

EASY RIDER

Stereotypes collide

from NEW LEFT NOTES

'A man went looking for America . . . and couldn't find it anywhere.'

These are evocative words that conjure up the splendid futility of a Don Quixote jousting his windmills. Audiences seem always to be deeply involved by a quest, whether it is for sweet Dulcinea, the World Series pennant, or the moon. 'Easy Rider' is a 'quest for America'; Wyatt and Billy, long-haired, and motorcycle riding, journey to the Marti Gras in New Orleans and run into a segment of America that is supposedly murderously hostile to their style of life.

'Easy Rider' is a magnificent exploration of personal relationships and agonies. The dialogue, the road photography, the New Orleans drug scene, the Odysseus atmosphere of the film combine to beautifully express the way Billy and Wyatt see themselves. Hippy versus redneck, radical versus reactionary — these conflicts shape the action for the characters. (Radical in this movie, as is often the case, has nothing to do with a political consciousness.) The way these conflicts are set up, however, perpetuates an ideology that says long-hairs or students are inherently at odds with the working people. It seems to be saying that the main thing wrong with America is that poor Southern whites are racist, reactionary and violent, that they won't understand why it is important for people to be able to live like Billy and Wyatt. And the very rich are at least somewhat cool because they're into the drug scene — a character with a chauffeur and limousine buys some drugs from Billy and Wyatt and makes their journey possible.

The easy riders invite a man they meet in a small Southern town to come to New Orleans with them. Around the campfire that night he explains that the local bigots harass the trio because they feel threatened by Billy and Wyatt. That is, such

people talk a lot about constitutionality and rights, but when they are confronted with a man who is really free, says the new friend, they are afraid. This sort of analysis stops short after exploring the lack of existential awareness or anguish in the reactionary townspeople. It ignores the fact that objective conditions determine that these townspeople are in a situation easily leading to reactionary attitudes. That is, a certain class, the ruling class, profits not only from their lack of freedom, but from their fear of freedom. A worker has a low-paying and alienating job but it is his only security. If all of a sudden the government says to this worker that there must be certain quotas of black people employed here, and we're cutting back on federal spending to curb inflation, there's no longer enough jobs to go around, so you must be laid off — the tradition of racism in this country becomes a useful tool in diverting anger from the government to the black workers. Hippies may not threaten jobs, but they threaten life styles. If working people took off on a cross-country journey anytime, or wanted to 'drop out', or thumbed their noses at all authority, they'd lose their jobs. They cannot be 'carefree' like Billy and Wyatt, but their antagonism is toward the easy riders not their bosses, for whom they continue to work hard.

More and more this change in life styles is being adopted into the 'establishment'. It is being made a way people can escape from the reality of their relationships and the implications of the things they defend, or at least do not attack their country for doing. Billy and Wyatt's freedom that is supposedly threatening the small town Southerners is illusory, a pacifier. For if the opportunity to grow long hair and ride motorcycles across the country defines freedom to us, the easy riders are not representatives of a new way of liv-

ing being slaughtered by remnants of the old way, but are instead prophets of doom.

Perhaps this is what Wyatt was realizing the last night around the campfire when he said, 'Billy, we blew it.' The sparseness of the dialogue gives an air of profundity to this and other observations, which might have been difficult to match by detailed analysis within the context of the movie. Maybe the writers and director just knew that that had to be said, but weren't really sure why.

And so Wyatt and Billy are massacred in a Bonnie and Clyde type ending that leaves the audience in something of a state of shock. The easy riders become martyrs, but not for any particular cause, not for any movement. They are not 'outside' society in any significant way. Their life style, because it is unconnected to any political analysis, seems a new way of adapting to basic contradictions which are no longer bearable, instead of a way to change them. They were unconsciously intending to challenge the existing order in those Southern towns — Billy says he never thought of himself as the freak the townspeople see him as. Having them die the way they did seems unnecessary and meaningless. The only social comment that is made by their deaths is, I think, that people in this country — on all sides — are becoming increasingly and perhaps permanently paranoid.

Easy Rider stops short of indicating that hippy vs. redneck is only a symptom of more basic contradictions. Peter Fonda, who produced, wrote, and starred in the movie, has said on the Tonight show that he thinks it is more important to find and ask the right questions than to find and create answers. His movie is this kind of questioning — an absorption in a 'quest' that is so all-inclusive that it matters little if it is a quest for something.

Worlds greatest sports story

by Line (CPS)

In hockey action recently the league leading St. Mary's Huskies pummeled a game band of pucksters from St. FX, in a closely contested game at the UPEI ice palace.

Led by their smooth-skating pivot, who patrolled the ice lanes all day, the hockey warriors dazzled the fans and dippy-doodled around a badly disorganized band of hockey Xaverians. The slick samoyeds were braced considerably by their bespeckled crewcut mentor, who potted a brace, with singletons going to the stocky left-winger, who was a constant threat every time he was on the ice, and to their rill-star brace of hardrock rearguards, who scored on neat spineroos coming less than a minute apart in the sandwich session.

The Xmen roared back in the next frame to rifle home several well-earned counters, which had the capacity spectators going wild; they were in fact, on the edge of their flasks the whole game.

They had barely resumed their seats however when the Huskies shifty ace marksman tallied after a brilliant end-to-end rush which he capped by deking the bewildered santamarian netminder out of his jock.

The cage custodian from the Antigonish campus fared little better in this respect, as he fluffed a blooper from the slot at the ten minute mark, after the deceptive disc took a wierd hop into the mesh.

The bone-crushing defensive play took its toll, as several players were killed, and one died of natural causes. A mild altercation, including fisticuffs, and a stick-swinging duel earned both coaches a trip to the sinbin, in which they stayed until they could sing "We luv you reffie, o yes we do," without breaking up.

The game was forced into an overtime session, in which neither team scored, thus giving St. Mary's its margin of victory.

Other highlights included a booming slapshot from the left point, and several forwards being caught up ice.

Someone headmanned the puck, but it recovered, and was able to finish out the game.

In other sports action last weekend, Captain Bearheart made out.

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