

# Norman Strax: One man who believes our society

interview  
by gary davis  
brunswickan staff

It wasn't easy to interview Norman Strax. The first problem was to find him. Then I had to get his answers accurately. Then I had to write it up, and then cut out the parts that would probably get me thrown in jail. This article consists of excerpts from a longer interview, to be published later, in another publication.

After a discussion of his past, Dr. Strax and I talked about his life at UNB. He said that he mainly concentrated on physics until the spring of 1967.

"Then on April 15 I went to New York to the Mobilization (to End the War in Vietnam), which was the biggest march that anybody's ever had. There

were over a quarter of a million, marching from Central Park to the U.N. Building. That was just a peaceful march, and it was very impressive because of the huge numbers. Martin Luther King spoke, and it was the first time that he openly said that he was against the war. It really got me very excited. It was also the first time I saw Viet Cong flags. But I was still quiet.

"Then that summer, after coming back to UNB I spent the whole time agonizing over whether to get involved or not to get involved. So I sort of half got involved by giving a lot of money, at the beginning of the school year — in September. I was on the Mobilization mailing list, and they sent me this thing saying, 'Do you want to go to Washington on October 19th?' He did get interested in the

October march, and by offering to pay the difference himself, he induced 145 people to go to the march with him for \$9. In Washington he was arrested for his acts of civil disobedience, and he met other people who were equally concerned about the war. These events helped to strengthen his will, and when he returned to UNB, Dr. Strax was even more interested in finding ways to end the war and prevent future similar wars from taking place.

"But this war is not an isolated thing. It took me a very long time to appreciate this, but it's the certain system we have, and one of the symptoms of the system is this war in Viet Nam. There are other symptoms too.

"You're not going to prevent this kind of war, and you're not going to stop the actions of this society, until you change the system, radically change it. And after Chicago it looks like it will need a revolution. I don't think it's the police. We have a very repressive society. Usually the elite acts in a very liberal way, so people don't realize they are being repressed and manipulated. It's only once in a while that the liberal veneer falls away, and when they are not able to manipulate people they use force, and that's what happened in Chicago. It's happening at colleges. It's happening at San Francisco State now: it's the best example.

"Usually they can manipulate you, just because of the fact that they have all the controls, of all the radios and all the newspapers. And they've gotten people to be compulsive consumers. By advertising they create a need for something. Like a car. Which is complete insanity, from any rational point of view.

"You can just look into the future and you can see that there is going to be a disaster, because natural resources are all going to run out. Besides, our technology people could be working only ten per cent of the time that they work now, if they would just intelligently use the resources and technology to meet real needs."

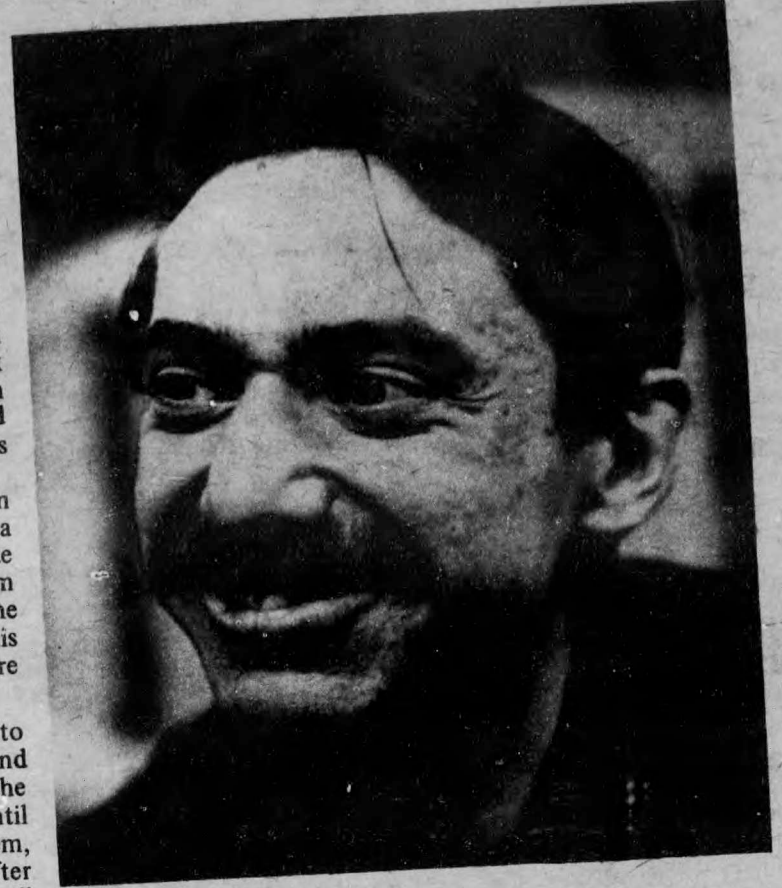
The waste of resources, he said, is the basic reason for colonialism and wars like the one in Viet Nam.

"You know," he said, "the United States uses half of the world's resources. And they really need these countries like Viet Nam."

Dr. Strax talked for some time about events which took place in Chicago when he was there during the Democratic Party national convention. He described the demonstrations in which he took part, and told of some of the things he saw Chicago police do there.

"On the march to the Conrad Hilton Hotel they were smashing the photographers' cameras right and left. They would walk up with a billy club and smash the camera. It was really amazing."

He tried to explain the mood of the demonstrators, and he said that the citizens of Chicago were to a great extent on the demonstrators' side. "They would all cheer," he said. "Everybody was on our



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side."

Then he went on to explain how he felt about the convention itself. "But you see the big contrast. You have a beautiful plush hotel, with all these plush delegates, who have very little contact with the people, but who are making decisions in the people's name, against the will of the people. Like the decision to have the war continue. Which is what they meant when they did not nominate McCarthy. And I don't think much of McCarthy, but at least he had won in primaries, between him and Kennedy anyway."

The discussion turned back to UNB. Dr. Strax explained further how the system operates.

"In our society as long as basically your life style, the things that you do, are in balance, more helping the system, than hurting it, they won't bother you. They'll just handle you by their manipulative techniques. But if you really make a threat of yourself, they'll crush you. By either using physical violence like in Chicago, or like what they did to me in Fredericton."

When he was asked the difference between the implied violence of an injunction — the threat of violence to restrain him — and the implied violence of a sit-in — the need for violence to evict them — he gave this reply:

"Well, if we're going to talk about 130 we've got to talk about the whole question of who is the legitimate authority at UNB. And who has the right to order who out of Room 130. Whose office is 130, is it my office or is it Colin Mackay's office? And exactly under what circumstances can he order me out? That's what you have to ask."

"And ask whether my guests in Room 130 have a right to be there or whether they don't. If they do have a right to be there, then it's not violence for them to sit there."

"But I think the fundamental thing is that the whole power structure at UNB

is illegitimate. It's not illegal. But that doesn't prove much. It's illegitimate. According to the University Act, the only people who have power at UNB — and I've been reading that act — is the Board of Governors. Strictly. Nobody else has any power. If you read it, at first inspection it looks like the Senate is the one that makes certain minor rules, academic rules, but there's a clause in there that all rules have to be ratified by the Board. So the Board of Governors is the power at UNB.

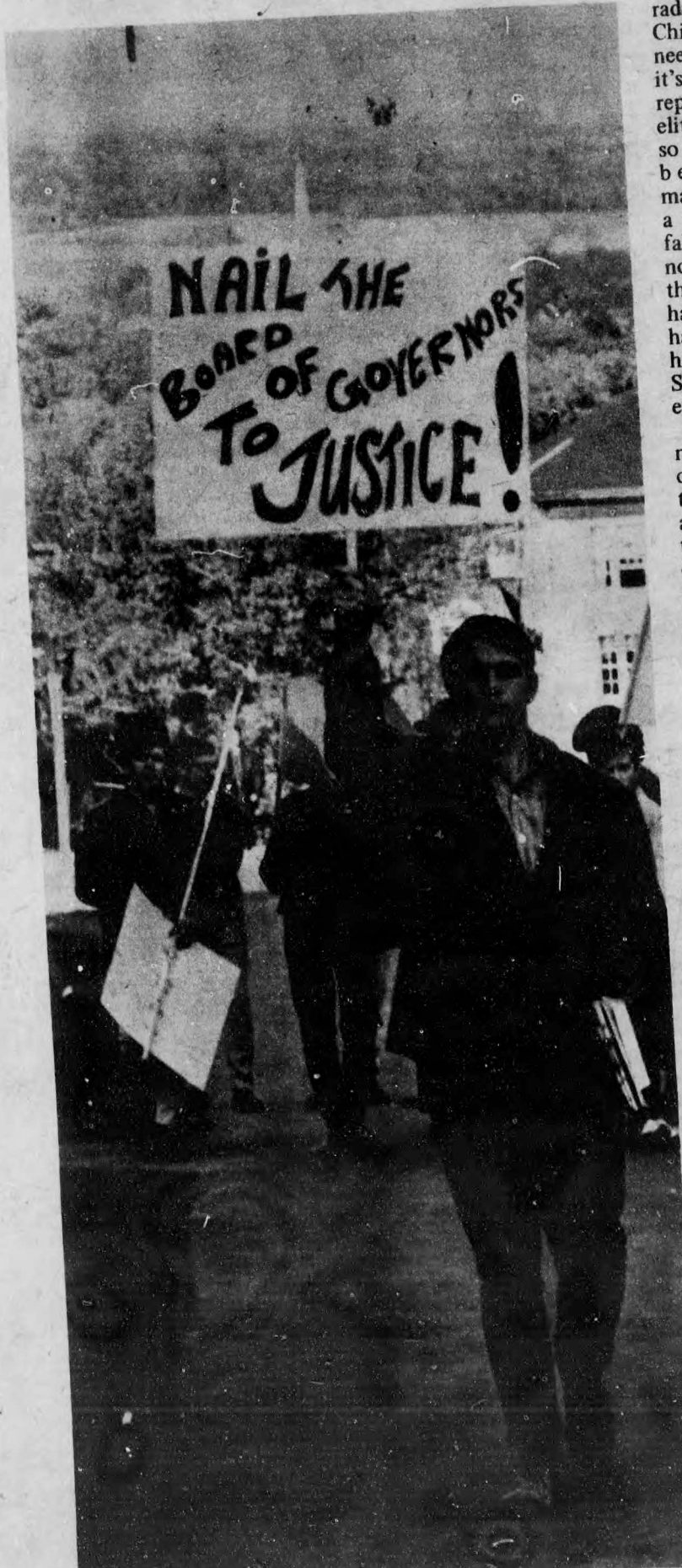
"The Board of Governors is a very unrepresentative body. It's certainly not representative of the University community. It's not representative of the people of New Brunswick either. I think it's therefore illegitimate. And I don't think they have the right to order me out of any office."

His opinion on what was accomplished by the sit-in in Room 130 is as follows:

"In our society they usually don't have to show how illegitimate they are, and they usually do not have to use violence, and they usually do not have to use their arbitrary authority. But here in bookie-bookie and also in 130 we actually exposed them much more than I had ever thought. I mean, they were very stupid. They demonstrated a whole lot of things. They demonstrated their contempt for anybody else's opinion. They demonstrated the very strong double standard they have in applying repression and discipline. They've done that before though."

He described a couple of incidents involving harassment of guest speakers at UNB talking about Vietnam. Then he said, "After we came back from Washington, there were a whole bunch of incidents. Like, the first meeting was attacked by a bunch of nazis. They wore swastikas, and they had charming little signs like, 'Strangle Strax the commie

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