

SDS sets out on radical path

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WITH SERGEANT PEPPER'S Lonely Hearts Club Band providing the spiritual cadence, Students for a Democratic Society is quick-marching to the political left. At its sixth annual convention here June 25-30, the nation's largest radical student organization embarked on a collision course with the United States government.

The confrontation may be years away, but it is clearly intended. Any organization that resolves to "aid servicemen who wish to terminate their association with the armed forces by going underground" would obviously rather fight than switch. The switch, if it had come, would have been to line up behind the growing New Politics movement and the trend toward the creation of an independent, left-liberal third political party.

An SDS convention is like reading Chairman Mao through kaleidoscope eyes. The words hop, skip and jump but patterns ultimately emerge strong and clear, if somewhat altered and stylistically unique. The pattern: Left-liberal politics—New Politics—is out, hardly worth discussion in fact. Resistance is in. SDS, with 250 chapters and about 30,000 national and local members, is not yet a revolutionary organization, but that is the direction in which it now seems headed.

Step by step

Said one convention delegate who has been influential in helping shape the organization's political direction in the last year: "In four or six years, when the black community is organized and when other oppressed sections of the population are ready, thoughts will turn to the creation of an independent revolutionary political party. The goal some of us have in mind is to be ready and organized. It's where we must go and where we are going, step by step."

The resolution to aid servicemen who wish to go underground is one step. It took about 300 delegates less than a half-hour to pass this proposal by a 5-1 margin, compared to the 19-hour debate that preceded adoption of a less seditious anti-draft program at an SDS national council meeting six months ago.



**SDS LEADERS ON U. OF MICHIGAN CAMPUS DURING STUDENT GROUP'S
CONVENTION AT ANN ARBOR**

Michael Spiegel, national secretary, Carl Davidson, inter-organizational secretary; Gregory Calvert, on interim committee

A resolution, however, is just paper. Asked during the brief debate just how SDS chapters might implement the "underground" proposal, Texas organizer Jeff Shero, former SDS vice president, responded simply and to the point: "First, hide the guy out a few weeks until his GI haircut grows in. Then give him your draft card and write to the draft board for another copy, telling them you lost yours. After that, supplied with civilian clothes, he leaves for another city and gets a job."

Said Shero later: "I intended it to be an illegal resolution. We should stand for disruption in the armed forces and for soldiers going underground." The body agreed without any substantial dissent and that was that—one more step.

Commenting on the resolution and other convention matters, outgoing national secretary Gregory Calvert said, "We are going to make clear in the next few years both to the government and the radical movement that the New Left — and I mean SDS, SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], some ghetto groups and a few other organizations — is definitely where it is at in American left-wing politics."

The "underground" proposal was contained in a general anti-draft resolution which reaffirmed SDS's "opposition to conscription in any form" and called for the formation of draft-resistance unions wherein collective action by organized draft registers would replace individual protest.

"Tactics such as civil disobedience and disruption of the Selective Service System are among those advocated when they complement the over-all strategy of resistance to the draft and to other forms of oppression," the resolution stated. "SDS does not urge going to jail as a means of resisting the draft, but supports all those whose actions result in imprisonment."

The message was clear: Evade the draft and evade prison too.

The section dealing with servicemen said: "SDS encourages chapters and draft resistance unions to aid servicemen in disseminating information about conscientious objection and the war in Vietnam as well as aiding them in opposition and disruption inside the armed services. We also urge aid to servicemen who wish to terminate their association with the armed forces by going underground."

Anti-draft organizing will consume much of SDS's energy this year. Of equal import will be radical organizing on campus, leading toward a massive multi-issue national student strike next spring.

A final decision on whether to call the strike will be made In December, depending on response from the chapters, but it is almost assured. The strike would have several purposes aside from registering protest.

First, it would "radicalize the student power movement" by superimposing the broader demand for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and other national issues. Second, it would help develop a massive radical student movement which would discredit, if not smash, the liberal National Student Association. (The NSA has apparently emerged strengthened from the recent revelations of CIA support and its subsequent "break" with surreptitious government funding.) Third, it would re-establish SDS's control of left politics on campus, particularly in relation to the Student Mobilization Committee—a single-issue antiwar coalition that has made inroads on campus during the last half year as SDS vacillated on the question of whether to support the Spring Mobilization against the war. SDS agreed to support the Student Mobilization Committee's previously announced call for campus referendums on the Vietnam war this fall, but within the context that it "views the referendums as part of the groundwork necessary in building student sentiment for the SDS strike."

Referendum a tool

"Campus referendums on the war," said Carl Davidson, architect of the student power movement, last year's vice president and newly elected inter-organizational secretary, "will prove to be a very frustrating experience for students because they will accomplish nothing. Such frustration, however, can pay off if it is channeled several months later into a radical student strike based on student power demands, an immediate end to the war in Vietnam and other national issues."

Davidson, who originated the student strike proposal, stressed throughout the five-day convention on the University of Michigan campus that the strike was an urgent priority because of "the inherent possibility of conservatism in the student movement." The concept of student power—student control over basic campus decisions — is potentially reactionary, Davidson explained, if student power advocates confine themselves to strictly local issues such as removal of dormitory hour restrictions. The outcome of such a situation, he said, "could be solidification of the class privilege students enjoy and making them better bureaucrats."

"We must make the student power movement political in terms of national issues," Davidson said, "and we must make clear connections between student insurgency and that taking place in the black and ghetto communities. You cannot build socialism on one campus." Hence the interconnection of issues in the strike proposal

One of the purposes of the student power movement, Davidson said, is to radicalize the "new working class"—a term used by some In SDS to define skilled workers, technicians, and service workers such as teachers.

Both the campus and draft programs are seen as steps leading toward the radicalization of SDS. Other approved resolutions in this vein included: establishment of a Radical Education

Center in Chicago and a program for training three dozen full-time radical campus organizers; labor and "new working class" projects; a call to the Mobilization Committee, organizers of the nation-wide anti-Vietnam war protests, to adopt "immediate unconditional withdrawal" as the principal political demand; the intention to create closer ties to the international revolutionary movement; an investigation of the "colonial" position of women in America and in SDS, and a pledge to defend any U.S. left organization under attack by the government.

Closer to home, perhaps for some of the delegates was a resolution condemning the Jefferson Airplane, one of the best known rock 'n' roll groups, for broadcasting commercials for Levi Strauss & Co., maker of Levis, while company workers are on strike; agreement to participate in the "Provo Tribal Gathering" to be held this fall and the intention to "develop a critique and strategic insights into" the hippie movement and the U.S. "cultural revolution" in the arts and social mores.

One of the most significant developments in SDS during the last year, as evidenced in the convention, has been its politicalization. Everyday politics and political positions have traditionally been the great unmentionables in SDS. Political decisions often seemed based on personalities or on broad humanitarian generalizations. As such, a hundred tendencies bloomed, none prevailed, and the organization was a political neuter. SDS is still far from a political understanding common to all members or a general ideology, but politics is now at least partly in the open.

Politics discussed

"For the first time," said Calvert, reviewing the convention, "people really discussed different kinds of political analysis openly in SDS. In the past, political differences were always submerged. Now they are coming out and it's a tremendously healthy sign."

Calvert himself, an immensely persuasive national secretary, was one of the reasons for this development—and he received considerable criticism from an articulate but in the end surprisingly small minority which charged him with promulgating a particular political line during his ten-month tenure as a nominally apolitical national officer. In essence, the University of Michigan chapter, one of the largest, sought to censure him for allegedly seeking to impose a political direction on SDS (i.e. concepts of resistance and the "new working class") by using his office to make statements to the press that he was not mandated to make by convention decisions. Included in the critique was a series of articles published in the NATIONAL GUARDIAN earlier this year.

Raking the national secretary over the coals at each convention is an old SDS pastime, but this year—as opposed to last when the then national secretary Paul Booth was virtually drummed out of the organization—it fell flat. The opposition never amounted to much more than the Michigan chapter and was clearly in disfavor.

Calvert—whose "crime" of "using the national office for political purposes" was similar to that of Booth—escaped ignominy because his politics were apparently those of a growing consensus within SDS.

Responding to the criticism, Calvert said in a farewell address as national secretary: "I did not push politics but tried at every point to push what would lead to political awareness. I did not push a political line because I don't have one, but I would like SDS to get a line on what it means to be political." Two days later he was elected one of 11 national officers.

Despite continued differences in SDS, a large degree of political consolidation appears to have taken place during the year. The left-liberal tendency has vanished as a serious factor. Gone with it, it seems, are proponents of national electoral politics. None of the three largest domestic communist parties—CP, SWP, PLP—has any influence. The so-called "third-camp socialist" faction, best known for its "critical" support of the Vietnamese revolution, is relatively small.

The major political tendencies appear to be these: On the one side are the left-wing socialists and neo-Marxists; on the other the anarchists of various persuasion, including hippies; and to the middle a combination of both. They all seem to get along rather well, particularly because the Marxists stress decentralism and non-authoritarianism and the anarchists push for revolution and (at least some of them) read Marx. Each side manages to complement the other and each seems to be gravitating toward the middle—which in this case means left-wing libertarian socialism of a revolutionary nature.

It would probably be fair to say that in general SDS identifies more with Che than Fidel; more with Fidel than Mao; and certainly more with Mao, at least as a revolutionary figure, than Kosygin. As far as identity goes, a combination Gene Debs, Joe Hill and Rosa Luxemburg might beat them all.

Like the organization itself, SDS conventions are extraordinary, at least in plenary session. This year it was water pistols, paper airplanes, and the spontaneous singing of old Wobbly hymns (the IWW is said to have signed up 20 new members at the convention). After one hundred-voice-strong rendition of "The Red Flag," Carl Davidson grabbed the microphone and announced: "All you people out there who think there is a plot by the national office to take over SDS are wrong. It's a Wobbly plot!" The declaration was greeted by the waving of dozens of red IWW membership cards and five choruses of "Solidarity Forever."

The convention opened with a 3½-hour credentials fight—the "sixth annual credentials fight," according to the chairman. Anarchists went out of their minds, with boredom. Two delegates publicly burned their voting cards. Water pistols were drawn and used. Delegates stomped out of the Natural Science Hall, where the plenary was held.

The next day, during another parliamentary debate, a dozen delegates ran from of the hall and, amid shouts of, "No, No, No!" one stepped forward to declare: "I'm going to get through like I got through the last convention – with Compoze."

Somehow, through the boredom and uproar, a great deal of work was accomplished.

The convention agreed to support the march on Washington in the fall with evident reservation. "We feel that these large demonstrations . . ." said the resolution, "can have no significant effect on American policy in Vietnam. Further, they delude many participants into thinking that the American 'democratic' process functions in a meaningful way." The resolution urged the Mobilization Committee to adopt the slogan, "Immediate unconditional withdrawal" and advised participating SDS chapters to raise this banner regardless.

SNCC and RAM backed

In another resolution, delegates voiced "support for five SNCC members charged with murder in connection with the killing of a policeman during a battle between cops and students at Texas Southern University, and support to 16 alleged members of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) charged with conspiring to kill moderate black leaders. A companion resolution mandated the SDS national office to "take whatever steps are necessary" to support any left group under government attack.

"Taking as our watchword the slogan of solidarity, we maintain that an injury to one is an injury to all," the resolution stated. "Part of the pattern of government oppression is an attempt to splinter the left and create self-destructive internal conflicts. SDS will not allow itself to fall prey to the errors of the left in the 1940s and '50s. We contend that whenever the government must attack and destroy a left group, we will support it regardless of the group's political ideology."

The question of the "new working class" did not come up for prolonged discussion. The theory that skilled and professional workers are able to be organized as radicals along working-class lines was evidently controversial. Instead of attempting to come to any decisions at the convention delegates approved a resolution calling for SDS to organize teachers, principally

in New York. Through this experiment, the “new-working-class” theory will be put into practice on a small scale and will provide data for the next convention. Also dealing with labor, delegates approved a resolution to create a Labor Research and Action Project to gather and disseminate information about the labor movement within SDS.

One of the most interesting and controversial resolutions, entitled, “Statement from the Women’s Liberation Workshop,” failed to gain convention approval but probably stimulated greater thought than any other proposal. Briefly, the young women who drew up the resolution defined the role of the American female, including the role of women in SDS, as one of colonial dependence and exploitation. The proposal contained a program advocating communal child care centers, distribution of birth-control information and devices, legalized abortion and other modest measures.

But the resolution must have touched a raw nerve in a surprisingly large number of males in the audience, many of whom began to act like children at a Saturday matinee when the women who sponsored the statement made reference to the existence of male chauvinism in SDS. Some of the men appeared particularly upset by a phrase in the document which called on women “to help relieve our brothers of the burden of male chauvinism.”

Moved by the hostility the proposal engendered, Jane Adams, Midwest organizer, told the male delegates: “A lot of you guys are getting furious because for the first time in your life you have had to face your own attitudes about superiority.”

The more politically experienced men in SDS tended to support the resolution, though they may have differed with some of the analysis.

It is a fact that women in SDS, as elsewhere in society, are pretty much second-class citizens. Though the subject got off to a stormy beginning, there seem to be enough mature men in SDS to work with women in resolving the “woman question.” A special group was set up to study the problem.

One of the biggest changes in the organization took place in the sphere of internal organization. The offices of president and vice president were abolished (they were considered political spokesmen, but it never worked out that way, with the political role falling mostly to the third officer, the national secretary). In the new setup there are the three political offices of national secretary, educational secretary and inter-organizational secretary. Elected to these offices, respectively, were Michael Spiegel, 20, of Portland, Ore., a temporary drop-out from Harvard; Robert Pardun, 26, an Austin, Texas, organizer, and Davidson, 23, the former vice president.

The other organizational change was to make the National Interim Council (NIC) a working body—to the degree that, in a disciplined political group, it would probably be called the central committee. The NIC traditionally did nothing, serving as an emergency decision-making body between conventions and quarterly meetings of the National Council. The intention is to convene the NIC monthly. Considering the political composition of the elected group—representing the Chicago and New York centers of thought in SDS—it will probably play an increasingly important role. Each of the eight members is a national officer with rights to speak for the organization. Elected were four members from Chicago, including Calvert, three from New York and Shero, from Texas.

The sessions ended with a scramble to find enough money to pay for the convention site. (The organization is quite broke, even though it pays national officers and organizers only \$10 a week.) As a final gesture, Calvert and Davidson offered themselves as a package-deal: For \$200 delegates could have the pleasure of throwing them in the pool. By adding pennies to dollars the money was finally raised. When it was counted, the “victims” had vanished.