hold political positions as an organization, nor do we by any means support U.S. occupation. This idea of us is a widespread fallacy, which comes from our willingness to critique the anti-war movement and certain reactionary forces fighting against Imperialism today. Our mandate is to critically reinvestigate Leftism, and to to be an educational institution promoting this reinvestigation on the Left. Hence the scope of our activities: panels, newspapers reading groups etc.

We have never been deceitful, although perhaps negligent, and we are certainly now being misunderstood.

Again, I would ask of you to reconsider you decision to withdraw, as I feel that if we can get beyond mutual suspicion and recrimination, we could hold a worthwhile discussion.

Best,
Ben

--- Quoting Mike <michaelklonsky@yahoo.com>:

Ben,

Why didn't you tell me this was going to be a "debate"?

Why didn't you tell me you were having Mr. Cutrone on the panel? Why didn't you tell me the debate was over some sectarian issues about the left?, i.e. "the left is dead, long live the left" (whatever the hell that means).

Why didn't you ask me, and the other panelists, as is customary, how they wanted to be described in the publicity materials? Why did you portray this as a request to speak to students about SDS and the struggles 40 years ago to build the movement? Why didn't you tell us there was already an agenda and that we were being suckered into an argument between Trotskyist groups--one of whom defends and supports our "mission" in Iraq while attacking the "new left" and the black liberation struggle? If you would have been straight with me (us) in your first request, I could have decided if I wanted to come and spend an evening doing ideological struggle. But instead, you made it sound like you were working on this with my friend Paul Eitzik and that it was a program to educate students about the struggles of the '60s.

Then when I raise some criticisms about the flyer and the agenda, I'm basically told by Mr. Cutrone to keep my comments brief and accused of violating "our trust." Now you tell me basically the same thing and that you've laid out \$100 -- so there's no need to respond to any of my issues. No word in response to the questions I raised. Not a word of apology for misrepresenting (intentionally or otherwise) the nature of the program. Not a word of explanation or an offer to make any changes or compromise? Only your lame rationale that you laid out \$100 bucks and worked hard on the publicity?

Well, I'll tell you something Ben. I don't know you. Paul tells me you're a decent enough guy and I believe him. I'm sure you and your comrades have worked hard on this program and I'm sorry about the money. (Don't forget, we were all giving up an evening to speak for free and never asked for a dime for ourselves). But I've been around too long to be played by sectarians like Cutrone who want to use SDS and groups like it, as their ideological play pen. I had enough of that with PL in SDS back in the day.

I'm sure you, Cutrone and Platypus will survive my abstention and that your forum will do fine without me.

Mike Klonsky

--- On Fri, 5/2/08, bblumb@artic.edu <bblumb@artic.edu> wrote:
From: bblumb@artic.edu <bblumb@artic.edu>
Subject: Re: I'm not participating
To: "Mike" <michaelklonsky@yahoo.com>
Cc: bayers@uic.edu
Date: Friday, May 2, 2008, 12:24 PM

Mike,

I am shocked and confused by this last minute decision. Since April 16th you have been aware of the framing we intended for the panel. So I do not understand why you suddenly feel so antagonistic to our event. Despite any idea you have developed about Chris Cutrone, you should realize that he is not the only one making arrangements for the event. Several members of our group have given it substantial amounts of their labor, including designing and putting up the posters, advertising with the local newspapers, working with the school bureaucracy, inviting panelists, etc. We also spent time as a group developing the questions given to you and all of the panelist last week. I have personally spent many valuable hours working on this in the final semester of my undergraduate career. For you to jeopardize the event by withdrawing last minute is to be disrespectful of my time and effort, as well as the labor of all of the others involved.

Also, there is no way to remove your name from our promotional material, which of course, with less than week until the event, we have already distributed. We spent over a hundred dollars collected from our membership to print the posters, so there is no way we can afford to re-print them.

I encourage you to reconsider your decision to withdraw, and to open yourself up to the idea that the disagreements we might have (which to my mind are as of yet unknown) could constitute a educational public debate/discussion.

Best,
Ben

--- Quoting Mike <michaelklonsky@yahoo.com>:

Ben,

After further consideration, I find that in good conscience, I am unable and unwilling to take part in the Platypus/SDS event. Please remove my name where possible from your promotional material and any connection to Mr. Cutrone.

Mike Klonsky

--- On Wed, 4/30/08, Chris Cutrone <schwartzweiss@yahoo.com> wrote:
From: Chris Cutrone <schwartzweiss@yahoo.com>
Subject: 1968 forum questions for panelists' opening remarks - w/PDF version
To: prexynsb@gmail.com, bayers@uic.edu, atiya@uchicago.edu, michaelklonsky@yahoo.com
Date: Wed, 30 Apr 2008 11:04:12 -0700 (PDT)

Hi, Mike,

We haven't met or even corresponded previously so I think we need to be careful about the tone problems that come with email.

Also, because everyone has been included in your email, this correspondence starts to take on the character of a public discussion and so cannot unfortunately be built on the trust of confidence but can only take the form of declarations, not the best kind of dialogue. So let's please try to keep this correspondence as brief and simple as possible if not strictly in the form of particular questions or issues.

First of all I want to apologize for any offense you might have taken from anything about the promotion for the event. I'm not sure what else to say about this other than to point out that we thought, perhaps rather naively, that we could be critical without simply being negative, and that we could problematize history without being dismissive or otherwise pejorative.

The identification of panelists in the promo materials was based on where they were and what trajectories they had around 1968 and its aftermath, because the point of the forum is a retrospective appraisal of events, actions and thinking of the time.

We are assuming a Left perspective and audience and a sympathetic critique in good faith that we thought all the panelists would be up for and interested in pursuing without embarrassment, a frank dialogue on historical roots for present problems for the Left.

Looking forward to meeting (all of) you,
Chris

--- On Wed, 4/30/08, Mike <michaelklonsky@yahoo.com> wrote:
From: Mike <michaelklonsky@yahoo.com>
Subject: Re: 1968 forum questions for panelists' opening remarks - w/PDF version
To: prexynsb@gmail.com, bayers@uic.edu, atiya@uchicago.edu, ccutrone@speedsite.com
Date: Wednesday, April 30, 2008, 10:39 AM

Chris,

I am still planning to take part in your 1968 forum. But I have to protest the negative tone presented in your literature about the forum and the movements of the '60s that several folks have pointed out to me. I wasn't told beforehand that the movement was being presented mainly as a negative examples for today's activists, ie. "separatist politics," "trapped in the ruins," "masks," "obstacles to an adequate emancipatory imagination expressed in the inappropriate masks of the '60s." This all sounds like a lot of Time Magazine bullshit.

Nor was I (we?) consulted about the descriptors under my name. I didn't expect this treatment from the good folks at the School of the Art Institute, SDS or Platypus when I volunteered to speak.

Mike Klonsky

--- On Tue, 4/29/08, Chris Cutrone <schwartzweiss@yahoo.com> wrote:
From: Chris Cutrone <schwartzweiss@yahoo.com>
Subject: 1968 forum questions for panelists' opening remarks - w/PDF version
To: prexynsb@gmail.com, bayers@uic.edu, atiya@uchicago.edu, michaelklonsky@yahoo.com
Date: Tuesday, April 29, 2008, 11:03 PM

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

Questions for panelists:

(Panelists' opening remarks should be at most 5-7 min. [or 500-750 words or 2-3 double-spaced pages]. Please incorporate some of the following questions into your introductory statement. Those points not addressed in your opening remarks may be reserved for subsequent responses during the forum, in the panelist discussion and audience Q and A. 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 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?

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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:

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

(Moderator: James Vaughn, Platypus)

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