5-4-1986

Resist Board Meeting, May 4, 1986

Resist

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A call to RESIST illegitimate authority

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Agenda - Resist board meeting 5/4/86

1) New Staff. Nancy Wechsler a lesbian/feminist activist has been hired to take my place in the office. Nancy's worked with Gay Community News as both a staff person and board member for close to 10 years and has been involved with a range of other political activities in the Boston area.

2) Office and Finances

3) Request for Ad and Mailing List by Citizen Soldier for September '86.

4) Movement Building Coalition. Reprot on progress, discussion and decisions on legal structure of coalition such as forming a non-profit corporation with other groups.

5) Background article on Sanctuary Movement enclosed. Information on Sanctuary Movement to follow up on discussion we had at Dec. 1st meeting about the split in the movement.

6) Old staff. I just want to take some space here to say goodbye to everyone, at least as a staff person. My four years at Resist have meant a tremendous amount to me, I'm going back out into the world a much different person than when I first started working here. That has a lot to do with the influence, encouragement and support, and sometimes stubbornness, of all of you I have worked with so closely during these years. Thank you Kate, Louis, Tess, Grace, Ken H., Ken T., Wayne, Frank, Pam, Paul, Rene, George and the rest of you who I hope to work more closely with in the future as a member of the Resist board.

7) Grants. Money available for this meeting is $200 x 32 requests plus $1450 remaining from March meeting or $7850.

GRANT PROPOSALS

Media

1. Southwest Reports (Tucson, AZ). $535 for promotional flyer expenses for video on Sanctuary.

2. Turning Tide Productions (Amherst, MA). $500 toward costs of subsidized film sale program of Harvest of Peace, a documentary film on Nicaragua.

Community/Movement Building

3. Watsonville Parish Communities (Watsonville, CA). $600 for organizing costs in support of cannery worker strike

4. Movement Building Coalition (Boston, MA). $600 toward salary of part-time staff person.
5. National Committee for Independent Political Action (NY, NY). $500 for organizing in Kansas for a national networking/famiily farm support conference. This was postponed from last meeting.

6. Teamsters Rank and File Education and Legal Defense Foundation (Detroit, MI). $500 in support of Southern Organizing Project.

7. Northwest Big Mountain Support (Flagstaff, AZ). $600 to help cover costs of C.B. radios and radio base stations to be placed on the six districts of the Join Use Area and in Flagstaff to facilitate communication.

8. Mid Atlantic Non-Violence Conference Planning Cttee (D.C.). $4000 for conference in August. We're waiting for a more specific request.

9. West Coast Regional Non-Violence Conference (Berkeley, CA). Any amount, waiting for specific request, for June conference.


11. Informe Columbiano (NY, NY). $600 for general support for newsletter on recent atrocities in Columbia.

Women


14. Women and Reproductive Technologies (Boston, MA) $600 for production of video-tape of Conference held in February. (Oops I would have put this under media if I realized it was for a video).

Refugees

15. Oakland City of Refugee Committee (CA). All or part of $3,000 organizers salary for project.

16. NY Coalition for Immigrants and Refugees Rights (NY, NY). $500 for conference on Immigrants and Refugees Rights held on 4/26 in NYC.

Central America

17. Woman to Woman (Oakland, CA). $600 for pamphlet for AMNLAЕ ssuport work.

18. Sisterhood and Solidarity ( Boston, MA). $283 toward costs of April 26th event.

19. Center for Study of the Americas (Berkeley, CA). $600 for distribution of "Inside the Real War Against Nicaragua".


23. AMUCEN - Women in Support of Central American Women in Struggle $600 for videotape and/or newsletter to women's groups in New England area.

24. Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America (Charlotte, NC). Postponed from last meeting because follow-up info wasn't received. Still waiting... $410 seed money for fundraising campaign.

Peace/Disarmament/Anti-Nuke

25. The Nerve Center (Berkeley, CA). $600 for nationwide organizing and typewriter for work against chemical and biological warfare.


27. Brandywine Peace Community (Swarthmore, PA). $500 for purchase of Offset Press and booklet on "GE and the Permanent War Economy".


30. Downwinders (Salt Lake City, UT). $500 for distribution of educational materials to farming/ranching areas in Utah and Nevada on nuclear testing and for organizing efforts in those areas. (Matching grant from Plowshares Fund.)

31. Coalition for a Safe Bay (SF, CA). $ for support and documenting materials to stop deployment of the USS Missouri in San Francisco Bay.

Loans

32. Radical America (Somerville, MA). $1,000 loan request to cover initial expenses for spring promo mailing.

33. Militarism Resource Project (Philadelphia). Would like to convert $550 outstanding loan from spring '85 to grant.

That's it for this month (is it enough - we have a few more already for June meeting). Well I'll be basking on the beaches of Southern California as you plow through these proposals. I'll think of you! See everyone in June.

Best,

Meredith
PROXY SHEET

1. Southwest Reports _____Y____M______N

2. Turning Tide_____Y____M______N

3. Watsonville Parish Communities _____Y____M______N

4. Movement Building Coalition _____Y____M______N


6. Teamsters Rank and File _____Y____M______N

7. NW Big Mountain Support _____Y____M______N

8. Mid-Atlantic NV Conference _____Y____M______N

9. West Coast NV Conference _____Y____M______N

10. African Reparations Org. _____Y____M______N

11. Informe Columbiano _____Y____M______N

12. Plymouth Area Task Force on Domestic Violence _____Y____M______N

13. NY Walk for Life _____Y____M______N

14. Women and Reproductive Tech _____Y____M______N

15. Oakland City of Refuge _____Y____M______N

16. NY coalition for Immigrants and Refugees _____Y____M______N

17. Woman to Woman _____Y____M______N

18. Sisterhood and solidarity _____Y____M______N

19. Center for Study of the Americas _____Y____M______N

20. Witness for Peace _____Y____M______N
21. Pronica ___Y___M___N
22. Cttee for a Free Grenada ___Y___M___N
23. AMUCEN ___Y___M___N
24. Carolina Interfaith Task Force ___Y___M___N
25. The Nerve Center ___Y___M___N
26. Arkansas Peace Center ___Y___M___N
27. Brandywine ___Y___M___N
28. Peacwork Alternatives ___Y___M___N
29. Nuclear Resister ___Y___M___N
30. Downwinders ___Y___M___N
31. Coalition for a Safe Bay ___Y___M___N
32. Radical America ___Y___M___N
33. Militarism Resource Project ___Y___M___N
The Underground Railroad: Parallels Between the Abolitionist Movement and the Sanctuary Movement

by Renny Golden and Michael McConnell*

Introduction

The Sanctuary Movement in the United States (along with Witness for Peace)** reflects the growing impact of the white, middle class religious community in challenging U.S. foreign policy in Central America. Unlike Witness for Peace, Sanctuary is far more congregationally based in faith communities who have seldom before engaged in actions that the U.S. government considers criminal. Although other religious groups have courageously taken up actions of resistance against official Central American policy, it has been the sanctuary movement which the government has openly, consistently attacked through infiltration, illegal taping, FBI harassment and three different arrests. These culminated in the indictment of twelve sanctuary workers, including two priests, one nun, one minister, eight lay worker and thirty-one Central American refugees who will be used as material witnesses against the indictees in the Tucson trial.

In addition to resurrecting the ancient tradition of sanctuary (an act punishable, according to the State Department, by five years in prison and $2,000 fine for each refugee harbored) another tradition recovered was an underground railroad consisting of church/synagogue safehouses and "conductors" who accompany refugees from the border areas deep into El Norte.

As the Sanctuary Movement faces the courts of Caesar whose major effort is to accuse the religious "conductors" of acting out of political as opposed to religious motivation, it seems necessary to reflect on the government's political strategy as it begins to focus its criticism on the theological arena. The government's pressure to force Sanctuary workers and congregations to choose between their traditional religious legitimation, or, to be labelled as being politically motivated (read being communist or subversive). This pressure has already intimidated sectors of this burgeoning movement. An examination of the historical parallels which exist between the original conductors of the underground railroad and their modern counterparts can shed light on a critical dilemma which faced both movements.

Many of the parallels between the original underground railroad and its modern version are inspirational. Inherent within both "train" stories, however, are contradictions, stories of betrayal and conductor naivete. In his article on the underground railroad, historian Charles Blackson, whose great grandfather escaped to Canada in the underground railroad, discovered that "spies of both races abounded, ready to sell out escaped slaves." The full scope of infiltration of the current "railroad" will only be discovered in the future. Even now, however, a problem for border assistance centers is the presence of "refugee plants." "Plants" are offered deals by INS border agents for information on other refugees and/or North Americans aiding them.

Conductor Naivete

Many abolitionist conductors believed freedom and justice would fall down like water if people would courageously stand on the side of the poor and oppressed on the issue of slavery. They believed the abolition of slavery would bring about black liberation and overcome white supremacy. Arguments amongst abolitionists erupted over the strategies and tactics necessary to accomplish abolition and liberation. For instance, Francis Wayland in the Elements of Moral Science argued that "slavery could be peacefully eradicated only by changing the mind of both master and slave, by teaching the one party the love of justice and the fear of God and by elevating the other to the proper level of individual responsibility." Such an argument supported the slave owning class by calling for gradualism. William Lloyd Garrison was feared by the south because he demanded abolition immediately. On the issue of abolition of slavery he said, "I will be harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject I do not wish to think, to speak, to write, with moderation... I am in earnest—I will not retreat a single inch—and I WILL BE HEARD."

Both abolitionist tendencies, however, focused primarily on the moral necessity of ending slavery. Historian Vincent Harding in his account of black history, There is a River, claims that the white abolitionists did not understand that while slavery had ended in the north, its undergirding forces of white supremacy, economic exploitation and fear were firmly in place, offering troubling intimidation of the future of an American society in which all legal slavery would eventually be destroyed. The white abolitionists did not understand the political and economic structures that would maintain white systemic control into the next century, spawning by the 1960's such dashed hopes that a black nation could confront a white nation in the civil rights movement. At the time that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, he'd begun to point to the fundamental structural inequities which kept blacks oppressed. Moreover, he had linked the oppression of blacks and an international extension of domestic racial/economic exploitation to Third World peoples in his opposition to the Vietnam War.

According to historian Howard Zinn:

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2. Ibid., p. 485.

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*This paper is taken from Chapter 6 of the book, Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad, by Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1986, which has been somewhat adapted and expanded in this publication.

**U.S. Women Against Intervention in Central America, the Pledge of Resistance, and other similar efforts, reflect the growing impact of the white, middle class religious community in challenging U.S. foreign policy in Central America.
"Slavery itself was ended not because of an upsurge of moral resentment in the North, or an insistence on the principle of freedom by the federal government. It was ended because the political and economic interests of the slaveholders clashed with the Northern politicians and business interests to the point of war. Expediency, flavored with morality, brought emancipation, and only after prolonged, unrelenting pressure on Lincoln by abolitionists."4

As the abolition movement grew the adversarial positions within it intensified, leading, as in the case of William Jay, to a deeper understanding of the roots of the slavery question. William Jay, who was head of the New York Anti-Slavery Society, resigned his position. He'd begun to see the struggle to abolish slavery as demanding a deeper and more precise understanding of the causes of black oppression. He states:

"We commenced the present struggle to obtain the freedom of the slaves . . . We are now contending not so much with the slave holder of the south about human rights as with the political and commercial aristocracy of the north . . . politicians are selling our Constitution and laws for southern votes. Our great capitalists are speculating, not merely in lands and banks, but in the liberties of the people. We are called to contemplate, never, I believe before witnessed—the wealthy portion of the country striving to introduce anarchy and violence in a calculation of profit."

Within the black abolitionist movement splits also occurred. Most black abolitionists, distrusting the writers of the Constitution, and noting their own disenfranchisement in that document, believed the Constitution virtually upheld slavery. Frederick Douglass, the black abolitionist and statesman, however, believed the Constitution was not meant to protect slavery, but that slavery was rather an aberrant system of lawless violence. Again, historian Vincent Harding interprets the Douglas position as a tactical move but one that was unrealistic given attempted federal legal attacks against black abolitionist vigilance committees. According to Harding:

"Douglas, who tended at times to buck away from the grim political realities, seemed to suggest that black men and women could oppose slavery and the Fugitive slave Law without really challenging the federal government and the power of the American state . . . Douglas tended dangerously to dissociate the institution of slavery from its roots in the racist, exploitative American society. Such a point of view could well leave him unprepared for the time when the institution might be destroyed without the roots having been seriously affected."5

Similarly, within the sanctuary movement a split developed over the goals of the movement. Would stating opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America be too polemical a goal? While this debate continued amongst the white middle class sanctuary leaders, the refugee community continued to beg for the solidarity of the North American community, asking in particular that North Americans act to stop their government's involvement in Central America. Like black abolitionists who understood that the roots of the problem of racism were systemic, Central American refugees insisted that North Americans uproot the continued cause of their exodus.

Antonio, a refugee in sanctuary in Madison, Wisconsin, said, "The direction of the sanctuary movement should be to know more the direction of our people and advance more the protest against the American government, to form small groups to conscientize the American people, to take to the streets in demonstrations, to speak out publicly."

Another refugee, Francisco, in sanctuary in Washington, D.C., said, "I believe that sanctuary should help from the point of view of humanitarianism, but also carry out the respect for human rights and the problem of intervention in Central America, and take a position before those facts . . . Solidarity is something real and concrete that must be felt and touched. Already our people receive so much moral solidarity of words and pamphlets. What is necessary is action and material aid."

The refugee insistence that the sanctuary movement declare its opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America was made even clearer during a Presbyterian conference on sanctuary when the refugees in attendance formed their own work group and declared to the conference that stopping U.S. intervention should be the primary stated goal of the movement. As Linda, a Salvadoran refugee in sanctuary in Philadelphia said, "We want to go back home. We want El Salvador and Guatemala to be sanctuaries."6

Critiquing White Abolitionist Zeal, Critiquing Ourselves

Though splits existed within the white abolitionist movement, different overall ideals inspired both abolitionists and sanctuary workers. For the white abolitionist the existence of slavery was a moral transgression of such magnitude that the very soul of America was in jeopardy over its continuation. Many white abolitionists would endure imprisonment and in some cases death in an effort to symbolize the moral intention of some whites to stand against the violation of human dignity that slavery represented. Similarly, within the sanctuary movement, North Americans horrified by INS deportation policy are willing to go to jail to confront this immoral policy. The challenge to both positions comes, as always, from those at the bottom, those who are the recipients of those policies and solidarity actions. Vincent Harding reflects on the white abolitionist motivating ideals:

"No one could deny the personal courage and self-sacrifice of such (white abolitionist) men as these, and the women who worked by their sides. Relentlessly, often at the cost of fortunes, families and friends, they criss-crossed the nation lecturing, preaching and agitating the anti-slavery cause, facing white mobs that were sometimes murderous. But by the same token, no one among them would have doubted that their movement and its national and state organizations were meant to be white, under essential white control, and for the healing of a white-defined nation . . . To a large degree, most white abolitionists saw slavery as a dishonor to their vision of the real America—the democratic, divinely-led, essentially just America. For almost all of them, slavery was a sin against God, an obstacle in the way of His Kingdom's establishment in an otherwise fair land."

What the white abolitionist movement could not see is that America was a slave society. So, too, sanctuary members are struggling even now with facing North American foreign policy decisions not as resulting in occasional moral compromises, but as consistent policy decision with no other goal than North American self-interest.
Moral preoccupation with the healing of the sinful white nation is a danger to which white abolitionists succumbed and which the sanctuary movement is currently confronting. The conversion of the anglo church and religious community cannot supersede the concrete moral/solidarity claims of the people of Central America. Thus, although true conversion takes place in the actual encounter between the refugee and the congregation, holding that encounter event as the single sacramental moment of our religious work fails to uphold the holiness of actions that flow from such an encounter. These “next step” solidarity actions involve the terrain of political advocacy and the mundane sphere of gritty organizing. These spheres have to be acknowledged by the movement as a holy act of building the kingdom. The sanctuary movement must more and more transform an understanding of religious work from its narrow confines, to understand building a resistance movement as a religious task. This transformation involves an ever deepening conversion process.

Such a commitment will save religious people from preoccupation with their religious conversion, so that their actions will be less witness to and more advocacy for a struggling people. Thus the goals of self-determination which Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees uphold would become goals that inform the sanctuary movement. In other words, the sanctuary movement would be accountable to the refugees as representative of a people on the move, struggling for human freedom. Without this accountability the sanctuary movement is in danger of setting its own moral agendas, accountable to its own reading of the Gospels, of Torah and subject to the same historical errors white abolitionists made.

Accountability to the poor of Central America shifts the sanctuary agenda from simple accountability of a specific congregation or a specific refugee, to accountability to a national movement to a people’s struggle for liberation. Without such a criterion for direction the sanctuary movement remains a confused expression of moral actions. The spiritual impetus of such a movement, while religiously and aesthetically attractive, fails to connect with the aspirations of El Pueblo whose agenda is more demanding than ours. The struggle of Central Americans, like the struggle of black abolitionists, is a struggle at the depths of history, a struggle for hope and life itself. Vincent Harding notes the difference in the black abolitionist struggle and the white abolitionist goal:

“The struggle in which the black abolitionists were involved was at once more personal and more profound. They were fighting against slavery but also, and more importantly, for the enslaved people... The freedom, dignity and self-determination of black people was central to the struggle. Even when they were most confident about the coming of a society of justice and brotherhood in America, these black abolitionists knew... the transformed society would have to be born out of the American experience as a new creation extending in depth and meaning beyond anything that white men and women—or blacks—had ever known before.”

To remain morally and politically accountable to the struggling poor of Central America, grounds the North American faith response in the depth of history which reveals God’s presence. Such accountability, as in all solidarity action, should proceed from the religious community’s critical reflection, in the light of Torah, illuminated by a Gospel addressed to the least of history. Without a dialogical process between white middle class sanctuary members and Central Americans, accountability to refugees could become another “gringo” cop-out, e.g., the tendency to romantically and uncritically relegate authority to people of color. Such a response is irresponsible and patronizing.

Some refugees have criticized sanctuary organizers locally and nationally for not using them enough. “I have not come to your country to sit on my hands,” said the Salvadoran refugee in sanctuary in Dayton, Ohio. “My criticism of the sanctuary organizers is that they have not given enough direction to the local church communities, have not challenged those communities to organize more opportunities for us as refugees to speak. I want to speak more and more.”

Without a collaborative and mutually accountable decision-making process, the sanctuary movement could repeat the errors of white abolitionists who wanted to be savior advocates for blacks but who did not see themselves as accountable to black people.

“Since many white abolitionists assumed that they were to be the saviors of the American society and its black underclass, they often treated their black co-workers with patronizing disdain at worst (or was it a struggle to save them?) and at best as almost equal but clearly subservient allies of their white-defined cause.”

As refugees in sanctuary recovered from an overwhelming sense of thankfulness for being safe, they became more honest about how they felt about the treatment from the host congregations. At the Presbyterian-sponsored conference on sanctuary one of the refugees in sanctuary in Minnesota said, “We don’t want you to treat us like we were your pets.” Two others from upper New York state wrote about their feelings in sanctuary organizers that “the great majority of the members of the church still maintained their racism.” In this case, the refugees were never consulted about upcoming plans and the congregation went so far as to tell them when they could take a shower.

Much of the refugees’ frustration at not being involved in a decision-making level nationally was because the sanctuary movement had no organizational process for decision making. At the 1985 national sanctuary convocation held in Tucson after the arrests of 65 refugees and 16 North Americans, a regionally-base representative structure was created which involved representatives from North American sanctuary communities, as well as refugee representatives. That national meeting provided the Central American sanctuary refugees the first national opportunity to meet with each other and raise their concerns. One of the most impacting presentations to the national sanctuary assembly was the plea of the refugees to North Americans to continue their resistance to U.S. policy in Central America.

By 1985, chastened by the seriousness of government attacks on the movement, with leaders being driven further from margins of safety and closer to the vulnerable, hunted positions of defenseless refugees, the sanctuary movement embraced refugee input. The movement was deepening, moving closer to refugees, not simply as conscientizcers, but as compañeros in a struggle.

Before offering the final comparative analysis between the abolitionist movement and leaders, and the sanctuary movement and leaders, it is important to offer an acknowledgement. While there are some parallels that have...
When Have We Gone Too Far?

Within the white abolitionist cause there were leaders and their associates considered extremists. William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips and John Brown were, and are considered by most modern historians, as fanatical extremists. The dilemma for many abolitionists was to remain activists while still attempting to legitimate their position by distancing themselves from extreme abolitionist positions.

Garrison, for instance, went so far as to burn the Constitution before thousands calling it "source andparent of all other atrocities." Wendell Phillips considered the pietistic silence of the American church in the face of slavery as collusion with the demonic.

Historian Zinn problematizes the charges of extremism:

"Did they help or hurt the cause of freedom? Did their activities bring a solution at too great a cost? The real question is: Can moderation ever be an effective tactic for sweeping reform? It is often thought the agitator alienates potential allies by his extremism. Lewis Tappan, the wealthy New Yorker who financed many abolition activities, wrote anxiously to George Tompkins, the British abolitionist. The fact need not be concealed from you that several emancipationists do disapprove of the harsh and as they think, the un-Christian language of the Liberator (Garrison's journal), that they don't feel justified in upholding it... (Similarly) The American Anti-slavery Society... was concerned lest others be alienated."

There is some parallel between differences within the sanctuary movement and accusations of extremism toward abolitionists like Garrison who demanded abolition of slavery immediately, not gradually. It is true that the sanctuaries movement had not been successfully labelled "extremist" by the government due to its broad grassroots church base and the evident desperation of refugees. However, the sanctuary movement itself must still grapple with its fear of the label. On the one hand, the movement must not become isolated, cut off from its base among the religious community. On the other hand, government pressure through arrest and infiltration seeks to compromise the movement, demanding it legitimize itself against charges of extremism. Such pressure can result in confused or compromised tactics. For example, the tactical argument which resists stating a political goal like stopping U.S. intervention because not all of the churches and synagogues are conscientious, sets the conversion of the North American religious community as a priority over the Central American's liberation cause. Salvadoran Marta Benavides, an ordained Baptist minister, has said, "Our people can't wait for your religious community to be converted. We are dying. We are at war. And whether you acknowledge it or not, you too are at war and must choose sides.

Rev. Benavides has voiced the urgent claim of Salvadoran refugees that the North American church unequivocally choose sides. After the indictments of the sixteen, Marta Benavides exhorted at the national sanctuary convocation to "not be afraid. Each one of us is political. Even when we choose to be neutral we are being political." The tactical arguments of some sanctuary leaders that the goals of stopping U.S. intervention will alienate some congregations newly considering sanctuary if it is publicly stated fails to acknowledge that not stating such a goal will alienate Central American refugees. The sanctuary movement must declare itself and accept the consequences of alienating some people.

The strength of the sanctuary movement is its popular grassroots religious appeal and its capacity for conversion. When the Wall Street Journal published a long article on sanctuary stating its fervent support by Bill Clarke, a wealthy conservative Republican from Ohio who felt called by the God of the poor and suffering to advocate civil disobedience, many were convinced the movement had "arrived" as strong, broad-based, and, by virtue of its political pluralism it was less vulnerable to accusations of extremism. But the dilemma of choosing sides, as a political-faith option, de facto leads to accusations of extremism simply because unequivocal choices, will alienate some religious people. Archbishop Romero said, "In a society that is divided, it is likely that the church will be divided too."

The North American church is already divided. To mitigate the determination of religious people to openly state opposition to U.S. policy in Central America, even for tactical reasons of broadening and diversifying popular support, it is to risk diluting the force of our position and to allow liberal voices the opportunity to "reconcile" the "extremists" and the more moderate/moderate tendencies. The result of such reconciliation within the churches is compromise and a divided movement limping its way toward confusion and/or retreat.

The Role of the Church During Abolitionist Times

During abolitionist times, church denominations made unequivocal denunciations of slavery and recommended that all Christians work to abolish slavery. But the clamor of southern clergy with their political strategy to gain greater control of the national assemblies resulted in equivocated and morally compromised moderate positions by the mid-1800's. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church had, for instance, vehemently condemned slavery in 1818, but by the mid-1800's the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Church was split with the head of the Southern branch, Dr. Thornwell, linking abolitionism to atheism and communists. Dr. Thornwell clarified the sides to be chosen:

"The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slave holders—they are atheists, socialists, communists, red Republicans, Jacobins on the one side and the friends of order, regulated freedom on the other. In one word, the world is a battleground. Christianity and atheism. The combatants and the progress of humanity is at stake."

That tendency to link radical faith positions within the religious sector as communists or not religious is prevalent even within the sanctuary movement, not as an outsider's accusation (the State Department has already accused the sanctuary leaders challenging foreign policy as simply political organizers) but as a fear within the sanctuary movement: should religious people become political? Similar to the Presbyterian's initially strong pro-abolitionist position, the Methodists also were initially strongly opposed to slavery. But at a general conference in 1836 the
Southern Methodists won their pro-slavery argument and circulated a Pastoral letter advising the clergy to abstain from discussion of slavery and chastizing pro-abolitionist northern ministers and underground railroad conductors. The split in the Methodist Church resulted in the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. In 1845 a similar split over the issue of slavery took place within the Baptist Church resulting in separate organizations for both home and foreign missions.

In his book The Negro People in American History, William Foster claims that:

"The Catholic Church remained intact (not split) all through the civil war, a militant pro-slavery organization... Some of the upper class Jews were not to be outdone by their Christian brethren when it came to profiting from slavery." 12

Such political ruptures within the churches of the abolitionist era reveal the institutional churches as a reflection of the society's class and race divisions. The choice of the side of the oppressed and poor will lead to a confrontation with the government and with those who identify their economic/political interests with the powerful and controlling sector. Such an assessment appears simplistic, immoderate and unnecessarily (read tactically) polemical to many within the religious sectors. But why? Howard Zinn's historical analysis of North American society offers a clue to these fissures within church bodies. Zinn claims charges of immoderation and extremism are charges raised by the liberal. (The conservative and radical positions are characterized as extreme.) According to Zinn what has been left out of historical accounting of the abolitionist history was American liberalism as collaborator by acquiescence or default with American racism.

**American Liberalism vs. Biblical Justice**

American liberalism was most idealistically expressed in the American Revolution and its principles publicly declared in the Declaration of Independence. North Americans who fought a revolutionary war against imperialistic Britain in order to establish the right to national self-determination would within the same century, uphold a principle of national expansion which would suppress other's rights to self-determination. Arthur Wineburg in his study, *Manifest Destiny* states that "America's natural right to territory essential to its security must override the right of self-determination of its inhabitants." After the revolution, American leaders full of idealistic zeal for principles of liberty insured by democratic liberalism were determined to teach savage or enslaved nations these ideals. This national mission was our manifest destiny ordained by Providence, according to Wineburg.

"Expansion was so rationalized that it seemed at the outset a right, and soon, long before the famous phrase itself was coined, a manifest destiny. Moral ideology was the partner of self-interest... the alchemy which transmuted natural right from a doctrine of democratic nationalism into a doctrine of imperialism was the very idea of manifest destiny which the doctrine of natural right created." 13

This moral and political ideology justified the conquest and appropriation of Native American lands, half of Mexican territory, the annexation of Hawaii, the Philippines, invasions of Puerto Rico and the forming of a protectorate over Cuba with subsequent Marine invasions in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Vera Cruz.

Democratic liberalism in practice contains certain contradictions codified in America's law of the land—the U.S. Constitution which guarantees the rights of all men while initially denying basic human rights to those without property or power, e.g., blacks, women, native americans or the propertyless. The ideal of the liberal democracy is a principle compatible with moral righteousness and a gospel upholding the dignity and rights of all, even those most disenfranchised. The problem is the liberal's willingness to compromise that principle for tactical or strategic goals. Gradualism, for instance, is the white liberal's tactical and strategic position on issues of human rights from the abolition of slavery to women's rights.

There are three assumptions that liberals hold, though, in a more sophisticated fashion than our forefathers who saw our nation as the godly savior of backward heathen nations.

1) Liberals believe there is a middle ground in national and international power conflicts. This assumption is attractive to religious people who truly desire peace and for whom disruptive conflict is seen as antithetical to a vision of a loving community of brothers and sisters. The assumption is that legitimate neutrality is possible.

2) The liberal blames the victims for the oppression or their response to the repression. Religious liberals do not blame the victims for their oppression as much as they tend to criticize their response—too violent, too abrasive. Again they want the victims to find a loving (middle ground) response.

3) The liberal distrusts the masses. For liberal religious people there is genuine love for the poor and oppressed but a fear that they need some experts who can give them theological or political direction. This clericalism, especially white male clericalism, is given authority and power disproportionately.

It is not so much a failure of heart which is the liberal's characteristic; it is a failure of imagination and historical analysis. The faith stance of the liberal stops too soon. Central Americans, unencumbered by the U.S. historical liberal tradition (ennmeshed rather by feudalism within the grip of neo-colonialism) understand the comprehensiveness of their historical struggle. Now, as in abolitionist times, oppressed national racial groups (in particular blacks) recognize that humanitarian assistance that does not struggle against the roots of oppression will not lead to liberation, though it would raise hopes for a time.

The sanctuary movement is primarily based among white middle class churches and synagogues whose most progressive expression is liberal. The conversion to the side of the refugees, the prophets from a martyred church, is a faith conversion which demands a critique and/or realignment of one's political stance. Only naive would fail to discern that a conservative government, such as the Reagan administration, would be alienated from a church which challenged the status quo and opted for the side of the poor and oppressed in Central America and for refugees in our midst. What is less clear, however, is how far should such identification with El Pueblo go before charges of extremism emerge from all sides, even from friends? Dare we risk alienating too many?

Once the journey of conversion has begun there is no criterion for deciding the next step except faithfulness to the God of Judaism and Christianity who is a God of all people, calling us to solidarity with the least. According to theologian Robert McAfee Brown such a choice is a subversive act.

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“So here is the point at which a significant identity crisis will continue to confront white middle class Americans: do they find their true identity in terms of nation, race and class, or in terms of their larger identity which their religious community offers them? How revolutionary are middle class people really going to be? My own feeling is that if white middle class churches are not going to do more than reflect (in pale fashion) the values of the culture around them they do not really deserve to survive; that they are going to have to look long and hard at where their allegiances lie, and then make some basic choices in the near future. The choices, if properly made, will place the churches in jeopardy, for they will involve tremendous risks with no assurances of success.”

Brown goes on to note that such options on behalf of the God of the oppressed will not increase church membership but may indeed drive away many who feel they share the name of Christian. Some may even turn violently against such a church but at “least they will no longer do what they presently do—ignore it.”

What the sanctuary movement has offered the anglo church is an opportunity to live a radical faith by sharing in the risk that such commitment demands. But the risk is precisely a faith and political risk—a risk necessary because of political power that is unjust. If the sanctuary movement’s analysis of the roots of structural oppression is shallow, the response is shallow. If the faith stance, informed of a precise analysis of the roots of structural oppression is deep, then a truly revolutionary faith is born.

The liberal worldview has been challenged in the Sanctuary Movement by the refugees themselves. In spite of differing political perspectives within the refugee community, the poor of Central America have not lived in a culture that values individual choice over the people as a collective. The consistency of the refugees’ own articulated moral values which prioritizes responsibility to the struggling whole community has met with two different responses in the Anglo-sanctuary movement. It has led to a conversion to such profound solidarity or it has led to cultural admiration with little reflection on its challenge to North American individualism. This different understanding of community and the individual is most apparent in the way North Americans make communal (political) decisions.

Many Anglo religious persons steeped in the liberal tradition, believe in democratic decision-making but assume that community breaks down if there is conflict. The liberal Anglo religious community uses the biblical language of covenant to describe, in the words of Robert Bellah, “a consensual community of autonomous but essentially similar individuals.” Within the covenant community there is the implicit assumption that the moral decision of each covenant member must be upheld without internal conflict lest the social fabric of the loving community be rent. Thus when a conflict emerges there is little moral value placed on struggling toward the most efficacious or the most principled decision. At such a point the consensus model breaks down and covenant appears broken because of the introduction of internal political conflict. In this situation people either capitulate to preserve the covenant community; they leave because they are considered a source of fizzle; or the community dissolves to reconstitute itself in a strictly (read non-conflictual) religious sphere.

Demand for organizational procedures of deciding within the Sanctuary Movement have been met with accusations of attempts to control that sacramental community which can singularly (group by group or individual by individual) decide what is right for them. Accountability to each other collectively, through a national structure is considered impossible. North American religious people shaped by liberal pluralism distrust each other except eyeball to eyeball. It is because community can only be conceived of in terms of individual congregational covenant.

The Central American, on the other hand, having little other historical choice, knows that El Pueblo must be united politically and religiously if the people of the nation are to survive. Their concept of covenant is based on the common good, not just what benefits one sector or one individual. In that way it is more biblical than the liberal version. Biblical covenant places specific demands on the partners based on a definitive sense of justice. “I will be your God and you will be my people” were the words of the covenant between Yahweh and the Hebrews. But what really sealed that covenant was the exodus event, the liberation of the people from bondage. Covenant and liberation are inextricably bound together in biblical faith. The covenant meant that God was so much in solidarity with the people that God took their historical circumstances seriously and acted to change them. The people, in turn, were required to be faithful to God and follow this liberation course to the end, even when it meant travelling a generation in the wilderness. Biblical covenant is a relation that calls us out of ourselves, out of our individualistic desires and into a binding relationship with a people struggling for justice and a God leading toward liberation. Without this outside sense of justice or the common good we are left with a pluralism that nearly always falls to the level of the least common denominator. If there is conflict the liberals will, according to Christopher Lasch, “accept a compromise that protects the right of private judgment but denies their right to force their own perspective on others . . . This is why Americans have always found it difficult to carry on political discussions when consensus breaks down, as in the nineteenth century struggle over slavery.”

Reviving the religious tradition of sanctity has also demanded a revival of the biblical understanding of covenant. The claims of covenant supercede consensual agreements devoid of conflict. Such demanding interpretations of Yahweh’s claims of covenant are interpreted as revisionism and a failure to live up to religious tradition, as if it were a timeless, ahistorical guide. The great fear for the liberal religious sector according to Lasch is “that any attempt to rehabilitate tradition and authority means a revival of dogmatism, intolerance and ideological conformity.”

15. Ibid., p. 101.
18. Ibid.
in 1984, the Rev. Gil Dawes, a sanctuary pastor from Iowa, faced it head on:

"Ain't nobody here but us religious folks, boss!" This is the kind of self-defensive cry that delights the IRA and other right-wing forces. Their goal has long been to drive a wedge between liberals and the left, and between religion and the left. If they can intimidate liberals into silence, or at least get them to separate themselves from those further left, and at the same time monopolize the public use of religious myths and symbols, then the left will be isolated from the body politic, and the right will control the body politic.

"If the sanctuary movement goes down the path of separating within itself those of "religious" orientation from those of secular, or "intentional" motivation, it will have done the work of the oppressor for him. Those whose policies cause the oppressed to seek refuge in the first place must divide the opposition before they can conquer. If we think they will stop once they have destroyed secular resistance and honor the 'religious' conscience of those who resist 'in faith,' then we will naively do their divisive work for them.

"To say in any manner, 'Ain't nobody here but us religious folks, boss,' is not only bad political strategy, but also bad theology. It is to cut the left hand of God off from the right hand of God! It is to say that unless you use traditional religious language and follow established religious style, you are not doing the 'work' of God in human history. It is to divide not just the sanctuary movement and other movements for justice and peace, but the Body of Christ itself. As Jesus observed under similar circumstances of conflict, his followers are not necessarily those who say 'Lord, Lord,' but those who do the will of God on earth. They are not to be known primarily by what they say they believe in, nor even by who they believe in, but by what they do. In a broader sense, to break solidarity with those whose deeds meet human needs, though stemming from different motivational presuppositions, is to theologically break the unity of God's new creation in formation."19


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RESIST Board Meeting Minutes 5/4/86

Present: Kate, Wechsler, Ken, Nancy M., Wayne, Tess, Roxanna, Louis, Connie, Rene

BUSINESS

New Staff. Introduction of Nancy Wechsler. Nancy's been at Resist for two weeks now. A Socialist-feminist, she's been active in the left, women's movement and lesbian/gay movements since the 60s.

Office and finances. We got a better return on our fundraising in 1985 than 1984. (See our Financial Report for 1985. If you don't have a copy and want one, let the staff know.) Balance in our checking acct. is about 5,000; Working Assets about 25,000; loan fund about 2000. Dollars and Sense has paid us back their 1000 loan with interest.

Our efforts to get our own computer have been stepped up. We are meeting with Judy Housman on May 22 to discuss what computer might fill Resist's needs. Meredith and Roxanna from the board have agreed to be on computer search committee. We will check out possibility of getting free computer from group that gives comp grants to tax exempt non-profit groups. Also we will check out free software from Lotus. Wayne is checking out MIT discounts and office surplus room access for Resist. (See office furniture, below). We agreed to ask Ken to put an appeal in the Newsletter for funds for the computer.

Office furniture. Staff will be looking to purchase used 5 drawer file cabinet and typing stand. The board also ok'ed buying a good chair for our new staff person. Approx. cost of chair 250.00. Roxanna said HIC might take our old file cabinet.

New Office Space. It looks like we might be able to move into the Multi-Service Center at 1 Summer St. in Somerville. All three groups would move Resist, D&S, and RA. There is about 1100 sq. ft at $8 a sq.ft. including heat and elec. We don't know exact money figures yet since we need to get the sq.ft. figure exact from the multi-service center. We did our own measurement, but they haven't measured it yet. We also need to figure the breakdown with the other groups. HIC is already in the building and would join in on our lay-out space. HIC has agreed to move into smaller office and give us their office if this whole deal goes through and we take the Multi-service center space. We agreed to cover expenses of HIC moving its phone. Thanks HIC!!
The Board agreed to have staff hire an alternative mover to move large items to new office.

Kate asked that the groups discuss letting the Som. Fair Housing group keep phone and answering machine in the front office through the summer. We will discuss with RA and HIC-- since it is likely that that office will be one of theirs.

Request for Mailing List Use. Citizen Soldier requested our mailing list and an ad in our newsletter. We Postponed decision until next board meeting so that Nancy M. could check on them to see what they are doing now.

Building Coalition. Nancy M. gave report of last MBC meeting of April 28. They need to set up a new non-profit corp. for purchase of a building. We agreed to become part of the new corp. and have a seat on the board. Lee Goldstein has agreed to do the legal work for free. Demeter is doing a compilation of the groups for funding sources, banks and loans. Rainbow Coalition has pulled out of MBC because of their commitment to stay with Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Association which needs to stay in Roxbury. Rainbow also said they didn't have time and energy right now because of the King Campaign. The MBC will be setting a cut-off date for new groups to join.

Sanctuary Disc. We had a very brief discussion. Those who had read the article liked it.

Board lists. Enclosed with these minutes is a new board address and phone list.

GRANTS.

We gave out a total of $5950 in grants, and agreed to loan RA $1000 for 6 months.

4. Movement Building Coalition (Boston, MA). $600 for staff time to work on buying building for several movement groups including Resist. Several people raised questions about giving a grant to a group that we were part of. What would we do if this was a group from out of town? People agreed that we would consider it after collecting information about the groups involved, which in this case we already had. Kate raised issue of whether or not it was good to have groups all in one central place rather than in several communities. The Coalition doesn't have a particular person in mind for job. Kate said she knew some people who might be interested. The person will work out of the Mobe office.

5. National Committee for Independent Political Action (NY, NY). $200 for organizing in Kansas for a national networking/family farm support conference. This was a close vote which is why we gave them $200 instead of the $500 they asked for. Disc. around their relationship to the Dem. Party; and whether this was just another Kinoy organization. Others felt it was important that progressives be involved in Farm Organizing.
6. Teamsters Rank and File Education and Legal Defense Foundation (TDU) (Detroit, MI). $500 for Southern Organizing Project. References were all very positive. Seen as one of the very best efforts by radicals to start a rank and file group and have it become broader and larger. TDU has been around over 10 years.

11. *Informe Columbiano* NY, NY) $600 for general newsletter support. Very positive feedback from people. Their newsletter was compared to work of early Central America newsletters and HIC. Rene knows about the group in Mexico--said they do good work.

13. New York Walk for Life. $100 for feminist peace walk. There were a lot of questions about this, but some sentiment to give token support. They hadn't responded to Nancy's letter of March 31. Grace said they were a Kosher group and that the Seneca people were expecting them. Louis raised issue of this march in the context of the recently failed national peace march. Kate questioned just who could be involved in something that meant you had to be able to take off six weeks from work. People liked that they were going to do little actions in the different towns, and figured it would be different in some ways than the national march in that it was feminists and a smaller distance.

15. Oakland City of Refuge Committe (CA). $500 for part of organizers salary for Refuge campaign. People thought this project was good educational work.

17. Woman to Woman (Oakland, CA) $500 for pamphlet for AMNLAE support work. People said they did good work who worked with them in coalition. Question was raised why they are predominantly white, what kind of outreach had they done to women of color?

19. Center for Study of the Americas (Berkeley, CA). $500 for distribution of "Inside the Real War Against Nicaragua." The group has 2½ paid people and 6-12 volunteers. Roxanna said they were one of a few groups that was talking about the U.S. militarization of Honduras two years ago. She said their strategy reports are good and the paper was good for the target audience. It pulls information together but is not a deep analysis. Rene agreed, said the report was good but very general. The suggestion was made that people should read the recent NACLA report on *Low Intensity warfare*. Also a book by a colonel from the Pentagon called *On Strategy*.

20. Witness for Peace (Durham, NC). $600 toward purchase of word proc. and computer. Good references. Solid group. Reaching out to broader community. Roxanna reported that HIC had board member from this group.
25. The Nerve Center (Berkeley, CA). $500 for nationwide organizing and typewriter. Good reference from former Sci. for the People ed. said they did good work and were consistently on top of issues. Questions raised about their budget surplus and why we were the only foundation that gave them money. We decided to give them money based on references and that they were the only group doing this work.

26. Arkansas Peace Center (Little Rock). $450 for typewriter. Very positive references. They even have a union bug on their stationary.

27. Brandywine Peace Community (Swarthmore, PA). $400 for purchase of offset press and publication of booklet "GE and the Permanent War Economy." Frank B. said this was a reasonable project. The discussion centered around how much they knew about GE unions and did they know enough to write a good booklet. We will suggest to them that they get in touch with GE unions in other places including IUE 201 local in Lynn. Kevin Mahar is the President. They need to talk to GE unions in areas where war related stuff is happening, like here in New England.

30. Downwinders (Salt Lake City, Utah). $500 for distribution of educational materials. References were positive.

Postponed

14. Women and Reproductive Technologies (Boston, MA) Very positive references, good people working on video. We decided to postpone until a subcommittee could see at least a draft of the video.

16. NY Coalition for Immigrants and Refugees Rights (NY, NY). Northstar gave positive recommendation. However the group had not responded to our last letter. We postponed decision pending update.

21. Pro-Nica (Managua, Nicaragua). We had conflicting reference reports on the person who organizes this. Wayne reported that people in Nicaragua don't like the guy and that he is more of a boss than a comrade. George was positive. It was postponed so that Rene could look into it and check with people in Nicaragua.

23. AMUCEN- References positive both about people doing video and the conference in Mexico. We decided we needed to see more of the video and an issue of the newsletter. Tess and Roxanna will meet with Catherine Russo and report back at next board meeting.

31. Coalition for a Safe Bay (SF, CA). They didn't respond to our last letter. We postponed pending more information.
Withdrawn

18. Sisterhood and Solidarity (Boston, MA). They collected enough money at their event to cover expenses, so they withdrew their grant proposal.

Rejections

1. Southwest Reports (Tucson, AZ). No one liked the video. Much too religious and it didn't say anything.

2. Turning Tide Productions (Amherst, MA) Most of the board saw the film previous to board meeting. Good photo and music, but it tried to do to many different things at once and didn't really do anything. The movie would not have convinced anyone to get involved in CA work. The film narrator asked "Why is there a war going on?" but didn't answer it in film. Suggestion to let them know we think they might want to supplement the film showings with additional material on Nicaragua and Central America.

3. Watsonville Parish Communities (Watsonville, CA). Vanguard said this was a Saul Alinsky-church type group. They didn't have an official stand on the strike, were very family, and support-oriented. Board felt there were other groups doing better support work for the strike, like TDU, and we wouldn't support this group because of their organizing orientation and that they hadn't endorsed the strike but remained neutral.

7. Northwest Big Mountain Support (Flagstaff, AZ). References reported that this was a good group but that there had been some problems in the past with use of funds. This concerned board members. Also the group had said they would send in new proposal for us to consider and we hadn't yet received it. We decided to consider new proposal when submitted.

8. Mid Atlantic Non-Violence Conference Planning Comm. (DC) They didn't answer questions Nancy sent them.

9. West Coast Regional Non-Violence Conference.

10. African National Reparations Organization (Phila, PA). Frank B. said no one in Philly has experience with this group who should know them. In response to request for more info. they sent us copies of newspaper Bürning Spear and their bylaws.

12. Plymouth Area Task Force Against Domestic Violence (NH). We said no mainly because it seemed primarily social service and we couldn't find any evidence that it was more than that. We agreed to suggest to them that they get in touch with the Mass Coalition of Battered Women's Service Groups in Boston for grant information.
22. Committee for a Free Grenada (NY, NY) Mixed references. Conference was strongly pro-Cord, lots of marxist jargon.

24. Caroline Interfaith Task Force on Central America (Charlotte, NC). No, because they haven't responded to our letters.

28. Peacework Alternatives (Louisville, KY). Their response to Nancy's letter left unclear their stand on abortion issue. Questions were raised about the social service nature of the work. Project seemed worth doing but because of our limited resources we shouldn't fund.

29. Nuclear Resister (Ukiah, CA). No because the focus is too narrow. Not a priority for Resist.

Loans

32. Radical America (Som., MA) Yes to a $1000 loan request to do spring promo mailing. Six months to repay.

33. Militarism Resource Project (Phila, PA). NO to turning their $550 outstanding balance into a grant. We had a long discussion about this. Louis felt strongly that a group that asked for a loan and then couldn't repay was acting irresponsibly. People worried about Resist getting the reputation that people don't have to repay their loans. We agreed to tell them we would not change loan into grant and that we are disappointed in them. or something to that effect.

That's it. I'm glad to be working here. To prevent confusion in the office because of having two Nancy's, you can call me Wec, Wex, or Wechsler. I answer to all three. It's your choice.

next meeting: june 22, 1986 11 am

Ken Hale's house:
209 Waltham St., Lexington, MA
617/861-8164
Call Ken if you need a ride from Alewife Station

in solidarity,

Nancy Wechsler