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Soc. Geschiedenis
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ideology at clear lake

Ed Richer
St. Cloud State College

The 1966 SDS convention delegates arrived in Clear Lake with a consensus that combined a studied, dumb affirmation of "organizing" at a local level with an equally calculated dumb rejection of "national programs." All in all, it was a gentle triumph of the decentralist caucus.

Dumbness aside, none of this made me unhappy. I suspect that most of those who went away imagining themselves "losers" or imagining SDS in trouble were people either too impatient to make an analysis of where the "winners" were at or they were people victims of an old and slanderous superstition of the Left.

That slanderous superstition amounts to this: "anarchist" strategy is an immature stage of revolutionary development that at best is merely a promise of better things to come. The assumption is that a nativist or decentralist has no real politics; worse yet, if he can produce an ideology it is only a scarecrow designed to chase away serious ideologues. Unfortunately, leaders of the triumphant caucus failed to articulate definitively where they had come to intellectually; whatsmore, they were uncharitably charged with having no "program" or analysis at all, or, as Bob Ross put it sardonically, during debate over the Adams-Robbins resolution, "These people simply want to get together and exchange experiences." Less fraternal attitudes are imaginable, of course. Nevertheless, what is needed now from the new leadership is something analytically serious, an intellectual (as well as a caucus) response to those within SDS who were out of it, pacing the lakeside beside themselves with disbelief and troubled abdication.

I am not part of that new leadership, but since I voted with and for it, I want to cast my thoughts on the organizational waters for whatever they are worth.

....

As an ideological point of departure, I'll borrow from Carl Oglesby's first speech to the convention, wherein he welded SNCC's emphasis on truth as a herald of experience and SDS' emphasis on the redistribution or power ("Let the people decide"). In that context, what does it mean to say that the new direction of SDS is toward an organization of organizers?

Simplistically, dissenters from the convention's consensus protested that "organizing" is a vacuous strategy, since there is no attendant program that outlines the organizers' objectives ("Organizing for what?"). It was not enough to respond that we were organizing to "take power," presumably because everyone at the convention agreed upon this objective. Nevertheless, real disagreements are discernible within SDS on what "taking power" means: to what extent it must be a humane "taking," a non-violent inheritance where possible; to what extent the power to be sought after is essentially local, as against a priority on "taking" (who says "seizing"?) national power; and sometimes there is disagreement on whether or not political power is worth having at all, a disagreement that presupposes perhaps that there is more power between heaven and earth than is dreamt of in practical politics. But shades of emphasis notwithstanding, "taking power" was a goal with which few at the convention would quarrel.

Returning to Oglesby's two principles, I think it worth noting that organizing to take power where it is administered (where people are at) is a sure way to intimately experience politics.

The convention in effect voted to politicize SDS members by defining them as working parts of an organization of organizers out to take power. Which is to say, there was an obvious wish to universalize within SDS the experience of power. Which is to say, there was an obvious wish to universalize within SDS the experience of power, to educate all members in political truth. The convention also voted against national programs, not so much because it is unfriendly or unwise to instruct organizers at the local level, but because SDS organizers, as a minority of a minority on the Left, are theoretically committed to being instructed by their constituencies. The convention was very sensitive to the fact that it had been "isolated" from the mainstreams of its potential constituencies; it had no intentions of approaching "the people" with programmatic preconceptions that would further isolate the radical organizers it hoped would, in the coming years, fan out into those mainstreams with a reciprocal openness of tactics and mind.

It was objected by some that not all members of SDS are outfitted to be organizers. But it is irrelevant to the new strategy whether any member of SDS is a good or bad organizer. What is relevant is that he tries, not that he succeeds or fails. Because behind the assertion that organizing is the new continuum along which we must measure one another is the assumption that any particular SDS member, whether he fails or succeeds at it, must in either case discover truths about power that he needs to know to become a humane and reality-centered radical. Perhaps there lurks behind the assertion of organizing as the new continuum another assumption: that there is not that much to be learned about power-taking where one is at; that it is best that we all learn what there is there to be known; and that beyond

(continued on page 3)

new left notes
an internal newspaper of students for a democratic society
1608 w. madison, rm. 206 chicago, ill. 60612
Vol. 1, No. 35 let the people decide SEPTEMBER 16, 1966

HELP

Have you tried to call the National Office lately? We hope you will be able to. As of Friday our outward telephone service was temporarily disconnected, so we are not able to call you. Unless we receive your financial support in the near future, you will not be able to call us either.

Before the National Convention, Roy Dahlberg, Convention coordinator, insisted that we needed at least $3000 to cover the secondary expenses (printing, travel, and extra telephone calls) of the Clear Lake meeting. That money was not forthcoming. At the time of this writing, the National Office has $4300 in outstanding bills. Of that amount, $2300 represents debts incurred before June 15.

If you recall the financial appeal issued by this office in late June, you will remember that we then owed $4700 in back debts. This means that we were able to liquidate $2400 of those debts during the summer—thanks largely to your response to the June appeal. The $2300 remaining must be paid off in the near future.

The additional $2000 represents our debts for the Convention issues of New Left Notes —$1500—plus the large telephone bill necessitated by the Convention.

Unless you decide that the financial obligations of your organization are to be taken seriously, New Left Notes will no longer be published, the literature which we need so badly will not be printed, and the National Office will not remain open.

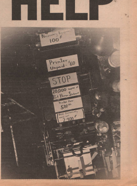
SDS Printing Press →

This is one of the national SDS printing presses which turn out the bulletins and pamphlets distributed to chapters and members across the nation. This particular press was in the process of reprinting the Port Huron Statement to fill the tremendous number of requests for copies of this important document.

The press now stands idle. There is no paper to print on and no money to buy more. The press operator is very hungry. He hasn't been paid his subsistence wage for more than two weeks. He claims he could live by drinking printers ink out of the tube—astronaut fashion. But there isn't even any ink. And no money to buy more.

The national print shop turns out material far faster and much cheaper than any commercial outfit because it operates without profit and on negligible wages. The saving to SDS is tremendous. For instance, printing 20,000 copies of the Port Huron Statement runs over $2,400 at a commercial shop but only $500 at our own shop.

To keep our shop operating we need money for paper, ink, and other supplies.



nac discusses finances

NATIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE minutes, 13 September 1966.

NAC members present: Silbar, Calvert, Condit, Kindred, Adams. Alternate: Berkowitz. Others: Davidson, Kleiman.

1. *Finances.* a. SDS has $4378 in outstanding debts, approximately $2000 of which must be paid by the end of the month. This is a reduction from $4700 in debts outstanding at the time of the June NC. $2300 of the total is debts remaining from that period. (See attached financial report.)

b. A discussion was held of fund raising possibilities. Calvert was mandated to approach *Ramparts* magazine with regard to both an exchange ad between them and NLN and the possibility of obtaining their mailing list in return for supplying them with an SDS chapter list so they can approach local groups about bulk orders for campus distribution. Condit was mandated to prepare a mailing to midwest faculty antiwar people.

2. *New Left Notes.* A discussion was held of what items should go into the next and immediately subsequent issues. It was decided to hold printing the full convention proceedings until full addresses were stabilized and we had sufficient funds for the estimated 16 pp. issue necessary. Croston will cull out items of importance for immediate publication, and we will publish the full list of convention and NC delegates for chapter reference.

3. *Printing and literature.* a. We are now in the process of printing 20,000 copies of the *Port Huron Statement*. Jerry Einstandig will go on staff as 2nd printer for the 2-3 weeks necessary to complete production. It was decided to set the price at 50¢, with the usual 50% bulk discount to chapters. Orders, cash in advance, are now being solicited, and the money received will go to paper and printers' wages to speed the job. As of 13 Sept., printing had been completed on 2 pages and was in process on 2 others.

b. A discussion was held of the necessity of printing new membership application cards, but no final action was taken.

4. *Staff.* a. With the addition of the president and vice-president as functional staff members this year, national staff is brought up to 10 persons. Staff at present (not counting pres and v-p) is: Greg Calvert, national secretary; Jane Adams, assistant national secretary (to be replaced by Nancy Bancroft in October, after which Jane will work outside the office on coordinating campus travelling); Thane Croston, NLN editor; Tom Condit, membership; Nick Norris, literature; Art Rosenblum, printer; Jerry Einstandig, 2nd printer (temporary); Mark Kleiman, chapter correspondence & high school coordinating. An extra staff member will have to be added to handle finances & fund raising, so the staff will remain 10 after Jerry finishes his printing stint. (Greg is presently doing this work in addition to national secretary.)

b. We discussed the work of the president and vice-president, Carl Davidson's travel plans, etc. They will report on their jobs as they see them in a future NLN.

c. Condit suggested national office staff members do a certain amount of travelling & chapter visitation in the midwest, both to better serve chapters and to overcome the sense of isolation which has in the past been felt by national staff workers. This idea was accepted in principle with specifics to be worked out by the national secretary in terms of office workloads.

5. *Membership.* Berkowitz proposed systematizing dues collection by making all payments fall due on one of two dates in the year. He and Condit will bring in a detailed proposal to the next NAC meeting.

6. *Draft program.* Earl Silbar will be travelling in the Fall, attempting to coordinate SDS anti-draft activities and to provide much-needed communication between people engaged in different types of action. A lengthy discussion was held on the problems of coordinating this type of work, finances, etc. Earl will bring in a written report on his plans and the job as he sees it.

DELEGATE LIST
NATIONAL COUNCIL

Delegates attending the quarterly N.C. in Clear Lake, Iowa, Sept. 2nd and 3rd, 1966

IOWA CITY - Harry Mac Cormack
Linda Mac Cormack
Barry Gholson

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO -
Mike Goldfield
Evi Goldfield
Brent Kramer
Ken Krich

SWARTHMORE -
John Bancroft

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY -
Dena Clamadge

COLUMBIA -
John Fuerst

SACRAMENTO STATE COLLEGE -
Ron Groves
John Jenkin (alt.)

AMES COLLEGE -
Greg Calvert
Tim McCarthy - (alt.)

BERKELEY -
Mike Sharon

SAN DIEGO STATE -
John Wagner
Ray Bierl

ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY -
Earl Silbar
Richard Kast

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA -
Al Spangler
Thane Croston II

KANSAS AT LARGE -
Itshak Epstein

PENN UNIVERSITY -
John Goldstein

CORNELL UNIVERSITY -
Henry Balser

BROOKLYN UNIVERSITY -
Sue Simensky

BOSTON SUMMER PROJECT -
Fred Gordon
Phil Roup
Mary Buscher

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS -
Thorne Dreyer
Carol Dreyer

VASSAR -
Kathy Mc Afee

TOLEDO AT LARGE -
Phil Urbanski

YALE - Ron Kircheim

AMHEARST - Elliott Isenberg

NEW YORK M.D. SOCIETY -
Mark Scher

CLAREMONT -
Dennis Brown

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY -
Ed Bowers Jr.

INDIANA - Robin Hunter

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN -
Eric Chester
James Jacobs
Mike Locker

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS -
Hugo Pruter

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY -
John Saari

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SANTA BARBARA - Kenneth Jennings

TRINITY COLLEGE -
Jim Kaplan

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS -
Zoe Olson

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
Terry Koch

CONVENTION REPORT
PLENARY SESSIONS

SDS - FIRST PLENARY SESSION

The first session of the Plenary was held on the morning of August 31st, and was chaired by Steve Max of New York City. The first point of business was voting on the proposed agenda submitted by the Steering Committee. The proposed agenda was passed. It was then stated that the delegates would have two votes each and all members who have paid their dues would have one vote.

JEFF SHERO spoke to us on his activities as vice president of SDS during the past year and what he feels needs to be done in the future: He started by saying, 'That this past year the organization has had a sense of wandering and aimlessness which has shown in the convention, especially in the workshops which people did not seem to take seriously. At the chapter level we have sound thinking, but not nationally. We lack a solid base, but can build one if we become externally oriented and organize people that will give us a solid base. We must develop both an organization of power and a theory of change."

He goes on at say, "The only way to organize people in this society is to reach them wherever they are. I suggest that what we do programatically, is to use the Vietnam issue. I believe this is a bad issue to organize around because it only touches people vaguely and not always negatively because it has given unemployed people jobs. It touched these people positively. It has given soldiers a camaraderie they never had before and for the first time in their life they have a goal. Only one aspect of the war in Vietnam touches us negatively, and that is the draft. After the next election the war in Thailand will be escalated. This means an increase in the draft, especially on the college campuses. Most of us firmly believe that we won't take part in the war, to guarantee this we must resist the draft. How? To organize people not to go into the Army which will be the most serious step SDS can take. This should be done on a local level rather than nationally.

On large campuses we should organize a union of students. A few reasons are to take part in radical activities, organize student employees and demand a minimum wages. We need a national union of students much like European and South American student unions which become powerful political forces in the country.

Also, we should organize among the professors, and see what work can be done in the middle-class suburbs. One main problem among the middle-class is that they feel alienated from the people who run the society. There are other problems which we should spend time to explore. It is important now that we become a group of organizers, not only student organizers, but young adult organizers."

JANE ADAMS spoke to us on the problems she's encountered since she became National Secretary last January. "During the time that she has been National Secretary she spent a great deal of time travelling to SDS chapters on various campuses in the mid-west and on each campus found a similar problem. People could not go out and organize because of their own personal problems. If there were several people on each campus that would organize that was considered excellent. Another reason that students didn't go out and organize is that they became more and more ingrown and got a feeling of being out of the elite. Students mobilize around demonstrations by passing out leaflets, but by the end of the year many students lose interest and also organizers have reached all the people they can reach on that particular issue. What is needed is REP campus travelers because there is a great deal of excitement on the campuses about REP but the people don't know how to hook in.

AFTERNOON SESSION
OF PLENARY 8/31/66

MIKE LOCKER gave a report on the activities and the state of affairs of REP. He stated, "There is a strong need for internal education in the SDS and through our new program of internal education we should bring new people into the organization, not only students, but people in professional groups. It is imperative that we reach out to new contingencies. In reaching out to new people we should link ourselves with the left wing intellectuals, researches, etc. People who can help us financially because our funds are very limited. At the present time REP is setting up a national office in Ann Arbor, Michigan (REP is incorporated in Michigan) with a full time staff. Already a board of sponsors have been acquired who will consult with us, research for us and donate money. We need people for administrative work, campus traveling, a policy asking board and better contact with people and chapters."

GREG CALVERT spoke on our financial situation - "We are not a self-financing organization and our present debt will increase when school begins this fall. It is necessary that we rely on outside sources for income. It is more difficult to get donations for past debts than it is to raise money for special projects. To pay off present debts SDS members should work on odd jobs perhaps one day a week and donate their wages to the organization. Another problem is that money collected on the local level never reached the National Office. The National Office is in dire need of money not only for the debt of approximately $1400 incurring during this convention, but for past debts and such necessities as printing of New Left Notes. We are now in the process of obtaining advertisement for the paper so that it will become self-sustaining. Also, the National Office needs a bookkeeper and office help, especially people that will stay longer than 3 months."

NICK NORRIS on the National Office: "The local chapters unable to feel a close tie to the N.O. because they don't feel it serves them in any way and this is one reason that they don't want to donate money. Some members feel it is not necessary to have a national office, but it is necessary. One of the main duties is to answer inquiries about SDS that come in from all over the world, another is for the printing of New Left Notes. If your dues has not been paid by the end of October your name will be taken off of the mailing list of New Left Notes."

HAL BENENSON on labor: "One of the most important steps for SDS to take now is to begin working thru people in the community, not just students. To do this we must set up a labor bureau to find out the special problems of the working people in different areas of the country and to learn how to organize in this area."

EVENING SESSION OF PLENARY 8/31/66

The evening of Thursday, August 31st we heard regional reports from Ed Moritz of Los Angeles, Terry Davis of New York and from Steve Wise for SSOC. After they were completed we voted on Art Rosenblum's proposal and the tabling of all other draft proposals until after the election of National Officers.

Carl Oglesby spoke to the convention on the unfair war the United States is waging in Southeast Asia. Here are some exerpts from that speech:

"A man's desire to support his country's government is natural and strong. In time of war, when his countrymen face death on battlefields, this drive grows all the stronger. But conscience may at some point be so deeply abused by acts of government that suspension of consent becomes the only alternative to dishonor." He goes on to say, "What we know about the war in Vietnam persuades us that it is wrong in its purposes and barbarous in its effects. This belief makes impossible the moral luxury of acquiescence, and obligates us to take as forceful a stand as possible against the war which our government calls us to accept.

We want it to be known that we support and encourage such acts of opposition as the following:

1. Sending medical aid to all human beings who suffer in this war, including adherents of the National Liberation Front and the people of North Vietnam.

2. Protesting production of napalm and other instruments of chemical warfare.

3. Refusing induction, whether or not on a pacifist basis.

4. Refusing to fight in Vietnam after induction, whether or not on a pacifist basis. China.

5. Refusing to pay all or part of one's federal taxes.

6. Establishing peaceful and open contacts with the people of North Vietnam, the National Liberation Front, and mainland China.

And believing this to be a position honorable and necessary for ourselves as men and Americans, we invite others to join in this declaration."

(continued on page 3)

CONVENTION REPORT
national officers elected

(continued from page 2)

The evening of September 1 st was devoted to the nomination and election of a new president and vice-president for S.D.S. Nick Egleson, Lee Webb and Bill Hartzog accepted nomination for the office of president. Each candidate was given approximately 7 minutes to tell what he would do as president if he were elected. Nick Egleson was elected as our new president by a wide margin.

Nominees for vice-president were: Carl Davidson, Jim Jacobs and Carolyn Craven. Carl Davidson from Lincoln, Nebraska, was elected.

After the election of national officers National Council at large delegates were elected. Those elected were:

Jane Adams
Nancy Bancroft
Tom Condit
Carolyn Craven
Mike Davis
Carl Davidson
Roy Lahlberg
Bill Hartzog
Mike James
Mark Kleiman
Steve Kindred
Terry Robbins
Jeff Shero
Bob Speck
Lee Webb

Alternates:
1st and 2nd were tied: Hal Benenson and Bob Ross
3rd - Tom Bell
4th - John Maher
5th - John Fuerst

We opened the afternoon session today (Sept. 3) by electing a new National Secretary. Elected for the post was Greg Calvert who has been our Asst. National Secretary for the past year.

Then we proceeded on to nomination of people for the job of Asst. National Secretary. Those nominated were: Tom Condit and Nancy Bancroft. Nancy Bancroft was elected but will not be able to take office until later this fall. Until that time Jane Adams will be our Asst. National Secretary.

We also elected seven members for the N.A.C. Elected were:

Tom Condit
Steve Kindred
Brent Kramer
Earl Leuter
Earl Silbar
Jean Tepperman
JOIN - Chicago

Alternates (tie):
Berkowitz
Teplick
plus National Secretary and Asst. National Secretary who automatically serve on N.A.C.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

The following are Constitutional Amendments that were passed during the annual SDS Convention in Clear Lake, Iowa, August 28th thru Sept. 1st, 1966.

KISSINGER Amendments:

Amendment 4: Reword the second sentence of Section 4, Article VI, to read: "A quorum shall be 40% of the voting members of whose election the National Council has been notified.'

Amendment 6: Section 1. The following new Article shall be introduced into the Constitution. Passed after amended by Scher. Section 1. All or some of the chapters and/or members in a given geographical area may constitute themselves a Region of SDS. New regions shall submit their constitutions and be recognized provisionally by the President pending the next regular NC meeting. All disputes over regional boundaries shall be resolved by the NC.

Amendment 6: Section 2. The following new Article shall be introduced into the Constitution. Passes as amended by Tom Bell. 'Section 2. Regions of SDS shall hold at least one membership Convention each year and may establish regional officers as deemed necessary.' Regional programs, staff, and offices shall be responsible to decisions arrived at by a democratically constituted Regional Council'.

Amendment 6: Section 3. The following new Article shall be introduced into the Constitution.

'Section 3. While fundamentally responsible to their regional constituency, Regions are expected to work with the broad terms of policy set by the National Convention and the National Council. Any points of conflict shall finally be resolved by the National Council.'

Amendment 7: Reword Section 2, Article IV: Passed after amended by Bill Higgs. 'Section 2. A chapter may be chartered by the Regional Council of the area in which it is organized or by the National Council. The chapter shall submit a membership list, a constitution or statement of principles, and notification of election of officers or Regional representatives. Chapters may be provisionally recognized by the President or appropriate regional officer pending the meeting of the N.C. or Regional Council respectively.'

BOOTH amendment: Add Section 4 to new KISSINGER Article.

'If 1/3 of the duly chartered chapters in the geographic area of a region so petition the National Council, shall immediately consider whether to declare the Regional Organization defunct and to prohibit it from speaking or acting on behalf of SDS.'

WEBB amendments:

'That Article IX be stricken and subsequent articles be renumbered accordingly."

Article: IX, Section 4: This would replace the present Section 4, it would become Section 5: New Section 4:

'The National Vice President is responsible for internal education. He is to stimulate and coordinate educational programs within SDS. He shall be responsible to the President and National Council.'

CONDIT Amendment:

My amendment would preface the present section 1, Article VI (National Council) with the letter 'a' and add a section subsection as follows:

'(b) Five or more members residing in an area where there is no organized chapter may meet together to elect a delegate to the National or Regional Council, provided that (1) a certification of the meeting and election bearing the signatures of at least 5 members, be sent to the national or regional office prior to the NC or RC meeting, and (2) evidence is offered that all SDS members in the area concerned received prior notice of the meeting and election.'

WEBB AMENDMENT: Article III, Section 1, amended to read:

'Membership is open to all who share the commitment of the organization to democracy as means and as a social goal.'

I move that:

a) the present Article II be stricken and all subsequent articles be renumbered accordingly

b) that in Article VI (National Council) Section 2 the third and last sentence the words' ...the LID and..."and"...coordination of relation with the LID..."be stricken so that the sentence read as follows:

(1)

...the NC shall be responsible for the drafting of a budget administration of the budget and organization of fund raising: interviewing and appointment of the National Secretary and other such staff as budget allows; appointment of committee chairman and representatives to other organizations, overseeing the functioning of the Administrative Committee; drafting an annual report; and making arrangements for the Convention."

PRESS RELEASE

September 10, 1966

Students for a Democratic Society deplores the arrest of Stokeley Carmichael and other staff of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in Atlanta in the wake of recent disturbances there. Once again an American city has been the scene of riots touched off by police brutality amid the tension of ghetto life. This time the riots have been used as an excuse for political repression.

The attack on SNCC serves two purposes. It shifts the blame for the riots from the white government of Atlanta and its police force to those like the SNCC staff who have worked to change the conditions of the Negro's life. It also provides a pretext for the repression of SNCC whose program of "black power" threatens white control in Georgia and elsewhere.

A developing pattern of political repression points ever more clearly to a conscious attempt to stifle a price dissent. Most recently, the abortive attempt to compromise the Philadelphia SNCC office by planting dynamite, the phony dope raid in the JOIN office in Chicago, and the criminal conspiracy charges in Atlanta are evidence of the mounting tempo of repressive measures.

At the same time that SNCC is being attacked in Atlanta, a retrogressive civil rights bill has been passed by the U.S. House of Representatives which carries with it an amendment which would open the door to the repression of all political dissent and every movement for political change in this country. In essence the amendment makes liable for prosecution anyone who encourages any activity which could result in riots and who uses the facilities of interstate commerce for these ends. The amendment provides for a maximum penalty of five years in prison and $10,000 fine. The passage of this bill by the Senate would mark a major step in the destruction of civil liberties in this country.

In response to this situation, SDS expresses its determination to combat the attempted isolation and destruction of SNCC and reaffirms its support of the concept and program of "black power" which SNCC has elaborated. In addition, SDS calls on the Senate to reject the repressive legislation now before it.

Students for a Democratic Society
Nick Egleson - President
Greg Calvert - National Secretary

NEW LEFT NOTES

Published weekly by Students for a Democratic Society, 1608 W. Madison, Chicago, Ill. 60612. Phone (312) 666-3874. Second-class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois. Subscriptions: $1 a year for non-members. Signed articles and letters are the responsibility of the writer. Unsigned articles are the responsibility of the Editor, Thane Croston

STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

NickEgleson, president; Carl Davidson, vice-president; and Greg Calvert, national secretary.

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Vol. I, No. 35 let the people decide SEPTEMBER 16, 1966

IDEOLOGY (CONT.)

(continued from page 1)

truths of power (or maybe beside them) there are other truths within other areas of human experience we will find more relevant. Anarchism does not, traditionally, define the problem of power as the central concern of an authentically civilized people. In any case, a little existential wisdom and forbearance would suggest that we hold as few presuppositions as possible about the "central concern" of Man. How many people know "the destiny of man" in terms certain enough to give them a guaranteed next step toward the realization of that destiny?

Antagonism to national program -- or, more pointedly, antagonism to the national office as a theological organization base at this time (or perhaps ever) -- becomes more credible in the context of the attitudes mentioned above. It is not only the redistribution of American power that concerns the new leadership of SDS; it is also the redistribution, within SDS, of the knowledge of what is needed to take power humanely. Better someone in the NO, who has failed miserably as an ERAP organizer than one who has never tried at all, because in the last analysis to claim power "for power" is to speak the democratic vision. A democratic society is peopled by those who are alerted equally to the dangers of power. The N.O. is no more entitled to "know better", than is the White House leadership of the Democratic Party to guarantee the equitable distribution of people-centered awareness of the power issues that confront this society is the precious goal of this new program. Nothing will guarantee such awareness better than organizing in the field. There is no one is outside a "field" and since the political truth about one's own field is garnered humanistically via a direct confrontation of its agains a more abstract, secondary order of experience available in the liberal graduate schools or in the Marxist magazines), is undoubtedly the logical first step toward an empirical feel for what is needed to accomplish a revolutionary democratization of America.

The word "America" reminds me of another objection to that kind of national programming which preempts energies, schedules, time, perspective, and even consciousness from the local places in which we invariably root ourselves as whole people. It is a serious question whether "America," as a nation, is a valuable territory within which community organizing toward a whole life in a humane place is possible. This may be the critical hang-up of the Old Left, that it could never shake itself free of nationalist preconceptions of where people were at. While it is the nation that makes war in Vietnam, it is precisely the absense of community at the level of a continental nation which makes such barbaric and abstract war-making possible. "America" is not a place, it is a lawless abstraction! (I presuppose, of course, that if American national destiny is of a fascist nature, then I am anti-American as well as anti-nationalist.)

We are, after all, Students for a Democratic Society, not Students for a Democratic American Nation. It is dangerous, and not even honest to the facts, to imagine the two as inevitably compatible. Indeed, I would argue that we do not live in an authentic nation at all, that we live in a continental empire that has, for the past several decades, sought to extend its imperial hegemony into less manageable continents. Empires cannibalize authentic nations. Oglesby, in a speech referred to above, alluded to students in the old Medieval nomenclature, as living within their separate "nations," a kind of quadrumpium of the arts. From that angle of vision, the multiversity is a minature reflecting pool of Empire. Texans, Californians, Mexican-Americans, Southerners, Indians, and even a variety of right-wingers (in their own way) have contributed visions of self-determined "nations" which, taken altogether (and adding as we go the constituencies that are profoundly incommensurate with these colonial ideals), point SDS toward a meaningful decentralist strategy of revolution. Without benefit of day-to-day organizing experience at a local level (however that may be defined subcontinentally), it is too easy to find one's self in a "national office" scheming toward a "national power" literally worth only the powder it takes to blow it to hell. National programming, from this point of view, is inevitably out of contact with democratic reality, especially of one presupposes that the logic of decolonization within America is the most promising kind of liberational politics, for us and (for only one example) the Vietnamese.

(continued on page 4)

MIDWEST CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL CHANGE

The Midwest Region is holding a conference on Social Change October 8 and 9 in Kansas City Mo. Interested parties should contact: Ishak Epstein; 1119 E. 11; Kansas City, Mo. or Bill Hartzog; 725 Chandler; Topeka, Kansas.

ideology (cont.)

(continued from page 3)

Hence the convention's anti-draft program is not, as some have charged, a defaulting on its obligations to the anti-war movement. There are plenty of national organizations with nation-oriented politics whose anti-war activities remain available to SDS members in the absence of an SDS national program on the draft. The convention was in no mood to "fink out" on the peace movement; on the contrary, it was in a mood to organize anti-war (draft resistance) constituencies to counter the imperial thrust of American politics where such power was administered in this country. The convention urged draft resisters to organize locally on a community union model. Furthermore, it was in a mood distinctly ambivalent toward "demonstrations," electoral politics, lobbying the liberal establishment, etc., Peace Movement tactics that have not, in fact, made any significant structural alteration of the conditions within America that make the oppression of the Vietnamese (and others in the Third World) seemingly inevitable. The localism of SDS' anti-draft program is, in a way, a step toward guerilla politics, a step away from liberal program and tactics.

Liberals on the Right and the older revolutionary socialists on the Left of the Peace Movement share a devotion to tactics rejected by the SDS convention because, whatever their ideological differences, they are both committed to a traditionally rational solution to the problems of American power. In addition, liberals, the American Old Left, and radical pacifists are all more or less equally trapped into a single-issue allocation of their limited energies because they are more deeply trapped by a Protestant tradition of conscience which, with uncasuistical awkwardness, compels them to struggle against the system's outrages where those outrages are the most visible and therefore most painful to behold. Admittedly, the Peace Movement's tactics have affected public opinion as such opinions can function within the delivered structures of the American system. They have succeeded in convincing millions of Americans (perhaps a majority even) that the Vietnamese war is somehow wrong or unworthy or sterile, or what-have-you. But it seems to occur to no one that to convince American opinion that it is engaged in a "bad war" is an agitation that provokes behavior from America-as-a-system which issues as a maddening paradox, viz., escalation! For given the impoverishment of America's humane political imagination and the rigidities of its hierarchical structures -- ask the Afro-American! -- it should be no surprise to radicals that the polls paradoxically show Americans simultaneously rejecting Johnson and the war and endorsing Kennedy and escalation. Victory for America in Vietnam is, in its barbaric simplicity, a purgation of conscience for those who are reached by the alarms of the anti-war movement but remain untouched by the kind of community organizing that could heal the impotency of their political style.

Unless SDS applies unequivocally its unique orientation to the Peace Movement, one could almost imagine, grotesque as it sounds, an antiwar program of public address so successful in its agitational efforts that it would fashion for the establishment a bewildered but obedient consensus for war with China. Some organization on the Left has to function as if America's global appetite were more complicated than a politicians' anomia or an abstract class war. The people who live in the culture area known as "America" may not like the war, but their obedience makes it possible: to put it bluntly, they are in no shape to say "no" to war, and SDS is that organization that wants to teach them how to say "no" to that and a variety of other outrages as well.

For the sake of conversation, let me grossly oversimplify the evolution of SDS-Man: from intellectual to politician to demonstrator-activist to community organizer. I am talking about an evolution of emphasis, a maturing model. And I admit I am over-charmed by organizers--they are performers, they sing, strut, pose, grin, impersonate their constituencies and their enemies, think dramatistically (does anyone read Kenneth Burke anymore?), all in all shaping up beautifully. I love them. That is why I wonder what is to become of them, i.e., what next? If only SDS-Man maturates, perhaps they are doomed to detention camps; if the organizer-type succeeds barely, perhaps his next stage is a guerrilla-type. Old man that I am, I have kept up so far, though increasingly winded. When SDS-Man becomes a new-dangled kind of guerilla fighter, the kind Fanon (with his blindspot toward post-national, post-modern life) could never imagine, then I'll pray for a second wind.

For the sake of further conversation, let me oversimplify the struggle for democracy as shifting in emphasis, now this way and now that, over the seemingly incredible continuum of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. I think our intellectuals are preoccupied with Liberty, our politicians with Fraternity, the demonstrator-activists with a curious combination of the preceding two, and the community organizers with Equality. Within SDS, the shift toward organizing as a modular reference is also a turning from the language of love to the tactics of power. (Perhaps Fraternity is to Love what Equality is to Power.) The community organizer knows that you cannot love someone who is not respected, and while individuals may be respected because they are agents of loving ways, this attitude has yet to impinge importantly in the historical processes, in the world of class relations. Bound to the realities of historical processes, in the world of power and politics, individualized agents of love are unequal to collations of people vying for respect; and such collations get respect because other groups know them to be effective. If love is to have political status, a precondition for that eventuality is the generous and wide distribution of respect, i.e., power.

None of this is meant cynically.

Now my point is this: the SDS convention, ideologically speaking, opted radically for the egalitarian task. There is no going forward until the front lines are evened out, filled up to the brim, with constituencies equally alerted to the problems of power in American society.

The convention's rampant rejection of liberal style and tactics also convoked another way to talk about Equality. In addition to the idea of being equal with or among others--others who are not yet brothers--there is the idea of being equal to the historical task of democratizing our continent. Wishing to be equal to such a task is an expression of the will to make history, if not in an altogether new way, in a new direction. (History, like a sonnet, appears to have terms that must be conceded if the "game" is to be played at all.) A tall, blonde, ebullient delegate pleaded with his peers to think confidently, to believe themselves to be those agents of historical change we are forever intellectually debating about. Ideologically implicit in the tactics of liberals and vulgar Marxists is the assumption that selfconsciously assembled they are never equal to their tasks; as a consequence they are always peeking about with goofy optimism for some under-developed "class" or "group" or "nation" they must lead, manipulate, control, ally to, etc. But the speaker, beaming and babbling about Bobby Dylan, carrying on existentially without knowing it, said, "If its not us, then who?" Oglesby hinted at something similar when he told the convention that he wanted SDS to write the platform of that third party a-borning. The problem was how to rejoin the historical process to a neo-populist, egalitarian "us" that added up to native millions. The answer was to invest 6000 SDS organizers into "America" to see what they could find. There was no other way to remain loyal to both one's democratic (i.e., egalitarian) ends and to one's self as equal to them.

Returning to our SDS model-man, it is worth noting that the alienated intellectual takes no small pride in his alienation; indeed, he fashions something from it, some art of philosophy or social criticism the raw resources of which feed, in a depressing way, on the range of his alienation. The middle-class intellectual's vision, valuable as it may be, reciprocates with his isolation. But the convention delegates took little pride in their isolation, and in fact lamented it to no end. They were tired of being a minority of a minority on the Left. Perhaps those most energetically weary of "losing" were somewhat naive about how easy it would bee to return to America's mainstreams--to organize, say, the middle classes; naive because, in their enthusiasm for egalitarian power, they momentarily forgot how satisfying it was to be ejected from the pain-producing cockpits of bourgeois life. Beards and bare feet had become insignia for the comforts of alienation, for the pleasure of being beneath the system, underground, happily in pursuit of a loving radical community.

But somehow the loving radical community did not shape up, the enemy pursued our SDS model-man (with the draft and the war, if with nothing else), and then SNCC made its rude and magnificent point. And there he was, stuck with his bourgeois self again; worse off, in a way, because he was isolated now from both ends, from the Black insurgency and the lunatic Olympian heights of **Establishment** life down from which, years ago, he had descended to become the **New Left.**

This idyll has yet to be written up in a way that it deserves, yet on its initial face there is an unsurprising obsession with Equality. George Orwell's typically prescient novel, **Keep the Aspidistra Flying**, is one variation on the bourgeois character-type (Gordon Comstock) seeking self-transfiguration through a descent into the underclass. Comstock was the last of a middle class family within which, as the novel repeats over and over again, nothing ever happens: such an existence was unendurably impotent. So Gordon--to all clinical appearances--became suicidal, though not really; it was the symbolic death of his biographical lineage that he wanted, to sink beneath himself as if there were some kind of ahistorical environmental womb down there out of which he could become re-born. Given his middle class background, SDS-man as organizer partakes, I suspect, of this archetypal motivation. (I mean this descriptively, personally, not sarcastically; I mean this as a point, not as an answering or as a clinical, empty cleverness.) Comstock muses to himself:

> It was all bound up in his mind with the thought of being underground. He liked to think about the lost people, the underground people, tramps, beggars, criminals, prostitutes. It is a good world that they inhabit, down there in their frowzy kips and spikes. He liked to think that beneath the world of money there is that great sluttish underworld where failure and success have no meaning; a sort of kingdom of ghosts where all are equal. That was where he wished to be, down in the ghost-kingdom, below ambition.

Floundering about below ambition (which is to say below politics and history-making), Comstock's idyll ends badly, from an SDS point of view. He re-emerges as the cynic, the self-deceived stoical functionary of a decadent civilization, a junior executive in an advertising agency. He rejoins the middle class "properly" organized, not organizing. But I would suggest that Comstock, wretchedly impotent and de-politicized, could have had no other destiny. Be that as it may, we have partaken of Orwell's bourgeois character-type who descends on his way to transcending his fate, and it strikes me as authentic that the rubric of that descent is an obsession with Equality. The obsession is bound to continue for us in new terms even as the experience of "descent" not only ceases to be honest or relevant, but becomes actually embarrassing and "colonial." What is needed now is a transmutation of that obsession: a rejection of ghost-kingdoms and an acceptance of living ones as points of reference; a will to be equal to history and ambition rather than below them; and a faith (essentially revolutionary) that sustains ambition even as the "future world" sought after is permitted a pragmatic, popular emergence rather than a utopian delineation from a vanguard.

So by some circuitous reasoning as the above, I have become convinced that our middle class radical SDS-Man is being true to his own class psychology and personal needs as well as honest with the objective world swirling around him, a world only partly outside of himself, when at his last convention he committed himself, as organizer, to work the levers of his own very local history for better or for worse. We can be more than we are, but not rudely brutally, and all at once dead to the identities that our histories shaped us to. The best commitments are unto death, but there is more than one way to die to what is killing us. What is wanted is a way of transcending ourselves that is at once humane and radically effective, and until all the evidence to the contrary is in, I would hope we continue to look for such a way. That is what I think, ultimately, was motivating the 1966 SDS convention, and why it is not unkind to say that it represented the sanest middle class politics available anywhere in the country.

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