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Jim Jones



Rev. Sun Myung Moon



Huey Newton

Cult Politics Comes of Age

By Alexander Cockburn & James Ridgeway

There is a skein stretching back from the suicides in Port Kaituma to the stirrings of urban revolt a decade ago. Charles Garry, defender of the Black Panthers, and Mark Lane, the high priest of assassination conspiracies, end up representing the interests of a psychotic religious cult leader, who in succeeding stages of his career ran a human rights commission in

Indianapolis, served as housing authority commissioner under the patronage of the liberal mayor of San Francisco, and ended up engineering the largest mass suicide in world history since Masada.

Over the last decade the politics of desperation have become the politics of paranoia. Not that psychosis and paranoia were latecomers on (Continued on page 13)

THE MOVING TARGET

By Alexander Cockburn & James Ridgeway

Cult Politics Comes of Age

(Continued from page 1) the scene. Charles Manson used to preach to his followers on the imminence of a black uprising in the United States and ranted on about the existence of a subterranean refuge for his white followers beneath the floor of Death Valley. In a mirror image, the Reverend Jim Jones used to tell his followers in Indianapolis that refuge from nuclear holocaust lay in the caves of Ukiah, California. Later, he told his poor black congregation that sanctuary from Nazi white racist extermination was only to be found in the jungles of Guyana.

In a labyrinth of paradox, Mark Lane went as attorney for Jones to Guyana—a country whose leader had been originally installed by a CIA conspiracy of the type Lane constantly denounced. His client, in one of his last speeches before the terminal command for self-slaughter, warned his disciples that the settlement was under threat by the CIA, FBI, and other forces of darkness.

Jones, particularly after the August 1977 expose in *New West* by Phil Tracy and Marshall Kilduff which precipitated his group's final removal to Guyana, is now being portrayed as a leader consistently paranoid, manipulative, and indeed satanic. It was not always so. The politicians who attended Temple services are now downgrading their original enthusiasm for his reforming zeal and—more practically—his army of wardheelers who got out the vote for those politicians he favored. But they, and many others, were captivated by the populist and religious self-help atmosphere reminiscent of the early days of Synanon, the Black Muslims, and reforming evangelism. Jones had indeed collected a very large interracial congregation. Unlike the Black Panthers, it showed little sign of macho male dominance. Women and



Don Fraser (left) and Leo Ryan (right) were among those members of Congress investigating cults such as the People's Temple. Members of the sect (below) denounced the killing of Ryan and others.



children shared the stage. The emphasis was not on guns but on faith healing.

But in other respects, the People's Temple was similar to the Black Panthers. Both organizations boasted of progressive social programs; both had strong leaders; both worked with the material of the urban black poor. Both relied on gangster techniques, of intimidation of dissident members or intrusive outsiders. Both attracted the enthusiasm of white liberals and the Left. The list of Panther supporters is familiar enough. For the People's Temple, the catalogue of flanking support was equally impressive—from the mayor of San Francisco to the mayor of Los Angeles, the governor, Tom Hayden, and San Francisco gay leader Harvey Milk.

It was only this year that the racketeering aspects of the Black Panthers were fully explored in print. The darker side of Jones was exposed over a year ago—with the violence, sequestration of members' assets, beatings of children, threats recounted by former parishioners. The decline, in the case of the People's Temple, happened much faster. One reporter in San Francisco who'd followed Jones, said that the spiral of paranoia accelerated so rapidly because Jones found that he needed recourse to fear more and more as the only way, as he put it, "to get things done." The same downward spiral into violent frenzy is documented in *New Times* this week by Robert Sam Anson, in his narrative of what has happened to another emblem of the '60s—Synanon.

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To follow the skein forward from the '60s to the late '70s is to find cadres collapsed into cults; despair at the state of the world disinte-

grated into a psychosis all the more terrifying because the sense of threat or outrage was originally justified. The skein leads into labyrinths ever more bizarre. Just before Lane left for Guyana, threatening suit against *New West* but offering them the real story on the People's Temple, he was having an affidavit typed within the People's Temple headquarters on Geary Street which was to be presented to the House committee investigating the assassinations of Kennedy and King. This affidavit purports to relate conversations held by Daniel Ellsberg with a government intelligence officer who claimed that J. Edgar Hoover had indeed sponsored the murder of Martin Luther King.

Cult politics have come of age and become a force to be reckoned with in the United States. It must be remembered that Leo Ryan served on a subcommittee in the House of Representatives whose members had become increasingly enmeshed in the investigation of cults. Ryan, because of his constituents around San Francisco, was focusing his attention on the People's Temple. But he had joined with Don Fraser, chairman of the subcommittee, in a detailed and controversial enquiry into another and much more power-

ful cult organization—the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

Fraser's enquiry demonstrated just how potent these religious political cults can be. Opposition by the Unification Church to his investigation was signaled by the appearance of the usual coterie of high-priced Washington lawyers, including, in this instance, Richard Ben-Veniste, of Watergate fame. These lawyers protested harassment of the church and violation of constitutional rights. The church sought to block publication of Fraser's report this fall and eventually sued him and two investigators for \$30 million. More to the point, it dispatched lobbyists to Minnesota where the church played at least a minor role in engineering Fraser's defeat in the senatorial primary.

During that contest, Fraser's district office was threatened with bombing and his offices elsewhere in the state were threatened with arson. There is no known connection between the Unification Church and these threats. And no one yet knows who set the fire in Fraser's Washington townhouse, while his wife and daughter were out for dinner.

Nonetheless, there is a certain ominous tone in some of the remarks of the Unifica-

tion Church leaders. Moon has often told his followers to expect opposition to the goals he sets for them, but he has assured them of ultimate victory. In one 1974 speech, he noted that up to that time opposition to his movement had gone unpunished. This, he promised, would change: "... So far the world can be against us and nothing happens. Now when they are against us, then they're going to get the punishment. So from this time ... every people or every organization that goes against the Unification Church will gradually come down or drastically come down and die. Many people will die—those who go against our movement."

The church leaders have subsequently said that this is not meant to be taken in a literal sense. Connoisseurs of such lack of literalism might note the remarks of Synanon leader Charles Dederich, discussing the threats to media executives because of adverse coverage of Synanon: "I don't know what these people [Synanon's friends] might do," he told a television reporter. "I don't know what action they might take against the people responsible, their wives, their children ... Bombs could be thrown into very odd places, into the homes of some of the clowns who occupy high places in the *Time* organization. ... I would certainly not institute anything like that, but I would have no way of preventing it, if it would happen."

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If the enemy of sects in the 1960s was the

FBI, in the middle and late 1970s the opposition to cults is basically fueled by the parents or relatives of the cults' recruits. These parents have formed the Ad Hoc Committee of Concerned Parents, which has 57 chapters around the country. They have mounted a vociferous line of attack which has developed into an organized lobby, aimed at calling attention to the "brainwashing" by the cults of the children and seeking remedial legislative action. Many recoveries of the children, or their "deprogramming," have attracted criticism as being as authoritarian in their way as the original seductions of the cults.

In May 1977, Ryan, together with Congressman Robert Giaimo of Connecticut, met with Justice Department officials to discuss brainwashing allegations as they pertained to Moon's church. Later that summer, the Justice Department told Giaimo that it did not wish to get involved in this area, that it was extremely hard to prove brainwashing under federal criminal laws and that the parents of cult members should go through civil court procedures.

Subsequently, the parents persuaded Giaimo to introduce a resolution stating that it was the sense of the House that the Reverend Moon should appear before Fraser's investigatory committee. For whatever the reason, Moon left the country. The subpoena has now expired with the mandate of the subcommittee on October 31. The parents' group and investigators for the committee believe that Moon has reentered the country and may very well make an appearance at a major church conference on "the unity of science" that opens in Boston on November 22. The parents' group, led by Kay Barney, will be holding a press conference outside the session.

Although the cults appear on the surface to be quite different from one another, Barney believes they are quite similar. In fact, his description evokes some familiar characteris-

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