

PACIFISM: A FAILED FAMILY ACHIEVEMENT

by Edward Jayne

May 17, 2007

Shakespeare gives King Henry V the opportunity to laud patriotism and military duty--“They shall be famed,” etc.--in Act IV, scene 3 of his history, *Henry V*. This occurs a couple dozen pages after the episode, Act II, scene 2, in which he condemns Richard of Conisburgh (the 3rd Earl of Cambridge) and two others for treason and sentences them to be beheaded just a week preceding his 1415 invasion of France that culminated with the Battle of Agincourt. This cruel dispensation of justice seems to have been appropriate, for Richard was indeed in the thick of a treasonous conspiracy (the so-called Southampton Plot) to assassinate Henry.

Unfortunately, Richard happens to have been my remote ancestor, so I take perverse satisfaction in his failed accomplishment. As the great-grandson of Edward III, he was also the grandfather of King Richard III, my great uncle 18 generations back by his older sister Ann. Richard III was a lover of children (for example his two royal nephews whom he dotingly buried under a castle staircase), and also a true equestrian--hence his final words “My kingdom for a horse” at Bosworth Field, when he was cut to pieces by relatives of the Lancastrian branch in a more successful family conspiracy.

Richard III’s death can be said to have made sense, but I’m not certain why two generations earlier Richard of Conisburgh sought to murder his cousin, Henry V, replacing him with Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March. It could have been because Richard supported the Lollards (including Sir John Oldcastle, the prototype for Shakespeare’s Fallstaff), whose holy cause inspired by Wyclif anticipated the Protestant movement a century later. For both Henry IV and Henry V persecuted the Lollards despite their having been favored by John of Gaunt, son of Edward III and the grandfather of both Henry V and Richard of Conisburgh. Then again, Richard might have sympathized with the French, who were desperately making every concession they could think of (including bribes, I’m sure) to discourage Henry V from invading France--a bloodthirsty grab for territory that wasn’t resolved for another forty years despite French successes inspired by Joan of Arc. Of course Shakespeare avoided all these considerations and in “Henry VI,” Part I, did everything in his power to vilify Joan, wicked strumpet that she was.

I myself shared Richard of Conisburgh’s experience during the mid-sixties, when I helped to perpetuate the Vietnam War without having intended to do so. My role was similar in the sense that I was vigorously dedicated to the prevention of military conflict, convinced that the U.S. invasion was nothing more than an inexcusable atrocity against a nation that should have been left in peace. The chauvinistic bravura typified by Henry V’s speech was just as offensive to me at this time as it is today, and as it might have been to Richard of Conisburgh back at the beginning of the fifteenth century. I was in my early thirties and thought I had all the answers (as in fact I did) but without having yet understood that answers alone aren’t always sufficient.

My first major counterproductive achievement was at a Los Angeles convention in 1966 (I forget the exact date), that brought all of California’s liberal and leftist groups together in a

large auditorium in order to determine whether a third party was acceptable in response to the Vietnam conflict supported by both Democrats and Republicans. Unfortunately, I myself played a central role in helping to promote the third-party movement, contributing to Reagan's victory over Governor Pat Brown in the 1966 election and setting the stage for Nixon's victory over Senator Humphrey in the 1968 presidential election. I was in exactly the right place at the right time, and I did exactly the wrong thing. Many others played the same role in other and perhaps more relevant situations, so I wasn't alone in the matter. Nevertheless, I was among the magic circle of New Leftists at least indirectly responsible for the continuation of the war.

At the time everybody was concerned about the impending gubernatorial race between Pat Brown (the incumbent middle-of-the-road Democratic governor) and the neophyte conservative politician Ronald Reagan. So the immediate impact of our choice was limited that year to the State of California. However, our collective decision also anticipated the 1968 election two years later, when the New Left led by the IS (or Draperites) wanted to run its own candidates for office, including the President of the United States (who disastrously turned out to be Eldridge Cleaver). Old leftists such as the CP and SWP wanted to prevent anything like this from happening, since they felt it would prove ruinous to the nation by splitting the liberal vote and letting conservative Republicans take power once again in Washington.

On the other hand, we so-called New Leftists wanted to scare middle-of-the-road Democrats into declaring their opposition to the Vietnam War. If Democrats were insufficiently hostile to the war, we insisted on putting up candidates of our own within the Democratic Party, and, to guarantee a more permanent impact, we wanted to be able to start our own political party well to the left of Democrats. To everybody's surprise, we won the vote at the LA Convention letting us do this.

All of California's leftist organizations--from the IS, Maoists and Trotskyists to the CDC and progressive labor unions--were invited to send delegates to the conference under an umbrella group identified as the CLR ("Californians for Liberal Representation") in order to decide whether to support the reelection campaign of Governor Pat Brown against Reagan, or to run candidates of our own, or to just sit on our hands and let Democrats and Republicans fight it out without our involvement. A car-load of campus activists, myself included, made the trip to LA from Humboldt County to join the convention, and when we arrived an hour or so before its opening session, we were informed by friendly delegates that its agenda was totally rigged. The CP, CDC, and progressive labor unions had sponsored the event not to work out a compromise on the matter, but to reject a third-party effort under any circumstances. The Convention was rock-solid in their pockets, and there was little we could do about it.

I joined a small cluster of indignant New Leftists who demanded from the organizing committee that we be permitted to use the mimeograph machine that was restricted to the needs of our opponents. After much haggling we were granted permission to print exactly one two-sided leaflet and to circulate it in whatever quantity we wanted. I convinced the others in our delegation once we obtained the mimeograph sheets that I would be the ideal author, since I was a composition instructor with great typing skills and had spent much of the long car trip to LA reading aloud to everybody in the car a cover article of *Ramparts* that attacked the politics of Governor Brown, especially his pro-war stance. For most of the trip we had debated just about

every sentence in the article, so I had a good idea what needed to be said opposed to Brown's candidacy.

I was accordingly provided a typewriter and exactly two mimeograph sheets--no more--so no major typing errors could be committed. Then I launched into an itemized diatribe against Brown's failure as a liberal. Nobody was at my elbow to make suggestions, and I did nothing more than type out the leaflet as quickly as possible so it could be distributed when the convention began an hour later. It was truly a first-draft leaflet, but as promised it was without typing errors, and it was also a devastating attack right off the top of my head, well organized and effectively articulated, if I do say so myself.

Sympathetic delegates papered the convention with my leaflet. Copies could be seen on the tops of desks, in wastebaskets, on the floor, in the bathrooms--everywhere. Inevitably debate in the seminars gravitated to my arguments in the leaflet, and New Leftists picked up momentum as debate advanced while their more respectable pro-Brown opponents lost their morale as righteous elders able to teach New Leftist children the need to be realistic.

By the end of the afternoon there was no clear indication which side would prevail. At the final plenary session, conservative delegates recognized that the New Left just might be stronger than anticipated, so renewed vigor was essential to carry the day. The venerable Bishop Pike actually stood before the assembly in his full regalia and emotionally called upon God's will toward the avoidance of hasty adventuristic choices, as did labor union leaders and others of the Old Left.

When the vote was taken, we of the New Left actually won, letting us reject Brown's candidacy and promote third-party candidates for the upcoming election. Those of us who supported this choice had graciously sat at the back of the hall to be able to walk out of the convention with little inconvenience to our opponents if we lost. But when we turned out to be victorious, we stood cheering and jeering while members of the Old Left, who had sat toward the front of the auditorium, came staggering up the aisles to remove themselves from the convention. Many of them were obviously golden-anniversary CPers little over five feet tall with horrified expressions on their faces. And perhaps with justification.

When I reached the sidewalk outside the convention site, Jack Kurzweil, the vigorous husband of Bettina Aptheker, daughter of the CP strategist Herbert Aptheker, found out who wrote the goddamn leaflet and approached me so angry that he was crying. We had never met before, and there he stood before me choking with tears as a small crowd gathered around us. He accused me of having no idea what I had done. "Let me tell you the future," he promised: "(1) Reagan is going to be the next president of the United States (which turned out to be true after a couple of interlopers); (2) you, whoever you are, I guarantee will go right back into the woodwork again (ditto relevant to its truth value); and (3) I and my friends will be executed like the Rosenbergs for being communists. That's what's going to happen." Like all leftist prophets, Jack turned out to be right in only two-thirds of his particulars.

So this was my accomplishment, perhaps the biggest of my entire lifetime. Can I claim, then, that I played a significant role in helping to elect Reagan governor of California, therefore

providing an essential stepping stone toward his presidency and the so-called Reagan Decade? Not really, since he won by a landslide against Brown. He would have won no matter what we New Leftists did. Nevertheless, I probably did help his campaign in its early stages by forcing Brown to run a more liberal campaign, thus losing much of the moderate and conservative Democratic vote. As already indicated, my intention was not to elect Reagan, but to punish Brown as much as possible for supporting the war in Vietnam, thus providing a useful lesson to all other Democrats sitting on the fence. As a result, Brown jeopardized the support of swing voters in order to retain the support of his liberal base, and this made his problem all the worse. He was in no-man's land between supporters and opponents of the Vietnam War, and he could only lose.

Probably as a reward for my leaflet, I myself was appointed to the state CNP committee, which replaced the CLR committee, though I lived too far north to be able to attend any of its meetings. I helped to manage the 1967 Vietnam Summer in Humboldt County and served as one of the two faculty advisors of Humboldt State College's SDS chapter. When the 1968 primaries occurred two years later, I was among Humboldt County activists who worked with Draperites in forming a third party, the so-called Peace and Freedom Party (PFP), later described as the PFM (for Peace and Freedom Movement). There was no effective opposition, since opponents had already shot their wad in 1966. As a result we were able to circulate a petition throughout the state to put ourselves on the ballot in record time and with a record number of signatures. My living room was the unofficial Humboldt County office for the PFP, and we proudly enlisted a membership of a couple hundred voters--as well as I can recall the biggest tally in the state outside of Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

I myself ran for office as a county supervisor on the Peace and Freedom ticket. I picked up a couple hundred votes--high enough compared to other Peace and Freedom candidates across the state, but far short of the total needed to be installed on the County Board of Supervisors. I recall having obtained the biggest vote total proportionate to the total electorate in the entire state largely because my supporters and I played down my Peace and Freedom Party identification as much as possible. Why our reluctance to identify ourselves with the movement at this stage? Soon after the formation of the Party, its statewide Draperite leadership secured a coalition with the Black Panther movement, and the resulting publicity was ruinous to any possibility of an entrenched third-party movement in the region. The best we could hope for was to be able to hold our own. The coalition might have had opportunistic value in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, but it turned out to be an electoral catastrophe among the state's outlying PFP constituencies. We weren't consulted beforehand, undoubtedly because the IS leadership was well aware what we would have advised--to avoid the connection. It was perfectly willing to give up the outlying membership in exchange for a seemingly more useful relationship with the black community.

The rest was turbulent history: Eugene McCarthy announced his candidacy for President as an independent liberal Democrat in order to neutralize Peace and Freedom as a viable third party; Robert Kennedy quickly declared his own candidacy, and President Johnson announced he would not run for a second term. To everybody's astonishment, Kennedy was assassinated after announcing his victory in the California primary (the very same evening I lost my election). Humphrey entered the race, but New Left demonstrators and their police attackers so totally

disrupted the Democratic Convention in Chicago that Humphrey's presidential candidacy was ruined despite his energetic campaign in the final weeks preceding the election. All of this added up to an enormous collective "surge" that brought Nixon into the White House by a relatively narrow margin. He would have lost if all the turmoil had been prevented; then again, Johnson might have run again on that basis.

Throughout the 1968 campaign New Leftists insisted it didn't matter who won the election, Nixon or Humphrey. Humphrey promoted a typically ambivalent Democratic peace platform, while Nixon promised with more verve that he had a "secret plan" to end the war. Everybody could remember that as soon as Eisenhower (a Republican) had replaced Truman (a Democrat), he brought the Korean War to a close as quickly as possible. Many of us assumed Nixon would do the same thing once elected, so there was no "real" difference between Nixon and Humphrey regarding Vietnam. We therefore felt justified in taking a third party approach that would force Democrats into a more aggressive anti-war stance, thus doubling the pressure to end the war. When any Democrat tried to suggest there might be a significant difference between Democrats & Republicans, we argued him to the floor and drove nails into his skull.

But things turned out different from expected. Indeed, Nixon won the election at least partly because the Left and many liberal Democrats stayed away from Humphrey's candidacy as if it were poison on wheels. But then Nixon did the unimaginable: his "secret plan" was nothing more than to escalate the war in order to win it, just as is the case today with Bush's supposed "temporary surge." According to his "secret plan," Nixon quickly expanded the conflict to include Cambodia and the war doubled in length before it could be terminated in 1974. In other words, it took Nixon a half-decade of devastation to remove U.S. troops from Vietnam, as opposed to Humphrey, who would probably have spent a year at most to do it. As a result, the bloodbath in Vietnam was far bigger than anticipated, costing, I would estimate, between one and two million additional lives inclusive of the Cambodian escalation. Almost two million lives--that was the price we paid for our effort to bring the war to an end by splitting the Democratic Party.

There were many dozens of complaints about Humphrey's political career that we could make--and we did. But the point was that the task at hand was to save lives by ending the war, and we abandoned this with the excuse that the two major-party candidates were exactly the same. Unfortunately, they weren't, as seems so obvious in retrospect. Democrats would have been more useful to our effort at that particular stage quite aside from their earlier mistakes and their countless problems and hypocrisies that offend us even today. Our inability to recognize this untidy truth turned out to be costly. The deaths we helped to bring about because of our mistake could have fertilized downtown Manhattan a couple feet deep--women, children, all the twisted corpses of "little brown people" heaped in clumps hugging the ground.

Again, it is to be conceded that my own role in this tumultuous scenario was very minor. I was an almost faceless member of a large angry crowd, but for just a few hours back in 1966, just 41 years ago, I did make a pivotal contribution at the LA conference. In retrospect I consider my intentions to have been badly misplaced, exactly as Kurzweil insisted while screaming into my face and twitching uncontrollably. Granted, Nixon was evil whereas I was merely stupid, but my stupidity played into his hands. Something better would have been

possible. More important than my bold and doughty integrity as a Leftist was the task of terminating the use of the U.S. war machine at the expense of a small third-world nation that deserved to be left alone. Obviously, this is not what happened. Like Richard of Conisburgh, I was unable to prevent an outcome I fervently opposed, and at the expense of my sense of personal worth, if not my life. Fortunately, my head was not chopped off (nor was Kurzweil electrocuted), and the Vietnam conflict did not persist for another four decades. We can only hope the same for Iraq.

© 2007 by Edward Jayne. This document may be reproduced in any non-profit form without permission of the author; however, for-profit reproduction requires written permission.

<http://www.edwardjayne.com>