

# Kunstler Agrees Left Is Less Militant

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Special to The New York Times

BALTIMORE, Feb. 20—"I think there is a feeling that the movement is dead," said William M. Kunstler, once one of the most incandescent national figures on the legal and political left. "There just isn't the same furor."

The occasion was a news conference that was called last week at which half a dozen well-known lawyers for feared and hated causes or clients were to have assembled on the steps of the City Courthouse.

They were to be there to mount a chorus of rhetorical support for a colleague, Arthur F. Turco Jr., a lawyer scheduled to go on trial for what the police said was complicity in the 1969 torture-murder of an alleged informer on the Baltimore Black Panthers.

But no one appeared at the news conference except Mr. Kunstler, who is 52 years old. He was there to defend Turco, who is 29. There was only one reporter.

And as a group of 20 young pickets circled tentatively for a few minutes on the courthouse sidewalk, lacking placards—they had only three hand-lettered signs that said, "Stop Repression of Lawyers"—and an audience, Mr. Kunstler observed philosophically, "I think it's the national mood."

### Interest Is Off

"Nationally," he said, "the pace of and interest in the Left has certainly dropped way down."

Then Mr. Kunstler went inside the courthouse and unexpectedly pleaded his client guilty to a charge of simple assault. Turco, who spent nine and a half months in jail while

awaiting and during a previous trial that ended in a hung jury, received a five-year suspended sentence and went free.

But the faltering exhibition of "the movement's" élan and the mild, even compromising courtroom tactics of Mr. Kunstler seemed to answer, as much as raise, questions about momentum on the Left in the country today.

And in a long, candid interview later, Mr. Kunstler said that the appearance of declining militancy was, in his judgment, a true one.

"On local issues, here and there, the feeling is still really intense. But I think there is a feeling that the movement is dead. The press covers it only occasionally," Mr. Kunstler continued.

"There have been so many of these things—these large, closely reported trials—that one more just doesn't seem to count anymore," Mr. Kunstler said. "There's a feeling that law suits are not where it's at."

### Elections Are Cited

Asked, then, where the energies, if any, of the Left are going, Mr. Kunstler mentioned elections.

"Some people now are interested in elections as a way to change a system that is still very bad," he said.

What about violence?, he was asked.

"Violence never was the alternative in the movement," he responded. "That was merely the paranoia of the public and the press. The press built it up. But we've succeeded in quelling the paranoia. It's a good thing, too. But we've lost some of the glamour and the interest we had in the process."

"I, myself, don't think the public really believes any more

that violence ever was the movement's aim, although they probably used to," Mr. Kunstler said. "We have done that much. All the great acquittals we have had—victory after victory in court, and not a single Black Panther convicted, for example—is showing the people that the fear of violence was just hysteria."

Mr. Kunstler said he still supported his no-fee defense of controversial clients by lecturing. The lectures are arranged through an agency in New York and are largely to college groups—as many as four of them in one day—usually, at a minimum fee of \$1,000.

"I manage to live very comfortably and do what I want to do and do best," he said. But his clients are changing.

"There's a lot more lawyers now willing to take on these very unpopular and difficult cases. The cause célèbre will always draw good lawyers now. So I am not needed for an Angela Davis or a Phil Berrigan. But there are still a lot of unknown ghetto kids who need a good lawyer, and who will get only a court appointed lawyer if I'm not around."