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## Vietnam Vets against the Vietnam War: the People's House in Clarksville, TN (1970-1972)

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## **Vietnam Vets Against the Vietnam War: The People's House in Clarksville, TN (1970-1972)**



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This research paper explores the history of a particular organization that flourished in a time of controversy and uncertainty throughout the United States. The People's House was a GI coffeehouse located outside of Fort Campbell in Clarksville, TN from 1970 to 1972 that was developed in response to a growing opposition to the Vietnam war from the soldiers themselves. During the war, GI coffeehouses played a key role in providing a safe space outside of Army bases where disillusioned GI's could speak their mind and organize together. This purpose, combined with the hope of bringing together GI and civilian activists, inspired and motivated the People's House and its members. This research reveals that both the community of Clarksville and also the federal government did not approve of the People's House. From firebombs to hearings before the House of Representatives, it is apparent that many viewed the People's House as both a Communist cell and a threat to national security. The methodology used in this research involved a close examination of primary source and government documents related to the People's House and interviews with past members. This research paper examines the importance and history of the widely under recognized GI movement and examines the reasons why the federal government saw the People's House as a threat to the safety of America. The paper concludes that the legacy of the People's House and other coffeehouses like it is an increase in governmental and public tolerance for criticism of the military by members of the military, the government, and the general public.

Vietnam Veterans Against the Vietnam War: The People's House in  
Clarksville, Tennessee (1970-1972)

The antiwar movement of the 1960's is commonly thought of as having been developed and carried out by radical students and disillusioned members of America's youth counterculture. However, at the center of those questioning the aims and intent of the Vietnam War were, in fact, the soldiers themselves.

As the 1960's progressed and the war escalated, the GI movement against the Vietnam war grew not only among soldiers who were stationed in Vietnam, but also among officers and noncommissioned soldiers at home in America. The GI movement was unlike any other movement in history because it not only had to develop organizing tools that were unique to the movement itself, like the GI underground press and the GI coffeehouse, but it also brought a number of the main political and social issues being dealt with throughout greater society (antiwar feelings, racism and drug use) directly into the lives of hundreds of thousands of GIs. Although it is the least publicized social movement of the time period, the GI Movement was one of the most effective social movements of the 1960's and 1970's.

With their growing activism, American GIs were responding not only to a controversial war in Vietnam, but they were also beginning to speak out against inequality and oppression throughout the U.S. Armed Services. According to an issue of *Armed Forces Journal* from 1971: "The morale, discipline and battle worthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United

States.”<sup>1</sup> Acts of resistance had been present during every war previously fought by the United States, but it was not until America entered Indochina in the 1960’s that “the fraggings, mutinies, desertions, and other symptoms of collapsing morale would alone qualify the Vietnam period as the most disruptive in American history.”<sup>2</sup> Responding to an controversial war, mistreatment and oppression within the military, racial conflicts and a variety of other issues plaguing GIs, discontent among troops was quickly expanding as the war escalated. Antiwar sentiment was spreading throughout the military and the effectiveness of authority began to linger. What was growing inside the hearts and minds of American GIs would eventually develop into something which had never before been experienced within the U.S. Armed Forces, an “organized political opposition and resistance,”<sup>3</sup> a collective GI movement.

Repressive regulations throughout the Army made it a challenge for the majority of GIs to organize themselves into politically active collectives, but many organized secretly and carried out protest actions. In 1966 the “Fort Hood Three”, privates James Johnson, Dennis Mora and David Samas, refused to take part in a war they considered “unjust, immoral and illegal” while also rejecting going AWOL because of its “dishonorable” nature. This action was one of the first instances of GI resistance. The roots of GI resistance are evident in their joint statement:

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<sup>1</sup> Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr., “The Collapse of the Armed Forces,” *Armed Forces Journal* (June 7, 1971), 30.

<sup>2</sup> David Cortright, *Soldier in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1975), 50.

<sup>3</sup> Cortright, *Soldier in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War*, 50.

We have decided to take a stand against this war, which we consider immoral, illegal, and unjust... We represent in our backgrounds a cross section of the army and of America. James Johnson is a Negro, David Samos is of Lithuanian and Italian parents, Dennis Mora is a Puerto Rican. We speak as American soldiers.<sup>4</sup>

In an effort to increase the impact of their actions, the privates contacted a number of anti-war organizations and announced their plan to refuse service in Vietnam while also filing a lawsuit challenging the legality of an undeclared war.<sup>5</sup> Connecting to their fellow GIs and sparking similar emotions through their actions and words, the Fort Hood Three inspired a number of other GIs to perform their own individual acts of resistance.

It is important to recognize that radical political organizing in America has always been a challenge. However, organizing within the military presented the greatest challenge of all; hence one of the unique factors of the GI Movement was its ability to successfully form a cohesive group of dedicated activists who varied in both race and class. Entering into the military institution meant that “restrictions on a soldier’s civil liberties are nearly absolute” while also “public assembly, distribution of literature, the wearing of political symbols – all such means of political expression are strictly forbidden on post.”<sup>6</sup> This presented GIs with major obstacles. To collectively organize themselves, GIs risked arrest and reprimand. In addition, soldiers who simply made their political views apparent, while not necessarily participating in political action, were commonly subject to harassment.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 70-71.

<sup>5</sup> Terry H. Anderson, *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 96.

<sup>6</sup> Cortright, *Soldier in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War*, 50.



Figure 1. Example of artwork produced by the GI movement as a response to their negative views of the military. Picture taken from Issue 1 of the People's Press.



Figure 2. Another example of GI artwork. Image taken from [www.sirnosir.com](http://www.sirnosir.com).

As GI organizing began to pick up among the troops in the late 1960's, two unique tools were created to combat the repressive restrictions enforced in regards to GI organizing while further bringing GIs together; the GI underground

press and the GI coffeehouse movement. The GI underground press was arguably the most vital organizing instrument of the antiwar movement. Combining grassroots developing and publishing tactics with covert forms of circulation among various army bases, the GI underground press brought information to GIs throughout the country while also creating a sense of solidarity and community among military activists. The main goal of underground papers was to spread the news of the GI movement to other bases. This was vital to providing GIs across the country with ways of interacting with each other while also gaining support from the words and actions of other dedicated soldiers.

American soldiers' underground newspapers were filled with personal accounts of racism and oppression by the Army, reports of GI protest actions on various bases throughout the United States, news on the war in Vietnam, political cartoons, and also inspirational articles and columns on varying social and political subjects. Some of the larger papers like *The Bond* and *Vietnam GI* circulated into the tens of thousands while the smaller and more typically seen papers usually reached around thirty-five hundred to ten thousand readers. By 1970, over ninety GI newspapers were in circulation throughout the country and recent research suggests that by the end of the GI movement in the mid-1970's, around 300 papers were published.<sup>7</sup>

The GI underground press was commonly published and distributed from a network of coffeehouses that were established in towns outside of military

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<sup>7</sup> Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era*, 96.

bases.<sup>8</sup> Along with the GI press, the GI coffeehouse phenomenon developed as a form of activism unique to GIs and their fight against the U.S. military. Through the creation of the United States Servicemen's Fund and dedication of both civilians and anti-war activists, over \$150,000 was raised in 1970 alone to help finance the development and maintenance of more than twenty coffeehouses at U.S. Army bases throughout the country.<sup>9</sup> A coffeehouse project was established at Fort Knox in late August 1969 and in an issue of their underground paper, *Fun Travel Adventure*, soldiers describe their newly opened coffeehouse, representing the views and goals of similar efforts throughout the country:

We feel that our time can be spent more productively and enjoyably. Like FTA [Fuck The Army], the Coffee-House is dedicated to building a movement of GIs who no longer will accept being messed over in the army and being used to mess over other people around the world. The Coffee-House will be a place where a guy who has been torn away from his family and friends and put into the cesspool known as the army can get away, a place to go where people are not telling him what to do and how to do it, a place to call his own, do what he wants, LIVE, get out of the stupor that Basic and AIT and the whole fucking system tries to keep us in. Most important, it's a place where he can get together with other guys who feel like he does and begin to change things. It's our Coffee-House, we have opened it, but it's up to you as to what the Coffee-House will be like.<sup>10</sup>

Coffeehouse projects like the Coffeehouse at Fort Knox were important because they brought together likeminded civilians and GIs. The civilians who became involved with GI projects were mostly antiwar activists who wanted to do their part within the movement by helping troops to create a space where they could organize and plan actions. It was commonly civilians who would establish a location for the coffeehouse and begin the organizing activities. Civilians also

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<sup>8</sup> Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era*, 98.

<sup>9</sup> Jeff Schutts, "Breaking Ranks: Anti-Vietnam War Activism Within the US Military", Paper presented at "Thinking through Action: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Social Movements and their Legacy" (Conference at Simon Fraser University Harbour Centre, June 10-12 2005), 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Fun Travel Adventure*, vol. 2, no. 2 (www.simosir.com).

helped to bring legal counseling to many coffeehouses which meant that GIs had access to free legal advice about their rights, court-martials, and discharges, among a number of other topics.



**Figure 3. Photograph of the Oleo Strut coffeehouse which was located in Kileen, Texas outside of Fort Hood. Image from [www.sirnosir.com](http://www.sirnosir.com).**

Although coffeehouses brought together GIs in a unified manner while also helping to create the vital link between GIs and civilians, they eventually became perceived as a threat to both the U.S. Armed Services and the American government. Believing that GI organizing projects were contributing to both the downfall of morale within the U.S. Army and the growing opposition to the American governmental system, coffeehouse projects were under constant surveillance by the U.S. military and the government. A number of coffeehouses

were also regularly harassed by disapproving members of the public and, on some occasions, these conflicts exploded into violence.

### **The People's House**

One coffee house in particular, the People's House, located near of Fort Campbell in Clarksville, Tennessee brought together GIs and civilians, published an underground newspaper, became involved with antiwar protests and demonstrations, and was eventually investigated by the FBI. Therefore, the People's House fully represented virtually all aspects of a typical GI coffeehouse during the early 1970's.

The People's House was started by a small group of activists who were dedicated to fighting for a society that was both socially and politically just. The two men who founded the People's House, James Mulherin and James Hawley, had become involved with the GI movement through an organization out of Southern California called Save Our Soldiers. Save Our Soldiers had evolved out of another larger organization, the United States Serviceman's Fund, which provided both financial support and committed civilian activists to budding GI projects at bases throughout the United States.

In November of 1970, Hawley and Mulherin made their way from Berkeley, California to Clarksville, Tennessee, the home of Fort Campbell and the

101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division<sup>11</sup>. Here, they met up with like-minded GIs and citizens and began organizing around their ideas and beliefs. Along with civilian activists, the People's House also attracted students from the University located in Clarksville, Austin Peay. A number of People's House members were students who believed in the Vietnam anti-war Movement and wanted to become active in the larger radical community.

In December 1970, Mulherin and Hawley purchased a house eight miles north of Clarksville for \$10,000<sup>12</sup>. A few weeks were spent fixing up the house and repairing broken pipes and electrical wires. By December 20, Mulherin officially moved into an upstairs room in the house. As the renovations progressed, informal meetings began and contacts were made with professionals, soldiers, community members and volunteers in both Clarksville and Nashville.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 4. Photograph of the People's House in Clarksville, Tennessee. Image taken from *the Nashville Tennessean*.**

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, “*Investigations of Attempts to Subvert the U.S. Armed Services*,” *Hearings before the Committee on Internal Security*, 92d Cong., 2d sess. (October 20-28 1971), 6514.

<sup>12</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Jim Mulherin, Historical Sketch, June-July 1971, 1.

As in GI centers throughout the country, the People's House was intended to create an environment where veterans, active duty GIs and citizens could organize and work together to address their common problems. Many GIs at Fort Campbell were growing increasingly more concerned with issues that affected them directly such as their living and working conditions on base, as well as soldier-community relations. They felt there needed to be a free space where people could meet and share their ideas, experiences and concerns. "The house provides a place for GIs (as well as students and other community people) to get together, talk, listen to music, speakers and films, to write and publish a GI newspaper (*The People's Press*), and a place to support and provide facilities for GIs and community people opposed to the war in Vietnam, racism, and sexism."<sup>14</sup>

The activities at the house ranged from a weekly spaghetti dinner to organizing community demonstrations. One of the main undertakings of the collective was an underground newspaper that dealt with a variety of issues including racism, sexism, the war in Vietnam, and abuse in the military. Originally named *Napalm*, the paper, after a few months, was renamed the *People's Press*.<sup>15</sup> The first issue was released in March 1971.<sup>16</sup>

"Speak Out" is the title of the first section in Volume One of the *People's Press*. GIs sent letters from various parts of the country to members of the

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<sup>14</sup> Ed Hamlett & Elizabeth Chase, "The People's House", (a leaflet describing the goals of the People's House).

<sup>15</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>16</sup> Jim Mulherin, Historical Sketch, June-July 1971, 2.

People's House and some were printed in this section of the paper. In the introduction to the first issue, the Editors write:

We know that shit is going down in every unit, that people are fighting back and often winning victories against the lifers and the brass. We need to know what's happening all over so we can learn from each other, get our heads together and begin to change things. Let the People's Press know what's happening where you are. The lifers and the brass are like roaches. They run when you turn the light on them. Turn the light on in your unit.<sup>17</sup>

In every issue two or three letters were printed from frustrated GIs. Here soldiers told their individual stories of military bias and abuse. A letter from a soldier who called himself "G.H" began this way, "Every person in the military conforms at one time or another, but why are we punished so severely for not complying on time to certain regulations, especially those which are of no great importance?"<sup>18</sup> In the rest of his letter, G.H. told readers how he, along with his roommate, received Article 15's (\$25 fine and 90 days suspended bust), were removed from their jobs, and kicked out of their section. All this happened because they did not have the proper haircut, and their mustaches and sideburns were not trimmed.<sup>19</sup>

The *People's Press* printed numerous articles having to do with military issues. Some of the articles were specifically about Fort Campbell, but many discussed other bases throughout the country. By printing the news of other bases, the *People's Press* afforded GIs at Fort Campbell the opportunity to read about and relate to men in similar situations, inspiring them not to give up the fight for equal and fair practice in the military. In Volume one of the *People's Press*, there

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<sup>17</sup> *People's Press*, Vol. 1 No. 1, (March 1971), 1.

<sup>18</sup> *People's Press*, Vol. 1 No. 1, (March 1971), 1.

<sup>19</sup> *People's Press*, Vol. 1 No. 1, (March 1971), 1.

is an article titled “Right on Post” that discusses GI’s living in substandard barracks: “The plumbing is inadequate. Sinks, urinals, commodes and showers constantly back up causing an unbelievably unhealthy situation as well as an inability to use any of these facilities. The heat works sporadically, or not at all. Cockroaches and bugs run rampant over man and lifer.”<sup>20</sup> The article goes on to discuss that although no substantial improvements had been made to the barracks, there was a petition that resulted in some small improvements. “If the Army really takes care of ‘its own, then it better begin by taking care of the conditions that ‘its own’ has to put up with.”<sup>21</sup>

An untitled article published in Volume Two of the *People’s Press* refers back to “Right on Post” and adds that the article did lead to change: “In the last couple of weeks, the brass has managed to scrape up enough bread to start renovating the barracks.”<sup>22</sup> The article continues on to say that the *People’s Press* does not want to take any credit for having action taken to fix up the barracks, but rather “this article is written so that other GI’s might find some encouragement that things can change. They can change if GI’s stick together, they can change if we don’t buckle under to Army intimidation. They can change if we fight for what is ours to begin with.”<sup>23</sup>

Matters other than those pertaining to the military were published in every issue of the *People’s Press*. There were numerous articles criticizing the American government and its actions both in and outside of the United States. In

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<sup>20</sup> *People’s Press*, Vol. 1 No. 1, (March 1971), 8.

<sup>21</sup> *People’s Press*, Vol. 1 No. 1, (March 1971), 8.

<sup>22</sup> *People’s Press*, Vol. 1 No. 2, (April 1971), 3.

<sup>23</sup> *People’s Press*, Vol. 1 No. 2, (April 1971), 3.

Volume Two, an article titled “Nixon...My Lie” focuses on a new campaign launched by Nixon and other pro-war figures that attempted to convince the American public that the US pilots captured in Vietnam were being treated barbarically.<sup>24</sup> Later in the same issue there appeared an article entitled “Laos... Why They Fight.” Here, the author analyzed the unsuccessful invasion of Laos, discussing what happened during the invasion as well as the nature of the Laotian people. “The reason the ARVN got slaughtered in Laos is the same reason the US hasn’t been able to win in the Nam. The Vietnamese are fighting for their independence and land – so are the Laotians. They’re fighting with the same determination Americans did in 1776.”<sup>25</sup> The article also gives the reasons put forth by the Nixon administration attempting to justify why invading Laos was warranted.

Similarly, in Volume Four of the *People’s Press*, an article appeared with the title “The Pentagon Papers: Lie Like Hell!” and centers on revealing and analyzing the context of the Pentagon Papers.<sup>26</sup> The citation of articles on political issues of general interest helped expose GIs as well as the general public to major issues impacting their lives.

The People’s House regularly distributed literature published by the Black Panthers that clearly represented the militant ideology of the civil rights organization. Articles addressing either the Black Panthers or racism were printed in nearly every issue of the *People’s Press*. For example, in Volume Two, “Free Bobby & Erika!” talks of Bobby Seale and Erika Huggins, who were on trial after

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<sup>24</sup> *People’s Press*, Vol. 1 No. 2, (April 1971), 9.

<sup>25</sup> *People’s Press*, Vol. 1 No. 2, (April 1971), 10.

<sup>26</sup> *People’s Press*, Vol. 1 No. 4, (August 1971), 5.

being charged with conspiracy to murder and kidnap. Seale was the Chairman of the Black Panther Party while Huggins was the leader of its New Haven chapter. The article included an account of the incident from Seale and Huggins' viewpoint arguing their innocence. After outlining the criminal trial, the article next discussed the views of the Black Panther party and the goals of their political activities.<sup>27</sup>

**Figure 5. Every issue of the People's Press included this Grievance Form. GI's from Fort Campbell could fill out the form and send it directly to the People's House. Image taken from Issue 2 of the People's Press.**

Not only did the People's House write, print and distribute an underground newspaper, it also played a significant role in organizing and participating in

<sup>27</sup> *People's Press*, Vol. 1 No. 2, (April 1971), 5.

demonstrations around Clarksville. In Volume Five of the *People's Press*, a short article entitled "March on October 25" appeared that discussed a march scheduled to take place on October 25, 1971 at Fort Campbell. The article denounced hypocritical actions of both the American government and military, and then called for men and women to stand up and resist.

This march is our chance to stand up and be counted – to be counted into the thousands of people who are sick of repression, sick of the breaking down of our minds, sick of being kicked while we are down with our hands tied by the O.D. Green Machine. Stand up and be counted – March on Fort Campbell Veteran's Day, October 25!!<sup>28</sup>

Whenever a march or protest was taking place, those at the People's House would distribute literature around the Clarksville area hoping to find sympathetic supporters. One leaflet with a bold title stating, "May 15<sup>th</sup> is Armed Forces Day" has a small paragraph:

That's the day that the military glorifies war. That's the day we've chosen to celebrate peace. GIs for Peace and Justice is a group of GIs who are working to stop the war, racism, repression and to win full constitutional rights and decent living conditions for all GIs.<sup>29</sup>

The leaflet continued: "We're demonstrating for: U.S. out of Southeast Asia now, full constitutional rights for GIs, don't use GIs for riot control and strikebreaking, free all political prisoners." The bottom of the leaflet described the speakers and live music that would be present at the demonstration. It gave the date, time, and place of the protest along with a small statement addressing GI rights, "AR 600

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<sup>28</sup> *People's Press*, Vol. 1 No. 5, (October 1971) 1.

<sup>29</sup> "May 15<sup>th</sup> is Armed Forces Day" (leaflet discussing a demonstration).

20 says GIs have the right to demonstrate so long as they're off duty and out of uniform."<sup>30</sup>

Members of the People's House often distributed literature announcing scheduled protests and demonstrations, but they also printed (in the house) and circulated pamphlets addressing political issues such as women's liberation, racial issues, the War on Vietnam, and GI rights. One document that was frequently distributed gave a schedule of what went on each day or night at the People's House.

On Monday at 7:30 they will have a planning session for Armed Forces demonstrations on Armed Forces Day, and the People's Peace Treaty of April 24, a demonstration in Washington. On Tuesday at 6:30 is a women's meeting, and Wednesday at 7:30 they put the newspaper together – they need articles and poetry and so forth. On Thursday nights there is military counseling to advise GIs of their rights and how to use them. On Fridays they show movies, and Saturday is whatever you make it. Sunday there is a free spaghetti dinner.<sup>31</sup>

The People's House scheduled such events to bring GIs and civilians together to build a community of dedicated activists.

The People's House and its members successfully built and maintained a place where GIs and citizens could meet and feel comfortable discussing their views on numerous matters. They provided GIs with free legal advice, which was highly desired by conscientious objectors and men attempting to be discharged, and they gave GIs a place to learn about their legal rights. The People's House motivated men and women to become active in politics and to stand up for their beliefs. GIs felt safe and supported by other soldiers who shared many of the same concerns and were able to draw on the knowledge and support offered by

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<sup>30</sup> "May 15<sup>th</sup> is Armed Forces Day".

<sup>31</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

the civilians activists of the People's House to work for better living conditions and treatment at Fort Campbell. The creation of a space free of military surveillance was imperative to the survival of both the People's House and the greater GI movement because it provided GIs with an environment where they could comfortably organize their ideas and beliefs in an unbiased and cohesive manner.

Many veterans also found solace in organizations like the People's House. Countless soldiers had traumatizing experiences overseas and felt that most American civilians would be unable to relate to their experience, commonly ended up feeling like an outcast upon returning home to their own country. Not all veterans came back to America with anti-war feelings, but after experiencing the realities of war, the majority of returning soldiers strongly believed that the United States should not be fighting the war in Vietnam.<sup>32</sup> The People's House presented returning GIs with a place where they could find others who felt the same way; they could connect and talk about their experiences without feeling alienated. Veterans were also able to participate in peaceful demonstrations alongside active duty GIs and citizens, working towards ending the war they viewed as unjust.

GI coffee houses across the country held views and intentions extremely similar to those of the People's House. Both the GIs and civilians who participated possessed strong political positions that were highly critical of the government and the military. They focused on issues such as the war in Vietnam

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<sup>32</sup> Loren Baritz, *Backfire: Vietnam – The Myths That Made Us Fight, The Illusions That Helped Us Lose, The Legacy That Haunts Us Today*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 23.

and the state of military bases, but many of the members were also concerned with much larger issues:

They stated that their war activities were only a small part of the goals they were actually after. I tried to get them to tell me just what the other goals were, but they refused to say what else they were involved in. They said there were a lot of things wrong with the United States, many things that were unsatisfactory to them, and they started to list them, such as hunger – they talked about how many people were starving in the US today and how the government is paying the farmers not to grow food.<sup>33</sup>

Members of the People’s House also discussed their concern for medical care for all people, the polio epidemic and need for a mass immunization program sponsored by the federal Government.<sup>34</sup>

The leading members of the People’s House in Clarksville openly stated that their political ideology was of the radical persuasion. In early 1971, both Bobby Lynch and James Mulherin were interviewed by the Teddy Barr radio show on WSM Nashville. Their comments were later summarized this way:

Mr. Lynch stated that he had been in the Army and had refused orders to go to Vietnam, that he went AWOL for six months and later received an undesirable discharge from the Army. He also stated that he was not just “anti” to be “anti” that he was serious and very dedicated in his beliefs. He believed that communism is not a threat to the people of the United States, but is a threat to the power structure and to the capitalists. Lynch further stated that the revolution is a social-economic change that would happen in the next 20-25 years. Lynch stated that if communism means the liberation of people and a government that explains things and educates its people and advocates the overthrow of the present form of government, then he is a communist.<sup>35</sup>

Mulherin also was recorded on the same radio show talking about his political affiliation.

Mulherin stated that he had visited East Berlin in 1956 and would like to visit Cuba and Russia. He advocates a people’s government. He said his philosophy is basically communist and that if his being against poverty, racism, and war was communist, then he could be called a communist.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>34</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>35</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>36</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

Along with a few other key members of the People's House, Mulherin had been involved with both politics and the GI movement for many years. Because of their activities within the movement, they had been trailed and investigated by the FBI. Government agents tracked Mulherin and the other founding member of the People's House, James Hawley, on their political trips across the country. When the men ended up in Clarksville Tennessee, FBI surveillance followed.

### **Community Reaction and Harassment towards the People's House**

Most of the citizens of Clarksville were not supportive of the People's House and many of the townspeople were skeptical of the coffeehouse from its beginning. The demonstrations either conducted or supported by the People's House always made their way through the town, and literature was frequently handed out in the parking lot at the Clarksville supermarket.<sup>37</sup> A few months after the start of the People's House, some members contacted Reverend Robert Craig of Trinity Episcopal Church in Clarksville, hoping to talk to him about participating in counseling of GIs and others at the People's House.<sup>38</sup> Some members came to believe that Reverend Craig did not support the People's House and may have complained about them to law enforcement, because shortly after contacting him, the FBI and county sheriff began frequent and obvious surveillance of the People's House.

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<sup>37</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>38</sup> Jim Mulherin, Historical Sketch (June-July 1971), 4.

Unbeknownst to the members of the People's House, Sheriff Joel Plummer of Montgomery County and his chief deputy Paul Neblett had been closely watching them for months. Deputy Neblett had been focusing on illegal drug use in Clarksville for several years, but after receiving numerous calls about a large house located outside Clarksville, his focus switched. After surveying the house, Neblett reported seeing a large amount of teenagers frequenting the house every night. He took further actions to find out who owned the house, and the nature of their intentions.

Neblett continued his surveillance and observed members of the People's House handing out literature. He was able to recognize many of those distributing the pamphlets as GIs. "Quite a few of the participants are military. We can tell by their looks and by the stickers on the cars that we have observed at the house." When asked by the United States House of Representatives Committee on Internal Security his opinion of the People's House, Neblett responded: "Well, in my opinion, their main objective is to overthrow the Government and to disrupt the military where it won't be able to wage another war; this is according to their statements."<sup>39</sup>

Soon thereafter, members of the People's House began to notice strange vehicles lingering around their area; harassment began as well. "We began getting phone calls several times a day (but ordinarily no later than 11pm) telling us to 'get out of Clarksville' or 'so long suckers!' or just the ticking of a clock."<sup>40</sup> Around 2:30 a.m. on February 20, 1971 three shotgun blasts damaged several

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<sup>39</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>40</sup> Jim Mulherin, Historical Sketch (June-July 1971), 5.

windows of the house along with the windshield of a car belonging to a member of the People's House. Five days after the incident, "a pair of white men in a pale blue Ford attempted to firebomb Jim Hawley's Volvo but the wick went out. We called the pigs as a matter of form; as a matter of form they carried out a purely perfunctory non-investigation, e.g. ignoring even the wick and bottle fragments at their feet."<sup>41</sup>

In response to the harassment, members of the People's House started conducting a night watch. Every night starting at sunset, a volunteer would sit by a window in the second floor of the house watching to see if any suspicious activity occurred. The person who was conducting the watch always had a shotgun at arms reach, but fortunately there was never an incident where the firearm had to be used in defense.<sup>42</sup> In addition, "Suspicious Car" forms were created so members of the People's House could write down information about unfamiliar cars that lingered around the house. When someone observed such a car, they wrote down the license plate number, the make and model of the car, the color, descriptions of the people in the car, and what the car did.<sup>43</sup>

On March 1, 1971, a few weeks after the incident, the *Nashville Tennessean* published a front-page article about the People's House, complete with pictures of the house and its shattered windows. Along with reporting on the incident of harassment and discussing the community's reaction to the presence of the house, the article also revealed that the People's House had been under FBI surveillance. The reporters interviewed the Reverend William Jenkins, pastor of

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<sup>41</sup> Jim Mulherin, Historical Sketch (June-July 1971), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Night Watch Sign Up Sheet (February, 1971).

<sup>43</sup> Suspicious Cars Form (February 29, 1971).

First Presbyterian Church and wrote, “He has talked to both supporters and opponents of the house and is fearful there may be a violent clash of the two sides. ‘I’m afraid there is going to be violence here and I hope by reasoning with the community we can avert it, but there are people in this town who think it is a Communist cell,’ the minister said.”<sup>44</sup>

NIGHT WATCH

The Peoples House  
456 N. 2nd. St. Clarksville, Tenn.

Date Feb 3, 1971

Time 1 (sunrise to 10:00): Earl

Time 2 (10:00 - 12:30): Bob - ~~John~~

Time 3 (12:30 - 3:00): Glen - ~~John~~

Time 4 (3:00 - 6:00): Larry - ~~John S.~~

Time 5 ( ): \_\_\_\_\_

Date Feb 4, 1971

Time 1 (sunrise to 10:00): Earl

Time 2 (10 - ~~1~~): Jim M

Time 3 (~~10 - 2~~): \_\_\_\_\_

Time 4 (2 - 4): Larry + John

Time 5 (4 - 6): Judy

Date Fri

Time 1 (sunrise to 10:00): Jim M

Time 2 (10 - 1): Bob

Time 3 (1 - 4): Jim H + Diane

Time 4 (4 - 6): Larry

Time 5 ( ): \_\_\_\_\_

Date Sat

Time 1 (sunrise to 10): Bob

Time 2 (10 - 1): Jim M

Time 3 (1 - 4): Judy + David

Time 4 (4 - 6): Jim Lyons

Time 5 ( ): \_\_\_\_\_

Date Sun

Time 1 (8:30 - 12): Earl Jim H.

Time 2 (12 - 3): Larry - Judy

Time 3 (3 - 6): John

Time 4 ( ): \_\_\_\_\_

Time 5 ( ): \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 6. A night watch sign up sheet used by members of the People's House after numerous incidents of harassment. Image taken from the People's House Collection at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>44</sup> “GIs People’s House Has Guarded Moments”, *The Nashville Tennessean* (March 1, 1971).

Sheriff Joel Plummer shared Reverend Jenkins' feelings towards community opposition to the People's House. When asked if he felt there was any concern by members of the community towards the People's House, Plummer responded:

Mr. Chairman, there is great concern within the community concerning the People's House. Many citizens are concerned about it because of the proximity of Fort Campbell and their participation and, of course, the university and then the young teenage element. And there is great concern and they are having trouble staying in business. But at this time it is still open and is still functioning.<sup>45</sup>

Sheriff Plummer was accurate when stating that there was great concern among residents of Clarksville about the People's House.

The Ministerial Association in Clarksville printed a full-page ad in the *Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle*, entitled "A Statement to the Citizens of the Clarksville Area." The ad read:

Believing ourselves, because of our unique commitment to the Christian life, to be responsible for helping to guide and formulate the conscience of our community, and finding the community upset by, and confused by an organization known as the People's House, we the Clarksville Ministerial Association feel compelled to speak the following:

1. We do not support or endorse the People's House. While many of its activities may incorporate an appeal to conscience, we none-the-less are leery of their real goal.
2. In our opinion the People's House has a hidden agenda which is not to the best interest of our community or our nation. We believe its ultimate purposes are detrimental.
3. We find the underground papers and pamphlets supported by and circulated by the People's House and its affiliates to be unnecessarily profane and politically objectionable, an unfit influence for our young people and community, therefore an illegitimate, harmful expression of protest or grievance.
4. We suspect that the involvement of the People's House in what may or may not be legitimate needs, but none-the-less are sympathy arousing projects, is but

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<sup>45</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

a subterfuge, a ploy, for the more serious business of undermining and destroying this community's efforts to deal responsibly with its problems.

5. We urge the community to learn from the presence of the People's House that where there are unmet needs in our community, that we move responsibly within the established, respectable institutions that are ours, to meet those needs. We pledge ourselves as a Ministerial Association to the redress of real needs and urge community cooperation toward that end.

6. We express our faith in the resources of this community to deal in an innovative and redemptive way for the purposes of justice, and the well being of our citizens. We seek to express in unison with others a solid wall of responsibility, and concern on behalf of the people in this community. We reject and condemn the efforts of those who seek to destroy what we believe is basically a desirable system of government and a sensitive, practical form of corporate life.

7. Finally, we believe that without resorting to any method that will demean us, but with simply the perseverance and commitment of an enlightened conscience, this community can purge itself of the undesirable and our inequities, further proving that with God all things are possible.<sup>46</sup>

Another article printed in the *Nashville Banner* on March 17, 1971 was entitled "People's House Called Malignant Growth; Clarksville USO Defended." The article reported on the Director of the United Services Organization (USO), Horace Taylor, and his publicly stated negative viewpoint regarding the People's House.

The house was begun several months ago in Clarksville, reportedly to inform soldiers of nearby Ft. Campbell of their rights. Taylor called the house, located at the corner of Second and Marion Streets, a "malignant growth" and urged community leaders to stand up and be counted "before the cancer can infiltrate the community."<sup>47</sup>

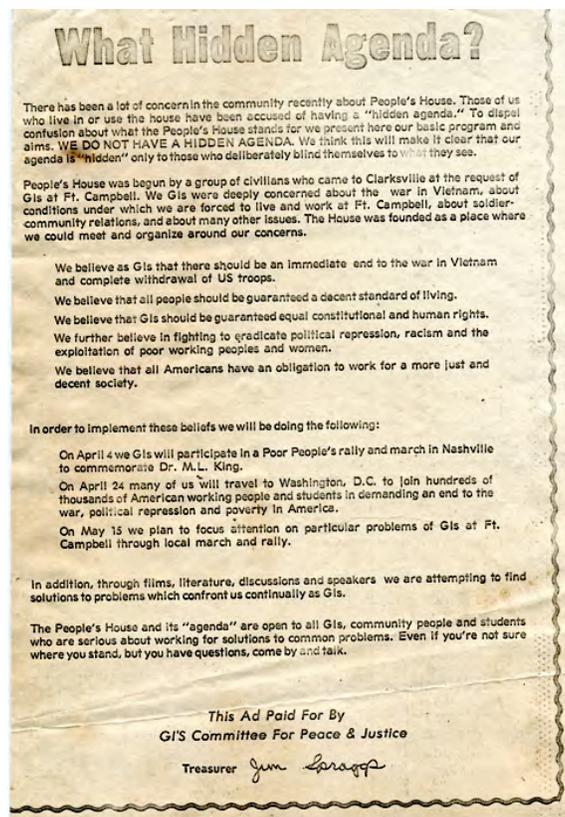
It was clear that the residents of Clarksville were not supportive of the People's House. Their negative views of the People's House no doubt were influenced by community leaders such as the Sheriff, the USO director, and the Ministerial Association, along with the media focus on the People's House. The

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<sup>46</sup> "Statement to the Citizens of the Clarksville Area," *Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle* (March 29, 1971).

<sup>47</sup> "People's House Called Malignant Growth; Clarksville USO Defended," *The Nashville Banner* (March 17, 1971).

presence in their community of an organization that encouraged controversial views and advocated for change was apparently intimidating to the community and they believed it needed to be stopped. Therefore, the citizens in and around Clarksville publicly denounced the People's House. Many locals suspected that the People's House was a communist cell, an opinion reflecting the lasting influence of the Cold War and McCarthyism in this small southern community.



**Figure 7. The leaflet created and distributed by the People's House in response to their public denouncement. Image taken from materials archived at the Shaheen and Gordon Law Office in Concord, New Hampshire.**

In response to the denouncement, the People's House printed and distributed a leaflet with the title, "What Hidden Agenda?" In an attempt to refute the "hidden agenda" allegation, the pamphlet stated:

There has been a lot of concern in the community recently about People's House. Those of us who live in or use the house have been accused of having a "hidden agenda." To dispel confusion about what the People's House stands for we present here our basic program and aims. WE DO NOT HAVE A HIDDEN AGENDA. We think this will make it clear that our agenda is "hidden" only to those who deliberately blind themselves to what they see.<sup>48</sup>

The leaflet went on to explain the purpose and beliefs of the People's House.

People's House was begun by a group of civilians who came to Clarksville at the request of GIs at Ft. Campbell. We GIs were deeply concerned about the war in Vietnam, about conditions under which we are forced to live and work at Ft. Campbell, about soldier-community relations and about many other things. The House was founded as a place where we could meet and organize around our concerns.<sup>49</sup>

The document ended with a scheduling of three upcoming demonstrations and then this final reminder: "The People's House and its 'agenda' are open to all GIs, community people and students who are serious about working for solutions to common problems. Even if you're not sure where you stand, but you have questions, come by and talk."<sup>50</sup>

### **Investigation by the FBI and the House Committee on Internal Security**

While the People's House was under scrutiny from the Clarksville community members, it was, at the same time, being investigated by the FBI and the House Committee on Internal Security. In confidential documents retrieved

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<sup>48</sup> Jim Spragg, "What Hidden Agenda?" (Document discussing the political stance of the People's House).

<sup>49</sup> Spragg, "What Hidden Agenda?".

<sup>50</sup> Spragg, "What Hidden Agenda?".

through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, it was made clear that the FBI had been investigating the People's House as early as January of 1971.

Through the use of confidential sources planted amidst People's House members (unbeknownst to them), the FBI was able to gain information on the whereabouts and activities of the People's House members at almost all times. An untitled document from the Memphis FBI office retrieved through the FOIA states, "It is definitely true that we have an investigation of the house because of its subversive nature and the subversive background of those involved, including the (name deleted) who was a Priority II Security Index subject in his last place of residence."<sup>51</sup>

The majority of documents retrieved through the FOIA simply reveal that the FBI was aware of virtually every move the members of the People's House made. Through the confidential sources planted by the Memphis FBI office, government officials were given access to practically all literature that was released by the People's House along with frequent updates about the activities going on at the People's House and the people who regularly visited the house.

The FBI also investigated the way in which the People's House was funded. Since the FBI associated the People's House with the Communist Party, it is likely that they suspected the People's House was supported by Communist funds. A document from the Memphis FBI office from February 19, 1971 confirms that the FBI was looking into how the People's House was funded. This document discussed four separate areas of interest: 1) basis of the People's House;

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<sup>51</sup> Untitled Memphis FBI Document received through a Freedom of Information Act sent to the FBI in March of 2006 and received on July 31, 2006.

2) investigation concerning purchase of house, connection of utilities and baking information; 3) information regarding automobile; and, 4) information concerning aims and purposes.<sup>52</sup> This document reveals no connection with the Communist Party, instead it simply reveals the date on which the house was purchased, the utility company that was used, the fundraising methods used by members of the People's House, and the support given to the People's House by the United States Serviceman's Fund.

On July 7, 1971 the director of the FBI sent a memo to the director of the Memphis office concerning the House Committee on Internal Security (HCIS) and its intentions to begin hearings to “determine the extent, character, and objectives of organizations engaged in various activities which undermine the discipline and morale of the Armed Forces of the U.S. or promote the causes of communist power engaged in armed conflict with the U.S.” The document continues on to state, “The People's House, according to HCIS, is presently under consideration as a leading area of the inquiry.”<sup>53</sup>

In the early 1970's, the HCIS emerged out of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). On January 22, 1971 the 92d Congress adopted a number of rules regarding the Committee on Internal Security and the responsibilities that it held. The first and most significant duty of the HCIS was to report on “Communist and other subversive activities affecting the internal security of the United States.” The HCIS was authorized to investigate under the circumstance:

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<sup>52</sup> Memo to FBI, “The People's House, Also Known As the Fort Campbell Project” (February 19, 1971).

<sup>53</sup> Memo from Director of FBI to Memphis FBI Office (February 17, 1971).

The Committee on Internal Security, acting as a whole or by subcommittee, is authorized to make investigations from time to time of (1) the extent, character, objectives and activities within the United States of organizations or groups, whether of foreign or domestic origin, their members, agents, and affiliates, which seek to establish, or assist in the establishment of, a totalitarian dictatorship within the United States, or to overthrow or alter, or assist in the overthrow or alteration of, the form of government of the United States or of any State thereof, by force violence, treachery, espionage, sabotage, insurrection or any unlawful means. (2) The extent, character, objectives, and activities within the United States of organization or groups, their members, agents and affiliates, which obstruct or oppose the lawful authority of the Government of the United States in the execution of any law or policy affecting the internal security of the United States, and (3) all other questions, including the administration and execution of any law of the United States, or any portion of law, relating to the foregoing that would aid the Congress or any Committee of the House in any necessary remedial legislation.<sup>54</sup>

The HICS was focused on organizations that it perceived to pose a clear and real Communist threat. The HICS took notice of a number of past governmental programs that revolved around domestic security. One of the most significant, the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1950 (also known as the Internal Security Act), required Communist organizations to register with the Attorney General of the United States. In addition, the Subversive Activities Control Board was established to investigate persons who were thought to be taking part in “un-American” activities. According to transcripts of the House Committee hearings:

In enacting the Subversive Activities Control Act, it was a principal objective to make public the identity, purpose, and mode of operation of Communist organizations within the United States, and in this manner to lay a basis for countering the evils inherent in the Communist strategy of secrecy and deceit which, in the words of Mr. Justice Frankfurter, had been regarded by the Congress as a threat to public safety and to “the effective, free-functioning of our national institutions.” This was to be accomplished by public hearings and by maintaining a public record of organizations determined to be Communist.<sup>55</sup>

As the months passed, the House investigations grew in scope and interest.

On July 6, 1971, two investigators from the HCIS, Charles Bonneville and

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<sup>54</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>55</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

Richard Shaw, contacted and interviewed Arpiar Saunders, an active duty Army lawyer and member of the People's House. According to Saunders:

Our discussion centered around the so-called "People's House" located in Clarksville Tennessee, a GI rights project which I was aware of and visited while stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Their inquiry appeared to be directed at a notion that the civilians at that project attempted to not only encourage GI rights but also non democratic politics. I stated to them that I saw no evidence of such activities while I was stationed at Fort Campbell.<sup>56</sup>

On August 10, 1971, a few months after the two investigators visited Saunders, Bonneville visited the People's House. Bonneville had been encouraged to visit the People's House by one of the local Clarksville citizens, Jay Schnoor. Schnoor, a member of a church group, had previously been to the People's House and become quite disturbed at what he found there. "The crux of what the people there told him, which really got Mr. Schnoor interested, was that one of their main aims was simply to create so much dissension in the ranks of the armed services that it would be incapable of waging another war such as the war in Vietnam."<sup>57</sup>

Throughout 1971, the People's House held meetings every week where any member of the public was welcome to join and participate. Bonneville and Schnoor attended a meeting where they participated in discussions with members of the People's House. Bonneville recalled:

I was there approximately an hour and 15 minutes and talked back and forth with these people about various subjects, mostly political. They said they would be glad to discuss anything. I might add that at that time they did not know my employment. They thought I was a local citizen. During our discussion I posed several questions, such as what would they be doing when the Vietnam war ended, and their responses was that, of course, the war would never be over; it will continually go on because the United States could not let the war come to an end because it would bring economic chaos to this country. And they said

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<sup>56</sup> Arpiar Saunders, "Memo for Record: Visit by Committee On Internal Security".

<sup>57</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

also that big business would not let the war end because of the vast amount of profits that would be lost.<sup>58</sup>

Bonneville added that they talked mostly about politics and issues that concerned the members. Larry Christian, a leading member of the People's House, talked extensively to Bonneville about his positions on class structure, Cuban and Chinese lifestyles, and medical care.<sup>59</sup>

At the end of the evening, Bonneville sensed that some of the members were becoming concerned, and they inquired as to where he worked. "I did not tell them at that time. I told them I would be back at a later date." Bonneville added: "Two days later I did go back, and at that time they knew who I was. I asked Larry Christian again if I could come in and talk to him, and he said, 'I have nothing to say to you,' and they refused to even let me in the door."<sup>60</sup>

### **Hearings Conducted Before the House Committee on Internal Security**

The HISC had been watching the People's House for months before Bonneville actually visited the residence. The investigations conducted by the Committee along with the reports from both Sheriff Plummel and Deputy Chief Neblett eventually lead the People's House to become a target of great concern for the HISC. On October 20, 1971, hearings began before the Committee discussing the investigation of attempts to subvert the United States Armed

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<sup>58</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>59</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>60</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

Services. The People's House was one of numerous GI centers specifically discussed in the hearings.

In their testimony before the Committee, Sheriff Plummel and Deputy Chief Neblett publicly discussed the actions they took to investigate and observe the People's House, its members and their actions. A newspaper article written about the hearings, "House Panel Investigates Clarksville Coffee House," summarized the tone of the hearings: "As testimony revealed yesterday, the committee actually has had its eye on the People's House for some months and, on at least three occasions, a committee undercover investigator has been in Clarksville gathering information."<sup>61</sup> The testimony made it obvious that the Committee was mainly concerned about a few leading members of the People's House; James Hawley, James Mulherin, Larry Christian, and Judy Cashin. After the hearings were completed, Bonneville added: "The committee decided to look at the Ft. Campbell situation because some of the People's House organizers had been active in setting up a coffee house at Ft. Ord, California. Some of the people at Clarksville have backgrounds that make them suspect."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Courier Journal*, "House Panel Investigates Clarksville Coffee House" (October 29, 1971).

<sup>62</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).



Figure 8. Newspaper article printed in the *Courier Journal* on October 29, 1971 discussing the investigation of the People's House by the House Committee on Internal Security. Image taken from the People's House Collection at Vanderbilt University.

Sheriff Plummel and Chief Deputy Neblett made a point to be present at a majority of the demonstrations where members of the People's House were participating. When asked about a demonstration he attended on October 25 Plummel noted:

That was set up on the same format as the previous demonstrations. It was held on U.S. 41-A, in front of the gates of Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Approximately 300 to 250 people participated in this demonstration. Their featured speaker was one Richard Chase. Richard Chase appeared on the scene in Clarksville some 2 or 3 days before the demonstration, and it was advertised in the local news, by the local news media, that he would be the featured speaker. He claimed to have been convicted for refusing riot-control training at Fort Hood, Texas, and that he had served time at Leavenworth, Kansas. He did speak at the demonstration, and featured entertainer was country singer Joe MacDonald. According to our reliable informants, who have been reliable in the past, country singer Joe MacDonald is originally from the Berkeley California area.<sup>63</sup>

Plummel and Neblett made special efforts to collect the literature distributed by members of the People's House. Many questions during the hearings were directed towards these materials and their content. At one point,

<sup>63</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

Neblett was asked about the People's House newspaper: "The underground newspaper was *Napalm* that these people started printing. They changed the name to the *People's Press*, which is printed in Nashville, Tennessee. They also had available Black Panther newspapers, *The Black Panther Story*, and several other underground newspapers."<sup>64</sup>

When Bonneville was asked about literature, he gave a more thorough response:

During my investigation in Clarksville some literature that Deputy Neblett and the sheriff received from their informants was shown to me, and I listed this material. Other than the *People's Press*, the literature that is available to GIs and other persons at the People's House, is the *GI Press Service*, which is a monthly newspaper printed by the Student Mobilization Committee To End the War here in Washington, D.C., the *CAMP News*, which is a newspaper put out by the Chicago Area Military Project – CAMP is an acronym for that – and this aims at all of these GI projects all over the country and prints news of these projects. In this particular issue, it states that the GI consciousness is a lot higher than a year ago and that GIs are looking for serious answers, and it specifically talked about the People's House in Clarksville and said that the People's House is going to try and provide some stuff around basic Marxist ideas without "waving the red book."

Bonneville continued,

The P.O.W., which is a pamphlet printed at Fort Ord, California, and in this particular one it advises the GIs how to resist oppressive authority by what they call shamming. While "shamming" during their legitimate duties, they find ways to mess up different things the service is doing by slowing down procedures or destroying papers, this type of thing. It states one of the best ways to do his is by negative work. Negative work which would be illustrated by unexplainable disappearance of records, data processing machines that won't function right, and costly breakdowns of motor vehicles. It said when performed in a subtle manner, "shamming" can appear as bad luck or some common occurrence.<sup>65</sup>

Bonneville also discussed different leaflets he had collected over the past months along with describing a document he received which talks about the budget of the People's House. "There was also a leaflet that was printed showing

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<sup>64</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>65</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

an itemized budget for People's House, showing a need for \$1,198 a month against an income they say they have of \$650 a month. This leaflet had on it a form which could be filled out so anybody could pledge a certain amount of money to support the People's House."<sup>66</sup>

After being contacted about the hearings and their content, a representative from the People's House, David Bruck, read a statement prepared by the staff. It refuted the charges made before the Committee and alleged that the Committee was attempting to ruin individuals and groups who were working towards peace. "We know that no activity supported by People's House will lead to violence," the statement said. "We suspect, however, that inflammatory statements made at the hearings may well have been intended to incite certain individuals in this community to renew the terrorist attacks which have been made against Peoples House since it began."<sup>67</sup> The statement went on to discuss how sixteen different people had been on the staff since 1970, but the Committee "has concentrated on the backgrounds of three of these people in an apparent effort to portray the People's House as part of some kind of Communist conspiracy."<sup>68</sup> The statement ended by refuting any charges made by the committee that the People's House was a center for illegal drug trafficking.

### **The End of the People's House**

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<sup>66</sup> House Committee Hearings, (October 20-28 1971).

<sup>67</sup> *Courier Journal*, "House Panel Investigates Clarksville Coffee House" (October 29, 1971).

<sup>68</sup> *Courier Journal*, "House Panel Investigates Clarksville Coffee House" (October 29, 1971).

Largely as a result of Watergate, no resolutions followed from the hearings. After the hearings were completed, the People's House just began to wither away. The extreme atmosphere of hostility towards the People's House made it difficult for participants to have any sense that they were making progress in either educating the Clarksville community or organizing GIs into a cohesive group of activists. The investigations and the hearings intimidated GIs and civilian activists alike. The People's House had always been "off limits" to GIs, but now it was even more so. GIs were afraid of being court martialed and, therefore, participation by Fort Campbell soldiers rapidly declined.

Members of the People's House, who had been there primarily to offer legal counsel to GIs, were out of work and would eventually find other centers in different parts of the country where they could help soldiers in need. Soon all members of the People's House began to feel this way. Many of them felt "burned out" and the town of Clarksville was not the least bit sympathetic. The initiative had reached its low point, and at the same time, a major financial crisis hit the House. Likewise, as the Vietnam war slowly began to decline, so too did the primary foundation of the People's House. In (date), the People's House finally closed its doors, and the members dispersed across the country. Many People's House members continued their activism through professional lives devoted to public service and ongoing political involvement.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Interviews conducted with 7 past members of the People's House in Nashville, TN on March 31 and April 1 of 2006 revealed that the majority of them saw their experience with the People's House as having significantly impacted their lives and influenced the direction they took after they left the project.

## Conclusion

The People's House contributed to the construction and development of a powerful GI and veteran movement during the Vietnam War. Groups like the People's House were extremely important to soldiers during this era. After returning from service, GIs felt empowered by organizations like the People's House. In stark contrast to repression soldiers experienced in the military, coffeehouse projects emboldened GIs to feel free to renounce what they had seen and been a part of overseas. Returning soldiers were surrounded by both GIs and civilians who neither criticized nor judged them for denouncing the actions of the U.S. Armed Forces in Vietnam, while also creating an environment where veterans felt it was acceptable to be part of the antiwar movement.

It can be argued that the legacy of the People's House and other coffeehouses like it is an increase in governmental and public tolerance for criticism of the military by members of the military, the government, and the general public. Although there still exists suspicion and paranoia on the part of the government when its wartime policies are openly criticized, overall, there appears to be less of a covert governmental response to such protests. In addition, those who criticize military policy do not appear to be automatically labeled as unpatriotic by the public at large.

Several respected members of Congress, some of whom are veterans of the Vietnam War, are vocally protesting George W. Bush's Iraq war policies.

Moreover, party affiliation has not served to inhibit certain members from leading the outcry against current Iraq war policies. Representative John Murtha of Pennsylvania was one of the first to publicly speak out against the war.

According to the *Washington Post*, on November 17, 2005, the top House Democrat on military spending matters stunned colleagues “by calling for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, while many congressional Democrats reacted defiantly to President Bush's latest attack on his critics.”<sup>70</sup> The *Post* went on to report:

Rep. John P. Murtha (D-Pa.), a decorated Vietnam War veteran, said many of those troops are demoralized and poorly equipped and, after more than two years of war, are impeding Iraq's progress toward stability and self-governance. ‘Our troops have become the primary target of the insurgency,’ Murtha said in a Capitol news conference that left him in tears. Islamic insurgents ‘are united against U.S. forces, and we have become a catalyst for violence,” he said. ‘. . . It's time to bring them home.’

Murtha's action, coupled with stinging rhetoric from the White House, was the catalyst for a remarkable outpouring of rage on

Capitol Hill about Iraqi war policy, an issue that for months was relatively dormant but now is dominating congressional debate. A few dozen other House Democrats have called for withdrawing from Iraq as soon as possible. But most are liberals who voted against going to war, and they have drawn modest attention. Murtha is a hawkish ex-Marine who voted for the war and has close ties to the military.<sup>71</sup>

Several Republican members of Congress have also spoken out in opposition to the Bush Administration Iraq policies. Leading the Republican opposition is Senator Chuck Hagel, Republican from Nebraska. Hagel, who served as an Army infantry squad leader during the Vietnam war, sits on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and supported the October 2002 resolution authorizing military action against Iraq. According to an

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<sup>70</sup> “Hawkish Democrat Joins Call for Pullout”, *The Washington Post* (November 8, 2005)

<sup>71</sup> “Hawkish Democrat Joins Call for Pullout”, *The Washington Post* (November 8, 2005)

article posted on CNN.com on August 19, 2005:

Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel of Nebraska on Thursday said the United States is 'getting more and more bogged down' in Iraq and stood by his comments that the White House is disconnected from reality and losing the war. The longer U.S. forces remain in Iraq, he said, the more it begins to resemble the Vietnam war.

Hagel mocked Vice President Dick Cheney's assertion in June that the insurgency in Iraq was in its 'last throes,' saying the U.S. death toll has risen amid insurgent attacks.

'Maybe the vice president can explain the increase in casualties we're taking,' the Nebraskan told CNN.

'If that's winning, then he's got a different definition of winning than I do.'

'The casualties we're taking, the billion dollars a week we're putting in there, the kind of commitment we've got -- we're not going to be able to sustain it,' he said.

Iraq and Vietnam still have more differences than similarities, he said, but 'there is a parallel emerging.'

'The longer we stay in Iraq, the more similarities will start to develop, meaning essentially that we are getting more and more bogged down, taking more and more casualties, more and more heated dissension and debate in the United States," Hagel said.

Hagel also did not back away from comments he made in June to U.S. News & World Report that 'the White House is completely disconnected from reality' and "the reality is that we're losing in Iraq."<sup>72</sup>

Other well-known political conservatives are speaking out against the Iraq war. According to an article in the April 7, 2003 edition of the National Review:

From the very beginning of the War on Terror, there has been dissent, and as the war has proceeded to Iraq, the dissent has grown more radical and more vociferous. Perhaps that was to be expected. But here is what never could have been: Some of the leading figures in this antiwar movement call themselves 'conservatives.'

You may know the names of these antiwar conservatives. Some are famous: Patrick Buchanan and Robert Novak. Others are not: Llewellyn Rockwell, Samuel Francis, Thomas Fleming, Scott McConnell, Justin Raimondo, Joe Sobran, Charley Reese, Jude Wanniski, Eric Margolis, and Taki

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<sup>72</sup> "Hagel: Iraq Growing More Like Vietnam", CNN.com (August 19, 2005)

Theodoracopulos.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the fact that current members of the military are prohibited from speaking out against the war by the Uniform Code of Military Justice, some are finding ways to let their anti-war views be known. On April 24, 2007, National Public Radio reported that nearly 2,000 active duty troops have signed an Appeal for Redress, a petition calling for withdrawal from Iraq. The appeal for Redress is a vehicle for service members to appeal to their representatives in Congress to end US military presence in Iraq.<sup>74</sup>

On June 22, 2006, U.S. Army 1st Lieutenant Ehren K. Watada became the first commissioned officer to publicly refuse deployment to the Iraq War and occupation. He faces court martial and up to 6 years imprisonment for refusing to deploy and for speaking out against a war that he believes is illegal. Lt. Watada's actions have served as a rallying cry for anti-war activists around the world. On a website that provides updates on Lt. Watada's situation, several well known leaders are identified as supporting Watada's actions. Those leaders include U. S. Representatives Dennis Kucinich and Mike Honda, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Reverend Al Sharpton.<sup>75</sup>

Public protest against the Iraq War is growing, too. Not only are public demonstrations against the war in Iraq growing on the streets and in cyberspace,<sup>76</sup> but the results of the most recent national elections reflect the public's dissatisfaction with the Bush Administration's Iraq policies. Many pundits

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<sup>73</sup> "Unpatriotic Conservatives: A War Against America", *The National Review* (April 7, 2003)

<sup>74</sup> Raz, Guy. "Members of Military Make War Views Known", NPR.com (April 24, 2007)

<sup>75</sup> [thankyoult.org](http://thankyoult.org) (2007)

<sup>76</sup> "United For Peace: Campaigns", [www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org) (2007)

attribute the results, which provided the Democrats with a majority in Congress, to the public's dissatisfaction with the war in Iraq.<sup>77</sup>

Although drawing a nexus between Vietnam era protests such as those by coffeehouse members and a greater acceptance of vocal opposition to the Iraq war is at best anecdotal at this time, the link seems strong enough to support further research into the factors that support this link. For purposes of this research paper, the history of GI coffeehouses raises the question of whether one of the most important legacies of the coffeehouses is to have created a current environment in which open opposition to Iraq war policies has been more readily accepted by society as a whole.

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<sup>77</sup> Jim Malone, "Election Results Drive Demand for Change in Iraq Policy", [www.voanews.com](http://www.voanews.com) (November 21, 2006)

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