

Module 05: 1968 — A Generation in Revolt?

Evidence 35: Tom Hayden Testimony Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, December 2-3, 1968

A

Introduction

In the fall of 1968, three organizers of the national mobilization around the 1968 Democratic National Convention — David Dellinger, Rennie Davis, and Tom Hayden — were called to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The three used their interrogation in Congress to argue against the war in Vietnam. The document below consists of excerpts from testimony by Tom Hayden on December 2-3, 1968.

Question to Consider

- How does Hayden view the results of the disorder in Chicago?

Document

MR. CONLEY: Mr. Hayden, would you give us a brief résumé of your educational background, please?

MR. HAYDEN: You mean the colleges I attended?

MR. CONLEY: High school and college, please.

MR. HAYDEN: Yes. I attended Royal Oak-Dondero High School in Royal Oak, Michigan, from 1954 to 1957. I attended the University of Michigan, 1957 to 1961. I returned to the University of Michigan 1962 through part of 1964 as a graduate student and as an instructor, and I taught political science at Rutgers University in 1967.

MR. CONLEY: Did you get a degree from the University of Michigan?

MR. HAYDEN: I did not complete my graduate studies.

MR. CONLEY: Did you get a bachelor's?

MR. CONLEY: Was this in English?

MR. HAYDEN: Yes.

MR. CONLEY: Now, Mr. Hayden, since your completion of your education, what particular positions have you held?

MR. HAYDEN: You mean jobs – in the sense of how I get money?

MR. CONLEY: Well, let us start with that, yes.

MR. HAYDEN: Well, I have done some teaching, as I said, at Rutgers University. I have been paid as an author and lecturer, published two books, one by New American Library-Signet, on North Vietnam, and another on the conditions in Newark at the time of the rebellion of July 1967, which was published by Random House.

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MR. CONLEY: Now, Mr. Hayden, were you the co-project director with Mr. [Rennie] Davis for the National Mobilization Committee's efforts in Chicago?

MR. HAYDEN: Yes, I was.

MR. CONLEY: When were you appointed to this position?

MR. HAYDEN: I suppose it was in the very early – in the early spring.

MR. CONLEY: Could you be specific in terms of months, sir?

MR. HAYDEN: I don't think I could, but I would guess at March or April.

MR. CONLEY: March or April. By whom were you appointed?

MR. HAYDEN: By the Mobilization, which has a structure for making such appointments, consisting of an administrative committee and a steering committee and a set of officers.

MR. CONLEY: Were you part of the steering committee or the officers or the
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MR. HAYDEN: No.

MR. CONLEY: In other words, you were appointed by this group. How many people are represented by this group?

MR. HAYDEN: The Mobilization has representatives from nearly a hundred organizations, most of whom are active around particular subjects like the organization of the demonstration.

MR. CONLEY: Well, did a hundred people meet to decide to appoint you?

MR. HAYDEN: I can't really recall. If you will allow me one minute to go talk to Rennie Davis, who has more of an organizational mind than I do, I am sure I could straighten it all out, but the Mobilization, through its normal process, appointed me in the spring of the year to be a project director with Rennie Davis, and I went to Chicago for that purpose.

MR. CONLEY: Did you receive this appointment in writing?

MR. HAYDEN: Oh, no, that's not the way we work.

MR. CONLEY: Do you recall who actually told you that you had been appointed?

MR. HAYDEN: No, I just knew that I had been appointed. If anyone told me that I was appointed, it was Dave Dellinger, who, as you know, is the chairman of the Mobilization.

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MR. CONLEY: Mr. Hayden, is it your present aim to seek the destruction of the present American democratic system?

MR. HAYDEN: That is a joke.

MR. CONLEY: I am asking you sir.

MR. HAYDEN: Well, I don't believe the present American democratic system exists. That is why we can't get together to straighten things out. You have destroyed the American democratic system by the existence of a committee of this kind.

MR. CONLEY: Well, let us use the word "system," then. Let us take the words "American" and "democratic" out of it and let us just call it the system. Is it your aim to destroy the present system?

MR. HAYDEN: What do you mean by "destroy"?

MR. CONLEY: To overturn it?

MR. HAYDEN: What do you mean by "overturn it"?

MR. CONLEY: To do away with it.

MR. HAYDEN: What do you mean by "do away with it"? By what means?

MR. CONLEY: I am asking you sir.

MR. HAYDEN: No, you asked me whether it was my aim.

MR. CONLEY: I am asking you if that is your aim, sir.

MR. HAYDEN: The question is too ambiguous.

MR. ICHORD: We are getting into the field of political philosophy. The witness has testified at length as to his philosophy, Mr. Council. But it would be very difficult for the Chair to direct an answer to the question.

MR. CONLEY: Mr. Hayden, I have one final question for you. Ambrose Bierce, in his Devil's Dictionary, defines a conspirator as someone who finds it necessary to write down everything for his enemy to find. Mr. Hayden, you were clever enough not to be carrying any names or addresses on your person, or any slips of paper, at the time of the events in Chicago. However, in the purse of Miss Constance Brown was a complete list of names and addresses which were purportedly prepared by you. And I would ask you, sir, don't you think that the young people who follow you in these various movements should take a second look at you before they place their lives and their responsibilities in the hand of you [sic]?

MR. HAYDEN: -----.

MR. ICHORD: The witness will please be seated.

MR. HAYDEN: I thought that was the final question.

MR. ICHORD: The Chair directs the witness to be seated.

MR. WATSON: Mr. Chairman, may I make this point? I know there are advocates of free speech, and the witness is one of them, but I happen to be one who will not tolerate any such language as that. We have ladies in this room, and I shall not tolerate it, and if it is necessary for me to ask the police to arrest a man for such disorderly language as that, I shall do so. I am not going to tolerate language such as that in the presence of ladies.

MR. ASHBROOK: Mr. Hayden, sometimes I get the impression that you indicate what happened in Chicago was unfortunate, a travesty, and so forth. Other times, I get the indication you believe that Chicago was valuable, in that it demonstrated certain things, brought to the surface what you consider to be unfair treatment, some of the wrongs of the political processes. There is somewhat a dilemma here. I would like to have for the record whether you think now, looking back to the Chicago convention, what happened was good, bad, or helpful to your movement. You have talked kind of from both sides. I would like to know which is your honest point of view.

MR. HAYDEN: I have talked both sides, because we are going to win either way, Mr. Ashbrook. We would have won if it would have been safe and secure for two hundred thousand rank-and-file people, ordinary people, to come to Chicago and protest. That would have had a profoundly discrediting effect on the Democratic Party as it ratified the war in Vietnam and nominated Hubert Humphery, and would have defeated the Democratic Party by the alienation of its grass-roots base. Since that was not allowed, because of the failure of the city to grant permits, since that was not allowed because there was too much jeopardy facing anybody with a family or job, and since they didn't come to Chicago, we won in a different way: by exposing the brute nature that underlies the supposedly democratic two-party system. I would have preferred to win the first way, but the second way was a tremendous victory of a kind for the young people in this country, people who watch on television and do not identify with the Nixon girls and David Eisenhower, but identify with the young people who are in the streets of Chicago, and watch very carefully. If you think that you have had militant people before you in these hearings, you have yet to see what

the seven- and eight-year-olds are going to bring you over the next five to ten years. You have taught them to have no respect for your authority by what has happened in the City of Chicago. And that is a victory in the sense that committees like yourselves are now through. You exist only formally; but you have lost all authority. And when a group of people who have power lose their authority, then they have lost. You have lost, period. That is why I have been quiet. That is why these hearings aren't disrupted, that is why no one comes to these hearings to picket any more. The job has been done against HUAC, and the job has virtually been done against politicians.

MR. ICHORD: And you say you are eventually going to do the job against the whole United States?

MR. HAYDEN: Politicians like Dean Rusk, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, these people are in a sense already finished, because they can't exercise authority; they have no respect from wide sections of the American people. Richard Nixon does not even believe that Beatles albums should be played. He believes that drugs are the curse of American youth.

MR. ICHORD: Of course, Mr. Hayden, you are very fortunate to have the protection of the First Amendment rights. Do you think that if you had performed the acts that you have performed and said such things that you have said in North Vietnam, in behalf of America, that you wouldn't be shot on the spot? Do you think you would be given the same amount of liberty, guarantees of First Amendment rights, which you have been given?

MR. HAYDEN: Mr. Ichord, I don't consider that I have that much freedom. Is it freedom to sit here, and under penalty of going to jail if I don't talk to you and express my opinions over and over in a committee chamber of this sort, knowing full well that the opinions are hot air, they have no effect on your ears, they will not change a thing? If that is freedom, that is a very inadequate definition of freedom.

MR. ICHORD: You have indeed a very strange philosophy, sir. You say that you don't care about electing a President. You don't care about a President at all. What kind of government do you want?

MR. HAYDEN: I want a democratic government. My views on that are

spelled out in the – not so very well, perhaps, certainly not, in my opinion, but they are spelled out in exhaustive detail in all kinds of things that I have written, which I would be glad to submit to you, but I think that the question at this point would be a little bit redundant.

Source:

Eric Bently, ed., *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 881-891.