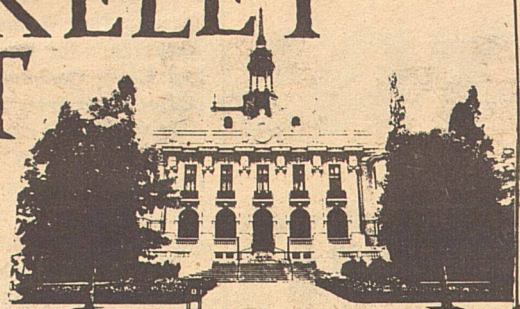


BERKELEY BEAT



Weather Critique Of School Strike

by Avis Worthington

When *Osawatomie*, the Weather Underground publication, came out this winter it devoted many pages to local issues -- New York City and the bankers' ripoff, cutbacks in Massachusetts -- and the Berkeley teachers' strike. It looks like lots of the struggles of the Seventies will be fought just around the corner from wherever you are.

The Berkeley article shows a lot of knowledge of the district and includes carefully thought-out criticism of the strike as a radical movement. Chief among the strike's defects were teachers' insensitivity to the needs and desires of Third World communities, a lack of solidarity with lower paid, non-professional workers in the district and a failure to make contact with parents and show a concern for educational needs.

"Sometimes teachers pass Third World students on to the next grade without having taught them the material, thereby institutionalizing a system of non-education," *Osawatomie* writes. "For these reasons there is a lot of mistrust between black and other Third World parents and the teachers; parents were not inclined to support the teachers' demands. In addition, many Third World parents were afraid that if the teachers won, the money to pay their wages would come from the special school programs they had struggled for. They also feared that if the board had to lay off teachers after the strike, it would be the more recently hired Third World teachers.

"Early on, some teachers proposed that the Board raise the funds to make up the 7 1/2 percent wage cut by eliminating the ethnic studies program," the writer adds.

Osawatomie felt that gains had been made towards the end of the strike in unity between parents and teachers, but some of the organizational efforts towards this end have faded away since the strike. Berkeley Citizens' Action (BCA) has an ongoing education committee that parents, teachers and non-teaching "classified" school workers have attended. City council member Ying Kelley, a teacher herself, is a member.

Anyone who wants more information about this effort to build a progressive school community can call Luane Rogers, 845-3829, for information.

Counter to the claim made by *Osawatomie*, my experience has shown decreasing support for the teachers among classified employees.

Osawatomie mentioned that Albert Shanker, head of the American Federation of Teachers, was not made welcome here during the strike, chiefly because of his reputation as a racist. Shanker, the Weather Underground says, supported the War in Vietnam, is a red-baiter, supports unlimited arms to Israel, attacked community control of schools by New York blacks and Puerto Rican communities and sold out teachers by accepting layoffs of chiefly Third World teachers in last fall's New York teachers' strike.

The Berkeley Federation of Teachers (BFT) and the Berkeley Teachers Association (BTA) are now locked in a struggle to control the district when collective bargaining comes in April. Julie Kennedy of BTA has publicly said that she envisions the future of teachers' organization as being something like the elite and powerful American Medical Association.

BTA, however, is losing ground in Berkeley and BFT is picking up members. There is potential progressive leadership in BFT. As a labor organization, despite Shanker, AFT could unite teachers into a group that has connections with the rest of the working class. These organizational skirmishes are being fought all over the country.

But *Osawatomie* made no analysis of school finance -- a shoe that's pinching school districts all over California. Nor did its writers question whether striking at the local level when a district is losing funds was a good move. The Weather article was written before a fact finding committee had verified that there was indeed little more to be offered teachers than the district was already offering.

Meanwhile, the enigma sits in the governor's chair telling us all to tighten our belts. That must sound good to over-burdened taxpayers tired of supporting elitist bureaucracies. But the message seems to be going out that there will be no more cheap culture for the poor; fewer books in public libraries, fewer macrame (a particular hate object of the governor) classes that impoverished elderly or singleheads of households can enjoy at adult schools; and no educational "frills" for kids whose parents can't pay for them.