

SDS and the Movement: Where Do We Go From Here?

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The split that occurred at the SDS national convention should have come as no real surprise: it was the logical culmination of processes long at work inside the organization. Its significance goes far beyond the simple fact that the Progressive Labor Party and its followers are no longer in the same organization as the old SDS national leadership and its followers.

Until only a few years ago, SDS in its overwhelming majority was anti-centralist and anti-ideological. Action was all that really counted. Marxism was rejected as "Old Left." The working class was seen as non-existent, irrelevant or bought-off.

Community organizing and participatory democracy were the key phrases which defined the organization. Neither had much substance. Of the hundreds of community organizing projects initiated, very few were able to claim even modest success. No attempt was ever made to define participatory democracy, and the term was used to describe everything from group therapy sessions and student participation on rules committees to Castro's ability to stand up at a rally and communicate with the Cuban masses.

When the question was posed, "Which groups in society are a potential force for social change?," most SDS'ers saw the answer to be students together with an ever-changing succession of theoretical allies: intellectuals, poor people, the black community, the "new working class."

1. THE QUEST FOR IDEOLOGY

SDS began to develop politically, but not in a social vacuum. In society at large, the decay of the American capitalist social order was expressing itself with increasing intensity. A black movement came into being: growing, becoming increasingly militant, breaking through the bounds set by a pacifist religious leadership, expressing itself in spontaneous ghetto uprisings, developing the concepts of black pride and then black power, developing black revolutionary organizations which were becoming increasingly political and increasingly respected in the black community.

At the same time, a small "consensus war" in Vietnam escalated into a mammoth drain of American troops and resources. A movement against the war developed, initiated by SDS and other student militants, and spread into all sections of the population. Though the initial appeal of the anti-war movement was based on pacifism and moralism, increasingly—particularly among students and blacks—an anti-imperialist consciousness began to develop.

For growing numbers, the struggle against the Vietnam war, and the struggle for black liberation, exposed the nature of the American capitalist state, and led to the understanding that it must be overthrown. All this time, a growing restlessness and rebelliousness was developing among students in particular and young people in general.

Propelled both by the escalating crisis in American society and by the manifest bankruptcy of its early liberal, reform-oriented approach, SDS politics went through a very rapid evolution to the left, from left-liberal protest in 1964 ("Part of the Way with LBJ"), to anti-imperialist resistance in 1967, to varieties of anti-capitalist revolutionism today. What began as a movement in many ways resembling a super-idealistic children's crusade to save the world, was becoming increasingly grim and increasingly serious.

No longer could movement activists expect to be received as idealistic if misguided children; the stakes had been raised. The vigorous campaign of calumny and slander directed against the SDS by ruling class media and institutions, the growing climate of repression across the country, forced the radical movement to take itself—and as a result its ideas—more seriously. The need for some idea of where day-to-day activities will lead and how they can help to bring about the desired social changes; the need for a political perspective which offers some way out of the societal impasse which liberalism can only seek to cover up; neither could any longer be avoided by most in the movement. As every struggle became more bitter, it was only a commitment to radical politics which could sustain activity.

As SDS members began to search for political definition during this period of rapid flux, their first efforts were colored by the anti-ideological flavor of the new left. In an *ad hoc* fashion, each new stage of the various movement emerging in American society, each new phase of the unfolding crisis, was analyzed as an eternal attribute of the world. As a result of this empiricism, just-developing theory tended to enshrine yesterday's reality; already becoming obsolete as a description of the present, it was irrelevant to an understanding of future developments.

Soon "anti-ideology" as an ideology was transformed into "the quest for an ideology" as an ideology. But the growing consciousness of the need for an overall political perspective did not automatically create one.

The myth abounded that SDS, out of its own experience, was on the verge of developing a uniquely American and fundamentally new political synthesis. It took the form of a belief that a theoretical panacea would somehow descend fully formed from the clouds, be accepted immediately by the entire organization, and

solve all theoretical and practical problems.

This illusion merely served to retard the growth of real substantive analysis inside the organization. SDS activists found themselves obliged to reject every existing synthesis, new or old, every concrete expression of crystallized politics, as a threat to the mythical ideology that was ever just about to jell.

When it became apparent that this home-grown, all-encompassing theoretical synthesis was in fact not going to appear, the movement began to cast about for perspectives to import.

Since its earliest days, the majority of the new left has reflected a strong romantic affinity with Castro and Che Guevara, with Ho Chi Minh, with Mao, and with others similarly locked in combat with American imperialism and involved in a real or imagined process of revolutionizing their society.

More recently, despite the fact that SDS, the radical movement as a whole, and the general acceptability of radical ideas had all been growing, the unevenness of the radicalization process in its effect on the various sectors of the American population has faced the radical movement, and particularly the SDS, with a growing sense of isolation.

In the context of this sense of isolation from the bulk of the American people, under the impact of a great hunger for political identity, the affinity felt by most SDS'ers for revolutionary leaderships in the Third World was increasingly transformed into a primary identification. Revolutionary models abstracted out of national liberation struggles in the neo-colonial world, out of guerrilla struggles in the underdeveloped countries, were put forward as paradigms for the American movement. The political ideas of Castro, Che, Regis Debray and Mao were virtually canonized and mechanically superimposed upon the US scene.

As these ideological developments were taking place, the Progressive Labor Party (PL) entered SDS. PL was originally formed as a pro-Chinese split-off from the American Communist Party. It styled itself as the American representative of Maoism, while committing itself to a modified version of the trade union perspective it inherited from the old CP. It was with the entrance of PL and its trade union perspective that the working class became a serious topic of debate within SDS.

The initial reaction to PL among indigenous SDS'ers was extremely hostile. PL members were viewed as "disciplined external cadre." However, SDS members at the same time found it very difficult to defeat PL politically. As PL became an increasing political threat, the SDS drew together for the first time around a national leadership, which mustered support by projecting a need for unity in the face of PL. This leadership was built around members of SDS national and regional staffs, and came to be called the National Collective.

As debate sharpened between the National Collective and PL, both claimed to be "the true revolutionary communists." PL advanced their politics as the true, consistent and scientific embodiment of Marxism-Leninism—a term now generally used as a synonym for Maoism. But the PLers were unable to hold on to a monopoly over Chairman Mao. Especially in the wake of the Chinese "Cultural Revolution," China, Mao and the Red Book became more and more popular within much of the new left. China, portrayed by US foreign policy as the world center of evil incarnate, was, not surprisingly, attractive to the developing anti-imperialist sentiment in SDS. The National Collective moved to preempt the PL threat by out-Maoing it; within a short time, each side was proclaiming that its politics and only its politics was the genuine embodiment of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

Thus PL's presence in SDS had the effect of accelerating the political development which had already been underway. In the bitter faction fight, lines hardened. PL's at least nominal possession of a coherent world view was an important initial advantage. In the fight against PL, leadership rapidly shifted toward those who could at least assume the posture of having their own worked-out political point of view. Ideas which had for years been floating around within the movement were pulled in and stuck together using the rhetoric of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism for glue.

Dialectical materialism, the rigorous and scientific methodology of Marxism, was transmuted into rhetoric, a magical mumbo-jumbo which could rationalize all inconsistencies, all leaps of illogic. Rhetoric and posturing filled the void left by the failure of the SDS to develop its own ideological super-panacea. The quest for ideology was over. Holding aloft the Thoughts of Chairman Mao, the SDS national leadership proclaimed that the Holy Grail had been found.

PL's perspective for SDS was to build a Worker-Student Alliance, that is, to organize students around issues which "serve the interests of the working class." They wanted SDS to remain a student organization, confining itself and its struggles primarily to the campus—

work off the campus was to be the province of PL itself. The sole extra-campus excursion which PL outlined for SDS was the annual summer Work-In project, designed to teach students about the working class, to bring together potential PL recruits for an intensive training program, and to convince at least a few to stay on as PL industrial cadres.

The National Collective, on the other hand, called upon SDS to build a Revolutionary Youth Movement against imperialism. Though paying lip-service to a working-class perspective (a necessity, after all, if one claims to be a Marxist-Leninist), it conceived of such a movement primarily as a support group for the black struggle.

PL, beginning as the more experienced, more serious, and better-disciplined group, made considerable headway in their struggle with the National Collective. The Worker-Student Alliance Caucus grew. However, their intense factional sectarianism made them extremely unpopular with much of the radical movement. Their mode of operation was to attack viciously and do their best to destroy anything and everything they did not control; it became impossible for any group to work with PL without politically deferring to them. SDS chapters in which the WSA had a base split into WSA and anti-WSA caucuses, with increasingly little relationship to one another.

Moreover, since PL had an organizational existence external to and independent of SDS, its members were capable of functioning within SDS on the basis of a perspective specific to SDS. PL members did not receive their primary political and organizational identity from SDS. Nor was it necessary for them to fight for the implementation of their entire program or their ideology as a whole in SDS. Their political training, their trade union perspective, their community action perspective, all were channeled through PL itself.

But the National Collective had no such external organizational existence. As members of the NC developed their politics, each idea, each perspective, each program was automatically viewed as an idea, a perspective, a program for SDS as a whole. As they came to view themselves as "revolutionary communists," it became necessary for them to project SDS as a revolutionary communist organization.

In addition, due to the looseness of SDS structure, and to the fact that the organization has never had a tradition of leadership being elected on a political basis (except in the negative sense of voting against someone's politics), the leadership felt free to put forward its newly developing ideas as the official politics of SDS. On this basis, a network of contacts across the country was set up, composed of people in general agreement with the ideas put forward by the national office. Although the outlook and perspectives of the National Collective had only very sketchily been worked out, these people began attempts to "educate" the membership of SDS to the "real SDS point of view," to begin turning the SDS into their revolutionary party.

SDS as the national political expression of the movement, of radical student activism as a whole, had already begun to die.

2. CHICAGO AND THE SPLIT

As the 1969 SDS national convention approached, SDS members across the country became increasingly aware that the fight between PL and the National Collective was coming to a head. There was a general awareness that the convention was going to signify a turning point in SDS and in the movement as a whole. But few had a clear idea as to what form that turn would take or where it would lead.

Not only the SDS leadership, but most independent forces in the organization considered PL a threat. Most were willing to submerge other political differences in a united attempt to decisively defeat PL.

The first real test of strength at the convention came over the adoption of the agenda. The national leadership, calling themselves the Revolutionary Youth Movement, or RYM, proposed an agenda consisting almost entirely of panel discussions from the podium. Almost no provisions had been made for workshops, or for any other procedure which would allow participation by rank and file delegates. RYM leaders argued that it was the job of the leadership to educate the rank and file, that people wanted to hear the contending positions first hand, that there were a lot of new people at the convention who were likely to be confused or even duped in workshops where the leadership wasn't around to set things straight, and thus that workshops were irresponsible.

Contentment for the rank and file; the conception of a convention transformed into a stage show, into a mammoth university lecture hall; the explicit admission of the national office that politics were to be confined to a struggle between already established elites—the RYM leaders came across as if they were deliberately trying to drive away all but their most loyal, dedicated support. People were being asked to vote on whether or not they were easily duped simpletons. In response, PL was able to present itself as the incarnation of participation and democracy.

PL's alternate agenda won. But the closeness of the vote, even though about one-third of the delegates had come committed to the PL-dominated WSA caucus, indicated just how solid the "anti-PL at all costs" sentiment was. RYM viewed the contest as revealing their

weakness, but it demonstrated their strength—it indicated the size of the base who would follow RYM against PL no matter what.

After subsequent votes and amendments, what was essentially a compromise agenda was finally adopted. But all attempts to open panel discussions to points of view outside of both RYM and PL were defeated by their combined forces. PL's fight to "open up the convention" was in no way meant to open it up to anyone besides themselves.

As the convention progressed, it became clear that for those outside of the orbits of both RYM and PL, an aggressive and disciplined organizational effort was required for even a losing battle to get one's point of view expressed. The Independent Socialist Clubs (ISC) were the only group at the convention outside of the major factions which was able to wage a sustained political opposition of any sort. SDS had developed into an arena in which only organized and coherent tendencies with their own cadre could even hope to compete.

During the first two days of the convention, every discussion of whatever topic—women's liberation, racism, imperialism, the Red Guards, etc.—was dominated by the faction fight between RYM and PL. Every possible pretext was used for attacks and counter-attacks, chants and counter-chants. All politics were subordinated to the struggle to discredit PL. PL won some support during several of the panels, not because of its point of view, but simply because its representatives at least appeared to be trying to deal in a substantive political fashion with the topic at hand; the RYM speakers concentrated on hysterical denunciations.

Many of the delegates were dismayed by the fact that the concrete political questions before the convention were not taken seriously by the leaders of the faction fight. Many of the women delegates who were committed to the women's liberation movement felt that women's liberation was discussed at the convention merely to be used as a tool in the factional struggle.

Resentment about the leadership's manipulation of the women's liberation issue came to a boil during a speech by a representative of the Black Panther Party, who reiterated the concept of "pussy power." "Pussy power" is ostensibly a program for women; it tells them that the way to have a say is to refuse to sleep with any but revolutionary men. A great hue and cry went up from the audience—male chauvinism has become a much more sensitive point in the movement than it was when Eldridge Cleaver introduced the concept of "pussy power" some time ago.

The Panther speaker, taken aback, went on to try to justify himself, instead of apologizing, and only made it worse. Chants of "Fight male chauvinism" rang throughout the hall; only the most hard core RYM supporters remained silent. A few even supported the Panther speaker, chanting "Power to the Vanguard!" As the chants continued, the Panther's self-defense became more vigorous. Finally he charged that PL was responsible for the chants, which he said were just one more manifestation of PL's anti-Panther attitude. Needless to say, the RYM side of the faction fight once more came off as poorly as it possibly could.

As the convention continued, tension grew. Teams of security guards—RYM members wearing green armbands—roamed the hall. As things heated up, they too began to play a factional role. In clearing the aisles and maintaining order, a difficult task in any case, they selectively harassed factional opponents, giving control of the floor microphones to RYM. At one point, a fist fight between a few PL members and some security guards threatened to lead to a free-for-all.

By the third day of the convention, a number of PLers and WSAers had begun wearing faction buttons on their shoulders; a counter-security force had been created. Both sides were organized to fight, or at least to defend themselves if necessary. The ingredients for an explosion had all been assembled.

Debate on resolutions was supposed to begin on the third day. The discussions had just gotten underway when it was announced that the Black Panther Party had an urgent message to present to the convention. A Panther representative took the stand and, after a few preliminary remarks—essentially trying to smooth over the "pussy power" fiasco from the previous day—read a statement in the name of the Black Panther Party, the Brown Berets, and the Young Lords Organization:

"After long study and investigation of Students for a Democratic Society and the Progressive Labor Party in particular, we have come to the conclusion that the Progressive Labor Party has deviated from Marxist-Leninist ideology on the National Question and the right of self-determination of all oppressed people.

"We demand that by the conclusion of the national convention of the SDS that the PLP change its position on the right of self-determination and stand in concert with the oppressed peoples of the world and begin to follow a true Marxist-Leninist ideology . . .

"If the PLP continues its egocentric policies and revisionist behavior, they will be considered as counter-revolutionary traitors and will be dealt with as such.

"SDS will be judged by the company they keep and the efficiency and effectiveness with which they deal with bourgeois factions in their organization."

This statement was then followed by a vigorous impromptu denunciation of PL; the entire hall was electric. Quite obviously, PL was being read out of SDS. The only question that remained was what form the expulsion would take.

For about an hour, the attack on PL continued—denunciation after denunciation. Many of the literature tables set up around the hall were taken down in fear of an imminent brawl. The PL-WSA security guards scurried around calming down their members, who otherwise would certainly have broken up the meeting. The RYM security forces were likewise working overtime, guarding the speakers platform and monitoring their own people.

The scene was an ugly one. The Black Panther Party was doing the dirty work of the RYM leadership, who themselves could not have successfully pulled off a split or expulsion. The Panther appeal was not made on the basis of politics. It was rather an appeal to the most spineless attributes of the white movement. It was reminiscent of a scene much more common a few years back, that of a black militant lacerating an audience of

white liberals—with the liberals squirming, but loving it.

The expulsion of PL was put to SDS as a test of whether or not they were racist. However fully SDS supports the Panthers, this appeal to an external authority in resolving an internal conflict could not but be a violation of the group's integrity. It was sad that the Black Panther Party had come to play this role.

When the Panther finished speaking, a representative of PL was given an opportunity to respond. For a while, it seemed that the crisis was about to pass. It had looked as though a decisive step toward a split would follow immediately upon the conclusion of the Panther speech. Emotions were then at their high point. When PL was permitted to respond (they demanded that right as the price for keeping order among their members), the convention seemed to be back on its old track. Recognition of their right to respond appeared to be a recognition of their still being part of the movement, and thus seemed to contradict their just having been written out. A feeling of relief passed through the hall. The PL spokesman, after answering the charges and restating PL's position, stepped down.

A series of procedural motions followed—to recess for caucusing, to proceed, to adjourn for the day. One representative of the University of Wisconsin SDS took the mike and charged that an attempt was being made to split the organization. He proclaimed his opposition to such a split, and asked those who were for it to raise their hands. Few hands went up. The procedural hassle continued.

Suddenly the green armband monitors grabbed all floor mikes and carried them up onto the front stage. Mike Klonsky and Bernadine Dohrn, the outgoing SDS national secretary and inter-organizational secretary, and RYM leaders, took the podium. First Klonsky proclaimed that something had to be done; most of what he said was inaudible beneath the shouting that was going on. Then Dohrn announced: "It's clear that we can't work in the same group as an organization that hates the Black Panthers and opposes self-determination." The two then led a walk-out of RYM supporters to discuss in caucus what to do.

Little happened in the plenary proper after the walk-out. Sufficient politically developed and independent forces to oppose PL did not exist, and of course the positions of PL and WSA had already been arrived at. The overcast atmosphere was one of marking time, waiting to find out what RYM was going to do. Meanwhile, since it had become clear that the real life was at the caucus meeting, independent and non-affiliated SDSers drifted over in increasing numbers.

Within the caucus, most of the time was spent developing support for the expulsion of PL. A large proportion of those who joined the walkout did so because they felt they either had to do that or become an appendage of PL. They chose RYM as a lesser evil. Others drifted into it when they found that most of the people they felt they could work with were there. Some others came in to fight against the split—knowing that, if it occurred, they could definitely not be able to work with the PL section, and possibly not, at least for very long, with the RYM part either.

While the split perspective began as a definite minority, it gained strength. Many who originally chose RYM as a lesser evil, and who were originally against the split, found themselves getting used to the idea, and began developing an affinity for the new grouping. One bloc of SDSers proclaimed that if PL were not expelled, they would leave SDS and build a new organization based on RYM politics. The threat was taken seriously. This, the Panther ultimatum, the problems everyone had had in trying to work with PL, and just the process of getting used to the idea, all had their impact. Support for getting rid of PL grew.

Eventually, the RYM caucus adopted a political statement including two "principles of unity," and declared that PL and the WSA as a whole were expelled:

1. We support the struggles of the black and Latin colonies within the U.S. for national liberation, and we recognize those nations' rights to self-determination (including the right to political secession, if they desire it).

2. We support the struggle for national liberation of the people of South Vietnam, led by the National Liberation Front and the South Vietnamese Provisional Revolutionary Government. We also support the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, led by President Ho Chi Minh, as well as the Democratic Republic of China, the People's Republics of Korea and Albania, and the Republic of Cuba, all waging fierce struggles against U.S. imperialism. We support the right of all peoples to pick up the gun to free themselves from the brutal rule of U.S. imperialism.

The Progressive Labor Party has attacked every revolutionary nationalist struggle of the black and Latin people in the U.S. as being racist and reactionary. For example, they have attacked open admission, black studies, community control of police and schools, the Black Panther Party and their "breakfast for children" program, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

The Progressive Labor Party has attacked Ho Chi Minh, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, the revolutionary government of Cuba—all leaders of the people's struggles for freedom against U.S. imperialism.

The Progressive Labor Party, because of its positions and practices, is objectively racist, anti-communist, and reactionary. PLP has also in principle and practice refused to join the struggle against male supremacy. It has no place in SDS, an organization of revolutionary youth.

For these reasons, which have manifested themselves in practice all over the country, as well as at this convention, and because the groups we look to around the world for leadership in the fight against U.S. imperialism, including the Black Panther Party and the Brown Berets, urge us to do so, SDS feels it is now necessary to rid ourselves of the burden of allowing the politics of the Progressive Labor Party to exist within our organization. Progressive Labor Party members and all people who do not accept the above two principles are no longer members of SDS.

Throughout the period during which both groups were meeting separately in the same building, the same rumor was spread at both meetings. Each was told that members of the other group were preparing to charge into their meeting and break it up. Both sides massed security personnel at the door separating the two meet-

ings—a veritable build-up of border troops. This had the effect, of course, of solidarizing the people on each side—each group was portrayed to the other as a ruthless enemy with which one might be forced to do physical battle.

Finally, on the evening of the fourth day, the border was closed. Those in the WSA section were told that RYM was making its final decision on what it would do and therefore would not let anyone out to divulge their plans prematurely. War appeared imminent. The WSA expected that RYM would attempt to use force to drive out the WSA. The WSAers in turn were prepared to defend themselves.

Then RYM marched in. But all they wanted was the podium. PL surrendered it without a fight. Then with the RYM forces surrounding the inside of the hall, with the security forces on each side maintaining order among their people, Bernadine Dohrn proclaimed the famous "principles of unity," declared that PL had been expelled from SDS, and led her troops out.

Both groups held press conferences declaring themselves the real SDS and denouncing the other. The RYM group stated: "The 1969 SDS convention has been one of the most important in our history . . . we have expelled members of the Progressive Labor Party from our ranks. We have taken this action because of Progressive Labor Party's objectively racist and counter-revolutionary positions and actions."

The WSA convention declared: "Last night a minority group faction of the Students for a Democratic Society National Convention split off from the original . . . However, there is only one SDS. This meeting in the Coliseum is the 1969 National Convention of SDS . . . We of this convention repudiate the disgraceful anti-communist and anti-working class attacks of this splinter group's leadership on the Progressive Labor Party, the Worker-Student Alliance caucus, and in fact all members of SDS regardless of their positions on various other questions."

The RYM-led group reconvened in a large church; the PL-led group continued its meeting at the Coliseum. Three secretaries and eight National Interim Committee (NIC) members. The RYM group held on to the old National Office, the mailing and contact lists, and all other material resources and property of the national organization. Both groups put out issues of the SDS bulletin *New Left Notes* in the original format—RYM numbered its issue vol. 4 no. 23, WSA numbered its vol. 5 no. 1. At the national level, at least, the split was complete; the old SDS was gone.

3. STALINISM AND THE NEW LEFT

The functioning of PL and the National Collective prior to the split can best be described as a symbiotic relationship. Each served as the other's best recruiting sergeant. The National Office would point to the extreme dogmatism, sectarianism, and anti-intellectualism of PL, which in its turn would cite the NO's anti-organizational, anti-ideological, personality brand of politics. The relationship was by no means static, however; as PL's more serious approach made headway, the NO began to adopt certain aspects of it. Unfortunately, the worst aspects of PL—Stalinism, dogmatism, anti-intellectualism, physical intimidation—were the characteristics which rubbed off.

PL's methods of operation created a situation in which groups in which PL was active but not dominant found it almost impossible to function—which in turn made PL very disliked, not only by those it proclaims to be its enemies, but also by most of the broad rank and file it would like to attract.

This is the dynamic which initially united the organization around the leadership of the National Collective. It enabled the National Collective to consolidate itself politically while maintaining its organizational control. It also created a base within the organization at large, particularly within the immobilized and already split chapters, which would support organizational efforts to get rid of PL.

Unfortunately, the desire to get rid of PL which permeated the SDS at the same time reinforced and was used to justify and propagate the Stalinist organizational concepts which were developing within the National Collective. The glorification of leadership, the principle that any opposition is a form of disruption, the notion that "enemies" within your organization are to be dealt with by any means necessary, fair or foul—all were made palatable by the extreme unpopularity of PL.

Splits and expulsions are sometimes necessary, and often desirable, in even the most democratic organizations. But particularly for expulsions, the disciplined position of the organization must first be established, charges of subsequent violations in action must be leveled, and the right to a political defense or appeal must be granted.

If the rights of minority points of view are not guaranteed, expulsion only too easily becomes a tool used by a threatened leadership to maintain itself and its position bureaucratically, by getting rid of its opponents.

When bureaucratic methods of operation become the established procedure within an organization, political life among the rank and file stagnates. To be tentatively entertained, much to be fought within an unaccepted and perhaps heretical idea, is then very possibly to offer grounds for expulsion, which is then generally coupled with the stigma of being labelled counter-revolutionary by your former friends and comrades. In such an atmosphere, a conscious creation of the leadership in all established Stalinist parties, the rank and file learns to keep its mind closed and its mouth shut.

Long predominant in PL, the Stalinist organizational methodologies rapidly crystallizing within the RYM SDS will, unless reversed, ultimately lead to the expulsion of all political rivals by whoever ends up on top. One by one, beginning with the most sharply defined and easily every center of dissent and opposition will be labelled as counter-revolutionary and rooted out.

Once this pattern has been institutionalized, even disagreements within the leadership will be resolved by expulsion and denunciation. Encouraged by, and encouraging, an ever-shrinking base, its final outcome will be the transformation of the SDS into a single (or perhaps several) monolithic Stalinist sect—a not necessarily undesirable outcome from the point of view of at least some SDS leaders.

SDS began as the national political expression of student activism. As radical politics in the US became increasingly intense, more and more activists felt the need for a revolutionary organization—for a revolutionary party. They naturally attempted to move their organization, the SDS, in this direction. The result was an SDS which, by trying to be both the political expression of student activism and also an organization of cadres committed to a revolutionary program, was able to be neither.

The development of such a contradiction within the organization was a result of external pressures—it flowed out of the radicalization process which has been going on throughout the country. The fragmentation of broad national radical activist organizations in this period is probably inevitable.

However, it is the Maoism and Stalinism of the leading sections of the SDS which have determined the specific form the fragmentation of the organization would take. It would be a mistake to try to reduce the resurrection of Stalin to a passing fad, or a misplaced eagerness to beat PL at its own game. It is a logical outgrowth of the Maoism, the Ho Chi Minh cult, and, to a lesser extent, the Castroism that pervades almost the entire left.

Many view Stalinism as a purely organizational phenomenon. Though it has organizational manifestations, these merely reflect a deeper and more full-tanging political methodology. To understand the developments in SDS, it is necessary to understand both what Stalinism is and the various forms it has taken within SDS.

It was only the hostility to PL which locked the majority of SDS members into subordination to a rapidly Stalinizing RYM leadership. But following a leadership and accepting its methods leads to supporting that leadership and defending its methods. The split, as the completion of the struggle in SDS between RYM and PL, at the same time was the completion of the process by which RYM was becoming Stalinist. It is therefore no accident that the pressures on SDS members to back the split were at the same time pressures to accept the Stalinization of SDS.

As we noted in IS number nine, the roots of Stalin's re-emergence must be traced to the tragic isolation of radical students in US society. Totally alienated from the established social order, in search of a revolutionary perspective, and cut off from any on-going mass movement, it has been only too easy for the US left to cast long glances elsewhere for its own salvation.

The problem is that US revolutionaries, familiar only with one of the most politically backward working classes in the world, have tended—despite all the recent talk about an orientation toward the working class—to lose sight of any perspective focused on an internal transformation of the society by its own rank and file.

The revolutionary socialist strategy worked out by Marx and Engels was based upon the conception of the working class as a social group of a new type: that is, the first mass social force that could take conscious control of society in its own name.

For Marx, socialism was democratic collectivism, established by a revolutionary transformation of society by the people from below: the conquest of political power by the workers as an organized, conscious class; the conversion of their organs of struggle into democratic, proletarian forms of social control; the socialization of the means of production and the reorganization of the economy in terms of usefulness, not profit-making; the implementation of direct, popular control over the institutions of society which impinge upon their lives; the evolution toward a classless society in which all forms of violence and coercion can be abolished.

But the rejection of bourgeois norms and values does not automatically lead to adoption of a socialist perspective. Intellectuals have a choice of roles to play in the social struggle, and there is today an alternative resolution of the crisis of capitalism which can have a tremendous appeal—a bureaucratic version of collectivism, precisely the antithesis of what Marx had in mind.

In every country in the world, virtually all political and social power is concentrated in institutions dominated by a relatively small group of people: a capitalist class, which owns and controls corporate private property; or a collectivist bureaucracy, which controls the state which owns the means of production.

It is easy enough for intellectuals who have rejected bourgeois society to identify with its competitor, a bureaucratic ruling class which "serves the people." Acceptance of the methodology, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" (patriotism in reverse), allows US imperialism to define (negatively) the models toward which revolutionaries should aspire.

A real pull is exerted by the image of the benevolent, sophisticated, beloved ruler, who knows the interests of the people even better than they do themselves; who often has to protect the people from their own ignorance and defend their true interests from mistakes they might make; who feels obliged to abolish the "forms" of democracy—like the right to strike and the right to organize against his benevolent policies, the policies of the party that rules for the people; but who provides instead the "substance" of democracy—antiparty democracy, the democracy of a ruler who makes the decisions which the people would have made if only they were smart enough.

"The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves"—this was the lead sentence in the first Marx wrote for the First International, and it was the first principle of his work—as it was of the work of Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Debs and others. It is diametrically opposed to the elitist machinations of the latter-day, comic-opera Stalinists that have surfaced in recent months.

The contrast between the Stalinism of both PL and RYM, on the one hand, and working-class revolutionary socialist politics, on the other, can be illustrated by a look at the politics and organizational approaches of the two factions.

The concept of the monolithic party, which developed out of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and became Stalin's hallmark, has been adopted in toto by RYM and PL. A common theme in the writings of Fidel, Ho and Mao, this approach to political organization is founded on the view that leadership in a revolutionary organization flows from the superior authority of the all-wise leaders. Loyalty to the leadership becomes

synonymous with loyalty to the organization and, as a result, a political attack on the leadership becomes a political attack on the organization itself. Meanwhile, the organization is viewed as the objective embodiment of interests and aspirations of the working class, quite independently of what relationship, or any relationship, the organization may actually have with the working class.

In a truly bolshevik organization, an organized political opposition to the leadership can play a role extremely beneficial to the organization as a whole. It tests, in ideological struggle, the politics of the leadership, thereby raising the consciousness of the organization as a whole; if successful, it can replace the leadership; and the competition of ideas and their advocates becomes a driving force for the development and evolution of theory throughout the organization. Bolshevism rests on the political consciousness of a disciplined membership.

But in a Stalinist organization, any political opposition which threatens the leadership is thereby seen to be threatening "the interests of the world proletariat," and is thus "objectively counter-revolutionary." Political attacks which threaten the authority of the leadership are forms of "anti-communism" or "red-baiting"; they are attacks on the "entire working class." The Stalinist conception of the relationship within the organization (party) between the leadership and the membership is reflected on a larger scale in the relationship they seek to establish between the party and its base of mass support. To them, the leadership's party exercises over the masses is based on the same relationship as that between generals and their troops.

The ultimate root of these attitudes lies in the implicit view that the party constitutes an incipient ruling group for society, which will some day take and hold power in the name of, and "on behalf of," the working class. Its primary goal is thus to establish the authority of its leadership, rather than to stimulate and raise the consciousness of the mass of the people. A revolutionary party must play a leadership role, but the goal of that leadership is to enable the working class as a whole to take power and exercise it, in its own name and on its own behalf.

The Bolshevik party rose to a position of leadership in Russian society as a section of the working class and on the basis of its program and conscious choice by the Russian workers of that program. A period of intensive, open competition among working-class organizations with different programs for the Russian workers was the context in which that choice was made. The Stalinists came to power when the Russian people were atomized and exhausted by years of civil war, and they did so over the dead body of the party that made the revolution.

Differences between the ways in which PL and the national office leadership functioned in the course of their struggle in the SDS shouldn't be allowed to obscure the fact that they both share similar organizational and political precepts.

Even at the Chicago SDS convention, when, fighting for its survival in the organization, PL attempted to appeal to democracy for support against the National Office, PL and most of the Worker-Student Alliance abstained from voting on or voted against motions made by the ISC and others independent of both leadership groups calling for the panels to be opened up to a broader spectrum of viewpoints than those encompassed by PL and RYM.

PL, never in power itself, constantly attacked the National Collective on the grounds of "elitism and manipulation." But the thrust of this charge was not directed at the lack of internal democracy within SDS; PL itself acted in a totally bureaucratic manner in the chapters and regions which it dominated. Rather, PL appealed to the much more amorphous, moralistic, notion of "fairness." The National Office was hitting below the belt by taking advantage of their leadership posts, the substance of the argument went, and the rank and file should demand fair play for PL.

When it came to standing up for real internal democracy in the organization, however, PL was nowhere to be found. As soon as PL acquired substantial strength in SDS, they and the National Collective operated on the tacit understanding that debate inside SDS would revolve around the positions of the two major tendencies. Both would bloc to prevent the intervention of independents.

4. PL/WSA

Members of PL consider their organization and its politics at any given moment to be the Stalinist embodiment of the world proletariat and its interests. This conception is organizationally entrenched and not subject to the illuminating light of ideological struggle. PL defines "left" to mean themselves, "center" to mean anyone they can work with under PL's political hegemony, and "right," or "anti-communist," to mean any committed political opponent.

Of late, PL has distinguished itself by a thoroughgoing opposition to black nationalism in any form, consistent with its overall approach to racism. Racism for PL is imposed upon society through the propagation of myths and prejudices. PL argues that since working class unity is in the interest of the entire working class, the struggle against racism (purged of the evil nationalist influences propagated by the ruling class) is in fact nothing other than the class struggle. As a result, they imply that racism can be destroyed merely by informing the white working class that the struggle against racism is objectively in their interests.

What PL fails to understand is the fact that racism is less a plot than a system—an integrated complex of institutions that permeates the whole society. Black people as a section of the working class are indeed super-exploited; but black people as a national minority are also specially oppressed. And white workers, as a part of white society, participate in that oppression.

It must be recognized that racist attitudes among white workers can be reinforced by material threats and privileges at the shop floor level—so long as no militant class movement is fighting for the needs of workers as a group. PLers and WSA supporters have consistently tried to deny that white workers participate in the oppression of black workers, just as they tried to deny that individual members of the working class can ever have short-

term needs that run counter to the interests of the class as a whole.

It is on the basis of a nationalist consciousness that the current struggle against the special oppression of black people is being waged. Even within the shops, the struggle against the special oppression and exploitation of black workers is organized on the basis of a nationalist consciousness.

PL's opposition to nationalism, and the theoretical mish-mash they have been forced to come up with to justify their stance, is capable of generating nothing but confusion, particularly among PL's own members and friends.

Blind to the real live working class (to its potential for independent struggle as well as to its deep-rooted racism), PL has been swept up in its own myth. Its belief that racism can be ended simply by PL's preaching against it is cut from the same mold as the liberal appeal to the "conscience of a nation" put forward by the old civil rights movement. This kind of top-down, bureaucratic approach is of a piece with PL's whole politics.

Any kind of independent upsurge from below comes as a threat to PL. Nationalist consciousness in the black community and independent black revolutionary groupings are outside its control—and thus, by definition, counter-revolutionary. As far as PL is concerned, nationalism and class must be irreconcilably counter-posed—for class consciousness in PL's terms is a recognition of PL's right to rule.

This kind of attitude shapes PL's programs for any group in society that might go into motion on its own. PL opposes open admissions to college on the grounds that it fosters illusions in the working class that the system can meet their demands. But the same can be said of the demand for higher wages and working conditions, a demand which PL supports. In fact, any demand short of the demand for socialism now can just as well be attacked on those grounds. With no confidence in the self-initiative of the working class, PL cannot understand the nature of a transitional demand, of how people's consciousness can be raised in the course of a struggle, whether or not they achieve the concrete goal that first impelled them to action.

Similarly, PL opposes all attempts to organize students around felt needs. They argue that students must be organized solely to support the working class, into a Worker-Student Alliance composed of all students and no workers. On the contrary: while students certainly should be organized in such a way that they develop a radical understanding of capitalism as a social system and the need to ally with workers to bring a revolution, the best way to do this is often to organize around issues which are real to them in an immediate sense. The particular demands are often not so important as the manner in which consciousness is injected in the course of the struggle. In opposing any and all attempts at organizing students except in the context of support for workers, by viewing the campus as merely a funnel for future cadres who will enter the working class, PL denies the value of a mass student movement in the building of a revolutionary movement and in the development of allies for the working class.

Moreover, interestingly enough, PL has generalized its opposition to nationalism in the US into an incipient, broad-based Maoism internationally. First it began attacking the NLF in Vietnam as "revisionists" for taking Soviet arms and for entering into negotiations on the war. Then earlier this year, PL attacked all forms of nationalism as revisionist, citing the Chinese revolution as proof that underdeveloped countries can pass immediately to "socialism" without passing through a nationalistic, bourgeois-democratic stage.

This new formulation is directly at odds with Mao's slogan of the "bloc of four classes" leading to the "New Democratic" state. Thus, the PL leadership, which in classical Stalinist fashion dictates the line to the rest of the organization, must now face the dilemma of reconciling their opposition to Mao's theory of new democracy with their claim to Mao's franchise in the US. The only rationalization even hinted at thus far is that Mao's *On New Democracy* is inconsistent with the rest of his writings. But if one opens Mao's writings to criticism, far more inconsistencies will present themselves than the one stumbled upon by PL.

Placing the center of world revolution in China, PL speaks of a plot by the US and Russian imperialists to destroy the Peking regime. However, in attacking the NLF as revisionist while the Chinese declared their solidarity with the NLF and the correct leadership of Ho Chi Minh, and by perpetuating a perspective in direct opposition to Mao's theory of new democracy, PL, the organization which formerly demanded total adherence to Mao, now intimates that at least some of his writings are revisionist.

PL cannot for long embrace Mao while at the same time rejecting tenets basic to Maoism. Already, other Maoist sects in the US are exploiting PL's break from Maoist orthodoxy. PL will be hard pressed to return to a dogma now claimed by arch-rivals; on the other hand, the only other alternative seems to be to make a formal break with Mao. This could lead to a new phenomenon of a Stalinist group without a country.

PL styles itself as the most advanced "Marxist-Leninist" party in the world, and is unwilling to subordinate its own interests to those of any other Stalinist group, in power or out. Its forthright sectarianism coming out as an upside-down mirror image of the national opportunism of the present-day US Communist Party. PL is reminiscent of the communist parties of the "Third Period" in the early 1930's, except that their ultra-left binge was dictated by a shift in Stalin's line in Russia, while PL's own allegiance only to itself and its own aspirations for social power.

PL's opposition to nationalism finds its antithesis in the politics of the RYM SDS—especially in one wing of RYM called the "Weatherman" group.

Once the decision to expel PL had been made at the national convention, serious divisions between two groups within the national office leadership came to public attention. Rumors of a sharp split within the National Collective had circulated throughout SDS prior to the convention. Most members were uncertain about what the issues were, or how irreconcilable the split would prove to be. There were fears that the divisions within the anti-PL forces would permit PL to dominate the convention and take organizational control of SDS.

In fact, of course, the very dynamic which originally created the National Collective demanded that the two RYM factions, however hostile to each other, form a united bloc against the common enemy, PL. Indeed, the growing sentiment for an open test of strength within RYM—which could not be afforded so long as PL remained a threat—intensified the desire to get rid of PL.

The split within the National Collective grew out of the intervention of the Bay Area Revolutionary Union into the politics of SDS. At the March SDS National Council meeting in Austin, Texas, the Revolutionary Union (RU), a political grouping long germinating in the San Francisco area, came to the surface. The RU developed, after a number of splits and additions, out of a group which functioned at the center of the Radical Caucus of the California Peace & Freedom Party. By the time of its public debut in March, it included members drawn from two sources: indigenous new left Maoism, and pro-Chinese split-offs from the Communist Party—including some of the original founders of PL who had subsequently split from it.

This organizational merger, between a harder current of new left Maoism and traditional hard line Stalinism, led to a political synthesis which had great appeal to many members of the National Collective. The handful of RU members who showed up at the Austin meeting for all intents and purposes walked away with it. In the fight against PL, they were able to project themselves as the most consistent "Marxist-Leninist Maoists." They emerged as a hard political pole within the National Collective which represented the logical conclusion of at least one aspect of the collective's own internal development. The entire National Collective came very rapidly to reflect the political influence of the RU.

While a significant and influential section of the National Collective was won over to RU politics, another section, though influenced politically, sought to congeal an alternative pole. This other group, centered around a section of the SDS National Office, the Michigan and Ohio regions of SDS and the Columbia chapter, published a number of documents in New Left Notes (the SDS discussion bulletin), culminating in a long convention resolution entitled: "You Don't Need to Be a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows" (or for short "Weatherman").

Weatherman most sharply differs from RU politics in that it totally de-emphasizes the revolutionary potential of the industrial working class, while the RU at least envisions an important role for the industrial workers in bringing about a transformation of society. On the basis of this and several other differences, the National Collective ceased to exist as a unified group. The two sections of the National Collective emerged as the leadership of competing tendencies in the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM); the Weatherman tendency is sometimes called RYM I; the RU-led tendency calls itself RYM II.

5. WEATHERMAN

The Weatherman document begins with a quote from Lin Piao which reiterates an idea which is central to the politics of both RYM factions: "The contradiction between the revolutionary peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and the imperialists headed by the United States is the principal contradiction in the contemporary world. The development of this contradiction is promoting the struggle of the people of the whole world against US imperialism and its lackeys."

Both RYM factions agree that the primary purpose for building a revolutionary movement—its primary function—is to generate support for the national liberation struggles of the peoples of the third world. In the RYM II document "Revolutionary Youth and the Road to the Proletariat" we read: "For revolutionaries in the mother country the crucial question is: How can we build the greatest possible support, within the mother country, for the third world liberation struggles... we can not allow our subjective desire to personally support these liberation struggles to prevent us from building a movement for mass support. We believe that, in the immediate period, the greatest assistance mother country revolutionaries can give is to spread our present anti-imperialist movement to the masses of people, especially the working class."

It is true that most of the current white revolutionary movement became revolutionaries as a result of experiences relating to their opposition to the Vietnam war and to racism. This revolutionary movement, in its overwhelming base, is the distillation of a mass movement and sentiment which developed throughout the 1960's among white college students, particularly at the large universities and at the so-called "elite" universities, and also particularly among students from relatively well-to-do families.

There is no reason for our movement to be ashamed of its history. But we should not allow our politics to be defined by the peculiar circumstances surrounding the rebirth of a revolutionary movement in the United States, by the fact that the harbinger of the coming revolutionary period in the United States was the disaffection of a substantial layer of petty-bourgeois, intellectually-oriented youth, who, because of their own inherent weakness as a social group, tended to conceive of politics only in terms of support.

The key to petty-bourgeois politics is the fact that the petty bourgeoisie have neither the social characteristics nor the social power to play a decisive independent political role in their own name. They ultimately have the political power only to support. A Marxist political program for the petty-bourgeoisie is to win its political support for the proletariat—a thoroughly respectable revolutionary task. However, in RYM, in the name of Marxism, in the name of Leninism, in the name of proletarian politics, we find the crystallization of a thoroughly petty-bourgeois attitude.

Both RYM groups want us to go to the American working class, to the bulk of the American people, and say: "Make a revolution for someone else." They add, with what comes across as an afterthought: "Oh, by the way, it will be good for you too." But one does not get the impression that even they believe this reassurance. They project revolution as a moral obligation, internationalism as the expiation of guilt. To them, the revolutionary movement is an agency foreign to the Ameri-

can people, not an expression of the needs and interests of the American people, particularly the working class.

Taking a close look at "Weatherman" we find that nationalism and national struggles play for Weatherman precisely the same central role that the struggle of the working class plays for Marxists. We are told with regard to "the principal contradiction (between the revolutionary third world and US imperialism) that: 'The primary task of revolutionary struggle is to solve the principal contradiction on the side of the people of the world. It is the oppressed peoples of the world who have created the wealth of this empire and it is to them that it belongs; the goal of the revolutionary struggle must be the control and use of this wealth in the interests of the oppressed peoples of the world.'" Then, a little further on, just in case the message isn't clear, we read: "... your television set, car and wardrobe already belong, to a large degree, to the people of the rest of the world."

The message of Weatherman to the American working class is not that the workers are robbed by the capitalist class of the surplus value they create, but that the level of technology and potential productivity already obtained in this country are such, that by doing away with the outmoded capitalist relations of production, prosperity and plenty is possible not only for Americans, but for the people of the entire world. No, Weatherman says, by implication, that the workers themselves are robbers.

Weatherman reinforces reactionary prejudices by telling the American workers that SDS, and in fact all militant and progressive struggles in the world, have as their ultimate goal, taking away from the workers what they already have. They put themselves forward as the world tax collector. Unfortunately for Weatherman, only a very small section of the American population is afflicted with liberal guilt. Weatherman would do better to revive the kingdom of Heaven, for they have nothing to offer the mass of the American population here on Earth.

Weatherman polemicizes very strenuously against "... any conception of 'socialist revolution' simply in terms of the working people of the United States..." They denounce it as "imperialist national chauvinism" to define socialism "in national terms within so extreme and historical an oppressor nation." They state: "Any attempt to put forth a strategy which despite internationalist rhetoric, assumes a purely internal development to the class struggle in this country is incorrect. The Vietnam struggle of the Japanese and the Rhodesians and the blacks and third world peoples in this country will continue to set the terms for class struggle in America."

Against whom are they polemicizing? Who is it that defines socialism "simply" in national terms? Who is using "internationalist rhetoric" to mask a secret belief that the class struggle in the U.S. is a "purely internal development"? It becomes clear that the words "simply" "purely" and the like are included only for the sake of appearances and that what is really being said is that one should not at all conceive of socialism in terms of the working people of the United States, one should not assume any internal development of the class struggle. They are polemicizing against any conception that white American working people have any decisive role to play in socialist revolution, against any conception that it is at all internationally progressive for workers to struggle in their own class interest.

This is made quite explicit in an amendment submitted by one of the Weatherman authors during the discussion of unity principles. After a variation on the above theme revolving around the word "simply," we read: "The socialist revolution must have the specific content of serving the needs and interests of the oppressed peoples of the world. This means that conscious full support for the international struggle is the key element [our emphasis] of socialist consciousness. To uphold this as the basis of the American revolution is necessarily to uphold white supremacist privilege and to separate oneself from the international revolutionary movement."

The underlying assumption seems to be that socialist revolution will be visited upon the bulk of the American people as retribution for their sins and corruption. It will be in their interest, but only in a moral, not in a material sense. Our job then must be, as it were, to gather together the elect and hasten the judgment day.

Weatherman does recognize that the workers in the shops face problems. They realize that: "In the shops the crisis in imperialism has come down around speed-up, safety, and wage squeeze—due to higher taxes and increased inflation, with the possibility of wage-price controls being instituted." What programs do they offer in response to these problems? "We must relate this exploitation back to imperialism. The best way to do this is probably not caucuses in the shops, but to take guys to city-wide demonstrations, Newsreels, even the latest administration building, to make the movement concrete to them and involve them in it. Further, we can effect consciousness and pick up people through agitational work at plants, train stops, etc., selling Movements, handing out leaflets about the war, the Panthers, the companies' holdings overseas or relations to defense industry." If a black caucus exists in the shop, Weatherman advocates: "perhaps organizing solidarity groups, but at any rate pushing the importance of the black liberation struggle to whites, handing out Free Huey literature, bringing guys to Panther rallies, and so on."

In short, Weatherman's "industrial program" seems to be: whatever you do with workers for god's sake, don't build anything in the shops—don't organize workers to struggle against their oppression as members of the working class.

For a moment, let us relate the Weatherman strategy to the May-June events in France. After massive street demonstrations and street fighting carried out primarily by students, the French working class went out on general strike. It was the general strike which transformed the very significant student demonstrations into an event of explosive international revolutionary significance. The student movement triggered a response by the working class, which then shook the very foundations of French society.

During those events, a large number of the most militant young French workers were out in the streets fighting side by side with students. Meanwhile, there was far too little (often none at all) radical organization or

organizing in the shops, and as a result there was no militant force in the shops which could effectively counter the influence of the CGT (the C.P. trade union federation) and the other sell-out French unions. They were able to isolate the bulk of the workers from the infectiousness of the movement in the streets, were able to conservatize the situation and blunt the revolutionary potential, were able to destroy the impulses toward class unity and class power, and as a result were able to trick the various shops into separate settlements and lead the workers back to work. And when the workers went back to work, for all intents and purposes, that round of the struggle was over all across France.

It is a fine thing for young workers to mix with radical students and participate in their demonstrations. It is, however, a grave error, if their immersion in the student movement is counterposed to playing a role in, or organizing a radical working class movement—particularly in the shops. When a revolutionary situation develops, it is the activity, or lack thereof, of a revolutionary movement in the shops which is ultimately decisive. But according to Weatherman, young workers who are affected by speed-up, safety hazards, wage freeze, etc., should not be encouraged to respond by organizing and struggling around these issues in the shops.

Why can the young worker best learn the relationship between speed-up and imperialism by participating in a student struggle at a college administration building, rather than participating in a struggle against speed-up? Part of their answer flows from Weatherman's general methodology: "... the particular issue is not the issue, is important insofar as it points to imperialism as an enemy that has to be destroyed. Imperialism is always the issue... The masses will fight for socialism when they understand that reform fights, fights for improvement of material conditions, cannot be won under imperialism. With this understanding, revolutionaries should never put forth a line which fosters the illusion that imperialism will grant significant reforms."

Making this more concrete they say: "What does it mean to organize around racism and imperialism in specific struggles? In the high schools (and colleges) at this time, it means putting forth a mass line to close down the schools rather than reform them so they can serve the people."

The essence of the Weatherman line seems to be that the reason one orients toward those who are oppressed and exploited is that it is they who are likely to be angry enough to tear the motherfucker down. To organize the shop in an attempt to force immediate concessions from the boss is reformist, economist, and fosters illusions. Since such organizing is a necessary ingredient in the building of a revolutionary movement and revolutionary consciousness in the shops, that too is prohibited. The notion that by collective struggle one can wrest from the rulers concessions which better the lives of oneself and one's fellows, is a notion that Weatherman is intent on destroying. But it is that notion, not despair, which among the masses generalizes to revolution.

One might conclude that Weatherman is overzealous in their opposition to reformism. But the demand for workers' control is clearly not reformist. It is the logical extension of workers' opposition to speed-up, unsafe practices, and the prerogative of the company to maintain dictatorial control on the shop floor. It is the demand which most easily leads to a very clear understanding of the capitalist relations of production. And it is a demand which can not be in any meaningful sense achieved short of the workers' seizure of state power. It is a demand, moreover, which epitomizes the interest of the working class, and makes clear the meaning of workers' power. To Weatherman, workers' control is an "anti-internationalist" concept which represents "national chauvinist and social democratic ideology within the movement."

Weatherman sees itself and the movement it is trying to build as the agents within Babylon of the oppressed peoples of the world. In fact they consider themselves even less than agents. They consider the black movement to be the real agents, and themselves to be its supporters. We read: "In defining and implementing this strategy, it is clear that the vanguard (that is, the section of the people who are in the forefront of the struggle and whose class interest and needs define the terms and tasks of the revolution) of the 'American Revolution' is the workers and oppressed peoples of the colonies of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Because of the level of special oppression of black people as a colony they reflect the interests of the oppressed people of the world from within the borders of the United States; they are part of the Third World and part of the international revolutionary vanguard."

At precisely the time that the Panthers, who originated the colonial analysis of blacks in America, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers are seriously discussing the relationship between black workers and the rest of the American working class, Weatherman denies that Black workers are a part of the American working class, and almost even implies that class divisions do not exist within the black community. They say: "Thus, northern blacks do not have a 'dual interest'—as blacks on the one hand and 'US-nation workers' on the other. They have a single class interest along with all other black people in the US, as members of the Black Proletarian Colony."

The Weatherman view of revolution is expressed in their discussion of black liberation. "... If necessary, black people could do it without this white movement, although the cost among whites and blacks both would be high. Blacks could do it alone if necessary because of their centrality to the system, economically and geographically, and because of the level of unity, commitment and initiative which will be developed in waging a people's war for survival and national liberation. ... To put aside the possibility of blacks winning alone leads to the racist position that blacks should wait for whites and are dependent on whites acting for them to win. Yet the possibility of blacks winning alone cannot in the least be a justification for whites failing to shoulder the burden of developing a revolutionary movement among whites. If the first error is racism by holding back black liberation, this would be equally racist by leaving blacks isolated to take on the whole fight—and the whole cost—for everyone." The task is "to build a white movement

which will support the blacks in moving as fast as they have to and are able to, and still itself keep up with the black movement enough so that white revolutionaries share the cost and the blacks don't have to do the whole thing alone." We are then told that any white that doesn't follow that line is "objectively racist."

One might ask what would be the nature of the state or at least what social and economic relations in the US would be like, following a revolution in which the blacks did it alone. But somehow, that question seems to miss the point. One feels that to Weatherman the revolution is Armageddon, and all that follows is the judgment day.

The central driving force behind Weatherman is desperation. Its adherents see the state power of decaying American capitalism playing an increasingly reactionary and brutal role throughout the world and at home. They see it viciously suppressing the legitimate desires and aspirations of oppressed people everywhere. They know that it is willing to use the most barbaric means to protect its own interest, and fear the worst. The response of Weatherman comes from its combined feelings of outrage and impotence. It generates such a great sense of urgency, that suddenly in its mind the urgency itself is translated into a material force capable of decisively tipping the balance in favor of its deep desires.

How does Weatherman justify its belief that, if necessary, blacks can make the revolution alone? "The genocidal oppression of black people must be ended, and does not allow any leisure time to wait." Throughout history, the most noble of wishes and sentiments, no matter how imperative, have not, in and of themselves, countered barbarism and oppression. Rather, when sentiment and forces, it impedes the development of programs which can begin to deal with the crisis, and as a result functions counter to its original desires. We noted Weatherman's systematic substitution of national antagonisms for class antagonisms as the decisive social and historical dynamic. The result begins to resemble a patriotic movement in negation-flag and mother country become, rather than the objects of veneration, the anathemas. Meanwhile, Weatherman seems, at least in theory, moving away from its petty-bourgeois origins toward the development of a political base among what has classically been called the lumpenproletariat. Many of its adherents have come to extol as a virtue, in and of itself, violence and political gangsterism. (As Jeff Jones, a Weatherman spokesman, said recently: "There's one good thing you've got to say for PL. They're tough. They beat up some members of the Young Socialist Alliance who tried to hand out leaflets on their turf.") It is difficult to predict in what direction the Weatherman tendency in SDS will go, or how long it will hold together. It will almost immediately begin to face one serious difficulty. A large and central part of its theory is based upon analogies of notes that have been put forward by the black movement, particularly by the Panthers. But the Panthers and other leading black groups are rapidly moving away from those ideas. At least in rhetoric, they are moving increasingly toward a class-oriented analysis and program. Though Weatherman emerged at the convention by far the dominant tendency in SDS, it seems quite doubtful that without a severe metamorphosis it can maintain that position for more than a year.

6. RYM/RYM II

RYM differentiates themselves from the Weatherman group primarily on the grounds that they, as opposed to Weatherman, claim to have a working class orientation. They point out that to the extent that Weatherman even uses the term "working class," they redefine it so as to deprive it of all meaning.

To the Weatherman, with the exception of the self-employed and those who live off profit from their capital investments, the entire American population are members of the working class. RYM II is basically correct in their opposition to this concept which lumps together the hippie, the cop, the student, the gangster, the corporation executive and the auto worker—all as members of the working class. In defining the working class toward which they orient, they share the fairly traditional view of revolutionary movements which have considered themselves in the tradition of Marxism: a central focus on the industrial proletariat, the creators of surplus value, with some understanding of how other sectors of the working population can as the result of economic pressures and insecurities become proletarianized and begin to develop essentially proletarian attitudes.

It is this traditionalism of RYM II, the fact that what it, as opposed to Weatherman, has to say, seems to jive with the writings of Marx and Lenin, with the historical traditions of the world Communist movement, which accounts for its greatest appeal. RYM II represents the first development within the history of SDS of what can appear at a glance to be a major indigenous SDS tendency with politics of a revolutionary Marxist character.

For those who have been waiting for SDS to develop its own brand of revolutionary politics with a consistency, with an internal logic, with a world view, RYM II has a definite attraction. No longer are such characteristics the monopoly of the various, seemingly irrelevant "old left sects." Now SDS has, it seems, thrown up its own brand of Marxism, out of its own experience. On the face of it, it could not but appear that this new Marxist synthesis would have a relevance to the America of the 1960's that none of the antiquarian traditions which have in the past represented themselves as Marxist could possibly have.

Beneath this fiction, however, lies quite a different reality. What RYM II represents is the remarkably successful capture, by a relatively typical "old left splinter group," of a large section of SDS. This fact, of course, in and of itself, in no way invalidates the politics of RYM II. It is merely presented to strip away the illusion.

The Revolutionary Union's "Red Papers," in putting down the so-called "splinter groups," tell us how they have functioned to make it difficult to "win over many genuine revolutionaries to the work of developing a revolutionary party in the United States." These genuine revolutionaries "are turned away through the work of parties claiming to be anti-revisionist and revolutionary, but whose politics and organizational methods belie that claim. A whole host of 'Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist' organizations, differing and splitting from each other on

almost a daily basis, share a political line and organizational style that sabotages mass struggle." This is quite a statement to be made by a group representing a split-off from a split-off. The Bay Area Revolutionary Union (RU), the political core of RYM II, politically represents a split-off from the Progressive Labor Party (it includes members of PL's founding central committee) and some other smaller split-offs from the CP.

It was faction fights in the old Stalinist movement, and within PL itself, which generated the hard politics toward which the SDS, through the avowal of "external cadres" from PL eventually moved in order to fight PL politically. It was just last March, at the Austin SDS National Council meeting, that RU made their first move in SDS. They were welcomed enthusiastically by the SDS leadership because they were able to provide much of what SDS was looking for—cadres who understood PL and could take them on politically, who could do the job against PL at which the indigenous SDS had failed. RU did its job and did it well. But of course, such services never come free. RU's price—a piece of the organization. RU was able to build as a result of this intervention a substantial tendency around themselves within SDS—RYM II.

RYM II has, just like the Worker-Student Alliance (WSA), recruited many indigenous SDSers. That does not make it any more than WSA an "indigenous SDS product." Within SDS, the distinction between politics which have developed within the organization, and politics which have been brought in from outside, ceased to exist—as has the distinction between "external cadres" and "internal cadres." The history and source of political tendencies is irrelevant at this point in SDS only to the extent that it sheds light on their content.

One of the justifications for the expulsion of PL from SDS which has had great appeal throughout the country has been the argument that PL represented a foreign political incursion into SDS. This notion has been encouraged, though not always openly and directly, by leaders of both RYM tendencies as well as by many other "members of friends of the new left." This encouragement represents a pernicious opportunism when it is not merely the result of old-fashioned liberalism.

While RYM II counterposes itself to Weatherman on the basis of Marxist traditionalism and its orientation to the working class, the two are, at least in terms of the political line they take in SDS, basically quite similar.

For example, during the discussion of the RYM "Principles of Unity," an amendment was introduced, declaring that, "The industrial working class will be the major force for change in this country and we must orient toward it now." It was argued that if SDS was going to declare itself a revolutionary organization and put forward an exclusionary set of principles, then one them must necessarily be an orientation toward the working class. If the time had come for politically dividing up the movement, and if it was going to happen, then a working class perspective must be one of the political principles upon which it would occur.

RYM II provided the spokesmen for the defeat of this amendment. Two different RYM II members stated that while they themselves are working in the shops other people have other important kinds of organizing that they want to do and that a major orientation to the working should not be a defining feature of SDS.

The "principles of unity," like the split itself, were only possible on the basis of an agreement by the two RYM leaderships. Their political thrust was to move SDS toward the direction in which only the political differences between the RYM leaderships were legitimate topics of discussion, and those differences were to be suppressed until the split was finalized. The RYM II speakers made it very clear that their highly-touted orientation to the working class was not in fact a very high priority item.

RYM II and Weatherman politics similarly converge in the concept of "white skin privilege" to which they both adhere.

The theory of "white skin privilege" is put forward as the domestic manifestation of the "primary contradiction"—that between the oppressed nations and the imperialist nations. In its crudest manifestations, it views the primary cause of the oppression of blacks in America to be the fact that whites, as a group, enjoy privileges at the expense of blacks. Racism and racial oppression serve whites as a whole by functioning to defend and maintain those privileges. The result is, that whites are necessarily conservative until and unless they are willing to give up the privileges they have obtained, since these privileges are enjoyed at the expense of the oppression of others.

The programmatic conclusion of the "white skin privilege" theory, therefore, is that in addressing whites, and particularly white workers, it is necessary to convince them to give up their "white skin privilege," to convince them to recognize that they are getting more than they deserve while others are getting less. Overcoming one's racism is thus the willingness to reject one's "selfish interest" and to make sacrifices in support of the black and anti-imperialist struggle.

This theme has several variations. We have not seen any of them committed to print by any of the proponents of the theory. Within the movement, however, the white skin privilege theme has been a central feature of the politics of both RYM tendencies. Its appeal is that it contains certain elements of truth. Its effect is to obscure a class and materialist analysis and to point toward sorely mistaken programmatic conclusions.

In viewing the white workers as a group, we find that it is true that they tend to enjoy material privileges and benefits vis-à-vis their black brothers. These relative benefits of one group of workers as opposed to the others, in fact primarily serve the interests not of the workers, but of the ruling class, by dividing the workers among themselves. These relative privileges account in large measure for the material base of racism within the working class.

In earlier periods, the ruling class played off one wave of immigrants against the next. With the end of mass immigration, blacks, racially oppressed since the beginning of slavery, were allowed into the industrial work force in large numbers for the first time. Racism was already rooted in the history of slavery, rooted in the history of semi-feudal relations in the post-slavery South, rooted in the history of urban blacks relating to

whites as a sub-industrial caste of servants and menial workers. To these forms of racism were grafted on the traditional antagonism toward the lowest, latest and least privileged layer of the working class.

No new wave of industrial workers is about to replace the blacks as the lowest and latest layer. Moreover, because of the racial and national characteristics of blacks and their traditional relations to American society, the myth of imminent personal escape by rapid upward social mobility and social integration, with its calming and conservatizing effect, is much less present in the black work force than in other sectors. The racial oppression of blacks is thus intensified because neither the traditional paths nor the traditional myths of escape are open to them. The result in human terms is unemployment, underemployment, degrading conditions, everything that the Black Panther Party ten point program points toward.

Over the past fifteen years, official liberalism has developed the public attitude that it is in favor of "civil rights." During this period, their primary answer to racism has been education. When liberalism decided, at least as an abstraction, that it opposed racism, and when mass manifestation of racism in the society as a whole, liberals concluded that the primary basis of those manifestations was the fundamentally crude and base nature of the American "masses." Once the liberals had publicly proclaimed their opposition to racism, they concluded that bad ideas were the basis upon which it was maintained.

Since they saw the base of the problem as existing in the realm of ideas rather than in the realm of material relations, their proposed solutions usually took the form of campaigning against those bad ideas in an abstract and moralistic fashion. Even Supreme Court rulings and laws which were passed were viewed primarily in terms of their "moral influence." Though willing to pass laws, they were unwilling to systematically wield state power against the material manifestations of racism. Enforcement of their "civil rights" laws was rarely more than sporadic and symbolic. Civil rights activities on the part of the state were implemented with any effectiveness at all in only three areas: attacks on some aspects of the semi-feudal relations in the South which now impede capitalist progress; certain rights which only those belonging to the thin layer of "black middle class" can be expected to exercise; and activities designed to relieve or correct the present suffering generated by mass movements. But during the same period, the material oppression of the mass of American blacks, particularly in the large cities, has in many ways intensified.

While liberalism was proclaiming its support for civil rights and its opposition to racism, it found itself facing what appeared to be an intense contradiction. Liberalism, as an ideology of the ruling class, is constrained as to what conclusions it can reach. What Marx in "The 18th Brumaire" says is, "in general, the relationship between the political and literary representatives of a class and the class they represent" applies to the theoretical liberalism as they relate to the capitalist class. "What makes the present liberalism a lack of fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically."

The liberals, themselves limited by the bounds set by the interests of the ruling class, found in practice that attempts to effectively combat racism and racial oppression would take them beyond those bounds. Liberalism maintained its self-conception, and attempted to maintain its public image, as opponents of racism. For official liberalism, its primary loyalty to the ruling class, or more accurately to a section of the ruling class, resolved its contradiction for it. The program and attitudes it projected simultaneously purported to combat racial oppression and racism, and at the same time confined themselves to the bounds set by the material interests of capital. As ghetto problems intensified, and as the black movement developed, liberalism, sometimes with the best of intentions, became increasingly a tool and a cover for racial oppression.

As liberalism's pretensions with regard to racial equality and justice came increasingly into conflict with the actions of liberalism's official representatives, with which the bulk of the liberals went along, a sizable number of renegades from liberalism were generated, particularly among young people. This phenomenon was one of the developments which laid the basis for the rebirth of activism and radicalism in America. The renegades, while rejecting (either partially or wholly) the limiting bounds set by liberalism's commitment to the ruling class, at the same time often held on to the methodology of liberalism. Much of the ideology of the newly developing radical movement emerged out of the tension between militant activism and liberal methodology. The entire "white skin privilege" concept, as put forward by both RYM tendencies, can best be viewed in this context. The "white skin privilege" concept can be viewed as flowing from a liberal methodology and a militant commitment to opposing racial oppression, both coupled with a Stalinist-Maoist world view.

An example of the "white skin privilege" concept in action can be taken from a discussion on whether or not to organize among whites over questions relating to content and power in the labor movement. "People in the third world nations and colonies can struggle for democratic rights because they are in the oppressed nation, but people in the oppressor nation should not struggle for democratic rights." Counterposed to this, in accordance with the "white skin privilege" approach, was the idea that in working among whites, it is our primary job to bring them to "understand that they are part of the oppressor nation and that they must learn to identify with the struggles of the oppressed."

RYM II leaders have also made clear their conception of how white workers should relate to the struggles of black workers. If, for example, blacks go out over working conditions, whites should be organized to go out in support of the blacks, even if the whites have grievances which affect them, these should not be raised. Once again the task of revolutionaries is to educate white workers that they are privileged—educate them to demand better conditions for blacks. But an attempt to broaden and spread the struggle is racist.

In such a situation it is likely that the most effective

support can be built by attempting to move the white workers not merely on the basis of support, but also on the basis of raising demands over grievances directly affecting them. At the same time a struggle of black workers in progress often provides the best opportunity for raising the class struggle among white workers, and helping to develop among them the attitude that struggle and not accommodation is the best way to defend their interests and wrest concessions from the boss.

But the "white skin privilege" notion leads to the conclusion that a course of action which may generate the best support for the black struggle, which may provide the best method of raising the level of class struggle and class consciousness among white workers, which may encourage black-white class solidarity and thus help make clear to all workers that divisions within the class hurt them all—that such a course of struggle is a priori "racist."

The "white skin privilege" approach, which seems, at least in part, to have its origins and basis in liberal guilt, projects only guilt as a valid basis for organizing. If these politics pointed in the direction of activities which could lead toward ending or alleviating the oppression of blacks, they would have much to recommend them. But it is precisely this liberal methodology which guarantees their ineffectuality. One leading white social group, as opposed to individuals, one should not expect that on the basis of idealistic appeals to guilt, the group can be persuaded to relinquish material privileges.

The RYM perspective can lead to the winning over of individual workers. But all RYM disclaimers notwithstanding, implicit in, and central to the "white skin privilege" concept is the underlying assumption that within America, except on the most long run and ultimate basis, the material interests of white workers are directly counterposed to the material interests of blacks.

Not only is this notion false, it reinforces some of the most reactionary prejudices which exist in the working class. Large numbers of workers, themselves caught in the squeeze of spreading taxes, inflation, speed-up—terrors of the breakdown of the leading social structure, the violence, the disintegration of the cities, reach the conclusion that the blacks are responsible for the acute distress they feel subjected to. They see the struggle of blacks as directed against them and at their expense—what real oppression they feel, they tend to blame, not on the system, but on blacks.

The "white skin privilege" approach provides no clue as to how these sentiments can be countered—it merely labels them as "racist." They are racist sentiments, or at least lead to racist conclusions; they must be countered; but at the same time, if we hope to build a political movement of the working class, we must understand these sentiments and the way they flow from the workers' own oppression. We must understand that racism hurts the entire working class in more than a moral way. It materially impedes the class as a whole in a rather immediate sense.

Some think that opposing racism helps workers only in that it helps the struggle for revolution which is ultimately in the workers' interest. But of course, only workers who are already revolutionaries would be convinced by this. The lesson that racism hurts the worker and his class however, can be learned prior to the achievement of revolutionary consciousness in the course of the class struggle. It can be learned in the course of the class struggle because it blunts the class struggle.

The attempt to hold on to a relative privilege leaves workers very vulnerable if they attempt to engage in a militant struggle against a boss who is willing to fight dirty—and they all are. To workers who are willing to struggle in their own interest, the price of a relative skin privilege is often greater than the benefit. By destroying a division which the boss can use against both, white workers as well as black workers can benefit in an absolute sense. As economic pressure on the working class as a whole tightens, and as bosses increasingly look for new ways to keep workers down, the need to do away with divisions within the class becomes a more immediate issue.

For example, the combat under way right now to smash the printing trades has certainly made every possible use of the racist practices which have long been prevalent in the printing trades. These examples are multiplying, and as they do, the material base for the struggle against racism in the working class grows.

Racism among workers is not so much the cause of their conservatism as it is the result of it. Workers who have been lulled into quiescence, who have become unwilling to struggle in their own interests, necessarily take a static view of society and its potentialities. The unwillingness to engage in struggle against one's own oppression tends to make one intolerant of those who do. The fear to oppose the status quo tends to become translated into support for it. The inability to understand one's own interest makes those who are fighting for their interest frightening, and threatening.

Those who have this static view, those who reject conflict and struggle, can not help but see society and what it has to offer essentially as a fixed pie to be sliced up. A bigger slice for someone else then must mean a smaller one for him. The "white skin privilege" concept as put forward by the RYM groups reinforces the world view that the pie is fixed. Presumably they then approach a man with such a view without challenging it, tell him that someone else's children have a shorter life expectancy than his children, and urge him out of guilt to struggle against this evil. Racism flourishes on this static conservative consciousness. RYM tells us that the first thing one must do is to break down the worker's racism—to convince him to give up his "white skin privilege." Everything else must wait on that. We agree with RYM that one should not hesitate for a moment to take on and to combat racism among workers. We disagree, however, in that we believe that combatting racism among white workers must proceed simultaneously with attempts to raise their consciousness of their interests as workers, and with attempts to move them in struggles around those interests. The only effective way of combatting white skin privilege among the mass of the workers is the process of making it clear that white skin privilege is no privilege. Helping to raise the level of the class struggle is part of this process.

Commitment to the "white skin privilege" concept is one of the fundamental principles which hold the Weatherman tendency of RYM together. RYM II and

members of the RU, however, have been its chief spokesmen in the movement. While it is also reflective of political views quite important to their overall approach, the "white skin privilege" formulation may be somewhat foreign to their Stalinist tradition. In part, the formulation probably represents an accommodation to the SDS currents they are trying to attract. It is likely that over the next period, they will either drop "white skin privilege" or totally change the concept they associate with the slogan.

It is foreign to their tradition in that it too easily gives away their view of the relationship between their politics and the working class. Traditional Stalinist formulations throughout the world, and particularly in industrialized countries, have been quite successful in projecting themselves as being the party of the working class. Under Stalin, the class interests of the international proletariat were systematically subordinated to the foreign policy needs of the Soviet Union, often in the form of direct and immediate counter-revolutionary activities.

With the rise of Maoism, the notion that revolution will come by the countryside surrounding the city has been popularized. This is the view that the economically underdeveloped nations, by struggling against imperialism, will strangle the countries of the advanced capitalist world. The primary force in the revolution will be the outside struggle, not the class struggle at home. Maoist politics, in their most fully developed forms, represent a political view whose primary commitment is support for the "primary struggle" in the world—the struggle against imperialism. It looks around for the international vanguard of this struggle, finds the Communist Party of China, and proclaims itself the American franchise holder. (For RU, the most important reason to smash PL is to attempt to establish its title to that franchise.)

The underlying basis of RYM II politics is not commitment to the working class, but commitment to the "primary contradiction." They orient toward the working class because they see it as a potential base of power which can be wielded in the resolution of that "primary contradiction." Rather than basing their politics on the needs and interests of the class, their primary orientation is to attempt to use the class for the implementation of politics which are based somewhere else. RYM II just like Weatherman views national loyalties and antagonisms as primary in their world view—however much emphasis they put on working class organizing.

As Stalinism developed in the world communist movement, politics primarily based on class were transformed into politics based primarily on national considerations and loyalties. It still led militant struggles and was able to maintain a terminology, a rhetoric, an orientation which led it to project itself as a working class movement, and even to attract, in certain periods, class conscious militants who accepted the rhetoric at face value. What is foreign to the Stalinist tradition in the "white skin privilege" notion is only that Stalinism has in the past projected its political program, whatever that happened to be at the moment, in terms which much more made it seem a program of a workers' movement. The "white skin privilege" concept is much too clearly a program of someone else for the working class.

In the convention document entitled "RYM II" under the heading "The Main Principles of Struggle for RYM" we read: "The revolutionary youth movement can be one of the main ways of bringing about an imperialist movement to the proletariat as a whole." In the "Red Papers," the founding statement of the RU, we read, in the RU statement of purpose: "The primary revolutionary duty of the people of the US is to build a militant united front against US imperialism."

Throughout RYM II literature we find continual reference to building a movement against imperialism. Here and there we are reminded that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism and so to oppose imperialism is to work for socialism—and is thus to build a movement for the emancipation of the working class. But agitational and programmatically the entire focus is on the struggle against imperialism.

It is important to build up a struggle against US imperialist politics. That struggle should be built on the broadest possible base. It can not be asked to slow down because of the currently conservative tendencies in the American working class. But at the same time, those who claim to be Marxists must understand that the most effective struggle against imperialism, the best support we can give the people of the oppressed nations, is the development of the class struggle at home. The slogan of revolutionaries has always been: "Turn the imperialist war into a class war."

The RYM II view which rejects the basis of Marxism that the class struggle is primary, views the class struggle, rather, primarily as a recruiting ground for the struggle against imperialism. This perspective lessens the effectiveness both in building the class struggle and in building the struggle against imperialism.

Stalinism flows from a basic pessimism toward the working class—both in terms of its ability to rule, and in terms of its ability to rise up and in its own name seize state power. As a result, it orients toward and attempts to build, not a party of the working class, but a party over the working class—not as an instrument of the class but of attempting to transform the class into its instrument. It sees the revolution as basically dependent upon outside support. It tends to consider the struggle between, and actions of, nations and nation-states as more important than the struggles between and actions of classes. As a result both for morale and for material support it feels it necessary to have a nation state with which to identify. Alienated from the state which rules in one's own country, unable to identify with and tie one's fate to the international proletariat, the result is an intense form of patriotism for the state upon which one fixes one's hope.

Having a state with which to identify, having a society which one can project as a real world manifestation of one's aspirations, having a "socialist homeland" toward which to look for inspiration, these are very reassuring—especially in the face of hostility from one's countrymen, and doubt. But this understandable desire has very negative implications. The various countries in the world which call themselves socialist are in fact class dictatorships, not of the proletariat, but of monolithic

parties which claim to represent the interests of the proletariat but which rule over the proletariat. The Stalinist revolutionary party is organized as the prototype within the old society of the new ruling class, and there is a tendency, at least among its leadership, to conceive of it in that way.

The proletariat, since it owns nothing but its labor power, can not maintain its class dictatorship on an economic basis, as does the bourgeoisie. It can only exercise its class dictatorship politically through its control of the state. The ability of the members of the working class to organize politically, to form parties, to form factions, to agitate and propagandize, to politically oppose the ruling party or its policies, to put forward and fight for an alternate political leadership to that of the ruling party, to publish opposing views and analyses—these are the substantive prerequisites for the working class to exercise power.

The history of Stalinist movements has been to smash all independent organizations of the working class—to prohibit all political life independent of or opposed to the party. These policies are carried out in the name of the proletariat—they are enforced by a party which claims to be the crystallization of the interests of the proletariat—they are enforced by a party which claims to be the crystallization of the interests of the proletariat. The party views itself as almost a metaphysical entity into which the working class has been transubstantiated.

In China, for example, after the disastrous policies of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1927—the acceptance of Stalin's orders to subordinate the workers' struggle to the nationalist policies of the Kuomintang—the entire urban base of the party (a majority at that time) was destroyed. From 1927 on, the party never had a base in the working class. It led a peasant movement—but by proclaiming the leading role of its party to be the leading role of the proletariat, it was able to divert its revolution to a workers' revolution. The Chinese revolution freed China from the semi-feudal domination of corrupt landlords and from the comprador bourgeoisie in the pay of the imperialists. It laid the basis for a more vigorous attempt at industrialization and modernization. But the CPC, on the basis of a peasant movement, brought itself to power. The proletarian revolution against this power and the dictatorship of the proletariat are yet to come.

The influence of Maoism on the American revolutionary movement can not but have a reactionary effect. Following the lessons of Maoism at best confuses the building of a real proletarian revolutionary movement at home. Systematic application of them directly counterposes itself to building such a movement.

The explicit resurrection of Stalin and Stalinism in the revolutionary movement—and its fairly broad appeal, is primarily attributable to the great popularity of Maoism within the movement. As the RU says in the "Red Paper," Stalin is the bridge between Lenin and Mao theoretically, practically, and organizationally." Who can deny that?

Some are now trying to turn the question of Stalinism in our movement into a joke, or alternatively into a peripheral question. They attempt to mock those who express concern with the growing Stalinism, and attempt to create an atmosphere in the movement in which the expression of such concerns is viewed as an expression of liberalism, red-baiting, or worse. Many independents who have such concerns have decided to keep quiet rather than face censure. More than one RU member has said "one of Stalin's biggest mistakes was the desire to get Tskysky sooner." For those who hold that view, one cannot but conclude that only tactical considerations prevent them from murdering their political opponents in the movement. On the basis of such attitudes, neither the working class nor anyone else will be liberated.

The need for politically organized groupings in SDS to fight the Stalinist politics and manner of operation of both PL and the NO had, as early as January, resulted in the formation of the Revolutionary Socialist Caucus in the SDS chapter of City College in New York. The RSC at CCNY came together on the basis of a commitment to socialism from below. It rapidly became the major force in the chapter; at the same time, its nature was extremely amorphous, which made it difficult for the RSC to act decisively as a unit. When an open admissions struggle blew City College apart, the RSC itself exploded, going off in several different directions.

The RSC at CCNY contained, in microcosm, many of the traits of the independents at the Chicago convention. The vague commitment to socialism from below was coupled with a wide range of viewpoints on both international and domestic questions. Many in the group felt that they could continue to coexist and work with the national leadership of SDS, and its representatives in and around the NY regional staff. Nevertheless, the formation of this group was a sign of increasing rank and file consciousness in the face of increased polarization of the leadership groups.

A few months after the formation of the RSC at CCNY, a group with the same name and a similar perspective emerged in the SDS chapter at the University of Chicago. This group was, far more developed politically, containing several members who had been in SDS for years and had generally been at odds with the national leadership. Once again, the need to project an organized tendency was recognized only after the factionalism in SDS had made it impossible to voice independent positions. The Chicago group, however, was more unified politically, and had a fairly clear working class-oriented revolutionary socialist perspective together with an understanding of the necessary relationship between proletarian democracy and socialism.

During the convention, the Chicago group issued a call for the formation of a revolutionary socialist caucus on a nationwide basis. About a hundred and fifty SDS members responded to the call. Initial enthusiasm was high. It appeared that substantial basis for collaboration existed among at least a large portion of those present. A commitment to democracy within revolutionary organizations, and the projection of full democratic rights within the working class as a necessary ingredient of the socialist society we are struggling to build was generally accepted. But there was a tendency toward political agreement going far beyond that.

Very roughly speaking, the group had a perspective which views the working class, particularly the industrial working class, as the primary grouping in society toward which revolutionaries should orient. Most agreed that workers, as a class in workers, and that the understanding of their class interests in the collective struggle for their self-interest in the working class, and that the struggles of workers as a social group against racism, against imperialism, against all the evils of capitalism, and eventually for the socialist revolution, are dependent upon and flow from the consciousness of their interests as a class. As a result, it was felt, a primary focus in the organization of workers at this time must be on self-interest, precisely because of the current quiescence and the resulting conservatism within the American working class.

At the same time, those in the group agreed that struggles around immediate interests must be viewed as a starting point, not as an end—must be generalized at every opportunity into struggles and directions leading to the attainment of working class consciousness and revolutionary consciousness. Also, though there was general agreement in support of the national struggles of blacks, chicanos, etc., most rejected the practice in both RYM factions of tail-ending and romanticizing the black movement.

The new caucus, however, failed to crystallize. Meeting in competition with plenary sessions, regional caucuses, etc., it bogged down while its sessions dragged on. Everyone agreed that the formation of a caucus would only be fruitful if a solid basis of agreement existed. In the inhouse atmosphere there was little to get a perspective on which political differences were major, and which were insignificant. Discussions wandered, and people wandered away. Finally, there was a sense of impotence. Many felt that even if the caucus were to jell, it would be incapable of significantly affecting the convention. To some, negotiations, compromises, accommodations, with one or the other of the RYM factions held out the illusive promise of more relevance.

However, even though those at the caucus meetings felt impotent, the RYM leadership of the convention must have felt threatened by the caucus' formation. On at least three separate occasions, RYM convention monitors attempted to break up the caucus. Claiming that the janitors had to clean the caucus area, claiming that the management of the convention hall had forbidden the use of the particular caucus area, claiming that the caucus sessions interfered with the plenary session in progress, the monitors demanded the caucus disband. Each time, the caucus refused, sent out a representative to investigate the claim, and discovered that each was a pure fabrication.

Attrition finally succeeded where coercion failed, and the caucus disbanded. Weatherman, RYM II, and PL were to remain the only major tendencies at the convention—the only organized groups with a significant presence within SDS on a nationwide basis. Though there were groups and individuals who shared a fairly substantial basis of agreement outside of the WSA and both RYM factions, because they were unable to work out an ongoing basis of communication and collaboration, they increased their own isolation within the movement. As a result, they weakened the impact on the movement as a whole of the political views which differentiate them from the organized leadership poles.

When election of officers occurred in both the RYM and WSA conventions, just how tightly the leadership groups had things sewed up became clear. In the WSA convention there was a scramble just to get people other than PL members or long-time associates to run. No one else seemed to want responsibility for the group. Given its isolation, PL was eager to let independents or even possibly opponents into the leadership to project breadth. As a result the nominees ran unopposed.

The RYM elections, on the other hand, were hotly contested. Both the Weatherman tendency and RYM II ran slates for the secretariats, Weatherman taking a clean sweep by about two to one. The only other contestants were two members of the Chicago Revolutionary Socialist Caucus, who after the attempt to form a national RSC had failed, had decided to join the Independent Socialist Clubs. They ran as representatives of the ISC, basically as protest candidates. They expressed opposition to the split, particularly to how it was carried out, opposed the "principles of unity," and protested the stabilization of SDS.

Most independents who were sensitive to the Stalinism, and who were not tied to RYM politics, ended up voting for Weatherman on the basis that they considered it a looser and more poorly defined tendency—which might either develop in their direction or at least give them breathing space.

The two RYM factions put up a joint slate for the NIC containing five Weathermen and three RYM II's. The large number of independents who ran for these posts on the basis of their nomination by regional caucuses didn't stand a chance. The RYM joint slate won handsly.

For large numbers of SDS members who, prior to and even during the convention, found themselves in bitter opposition to the politics put forward by the RYM groups, isolation in a sharply factionalized and polarized movement has had a toll. Many of the more politically experienced maintain their differences while finding it politic not to raise them in their chapters or regions. They feel that friction and maybe even disruption might result which would hamper important political work and possibly even threaten old friendships. They feel frustrated as they watch a large proportion of the newer and less experienced members of their chapters begin to adopt hard RYM politics of one or the other variety. But they don't know what to do.

Other former opponents are reconciling their past differences with the RYM groups and beginning to adapt in a more of less grudging fashion to the dominant lines. Illusions that one or the other RYM group is changing or about to change often masks their own rapid political drift.

Within the WSA groups, on the other hand, things seem much more static and lethargic. PL tries to inject life by allowing controversy (within limits). But for most the understanding that the PL line is bound to be a majority whenever PL wants it to deadens political development. Increasingly the alternatives become clear—

follow PL, join PL, or quit. As opposed to the RYM SDS, few WSA chapters have members who are strongly opposed to PL politics and fairly developed politically. They do have, however, large numbers of politically excellent rank and filers who are attracted by the "less talk, more action" attitude of WSA, and by the concept of building a Worker-Student Alliance.

Though both RYM and WSA claim to be the "real SDS," what does that mean? The WSA bases their assertion primarily on the fact that RYM deserted the officially constituted SDS national convention plenary, while they stayed. They also claim that if matters had come to a vote of the entire convention they would have won. That the second claim is probably false is not very relevant. On the basis of these assertions, WSA might be able to win the exclusive right to the use of the name SDS in a court of law. But in the real world, who is the "real SDS" is decided by the reactions of the SDS chapters around the country.

To be sure RYM's violation of the SDS constitution, and in fact of any reasonable procedure, in declaring PL expelled, would be a large proportion in favor of WSA at the local chapters. On the other hand RYM's control of the old national office, contact lists, etc., together with the fact that there is a continuity between its national leadership and the old SDS national leadership, are factors in its favor at the chapter level. Most decisive, however, is the same factor which swung the convention toward RYM. With a few exceptions, PL is very strongly disliked in most chapters they do not control, particularly by those who have ever had political differences with them. Only a few SDS chapters not already dominated by the WSA, now look to it and to the office it has set up in Boston as the national office of SDS.

But this does not necessarily make RYM the "real SDS." Though a large proportion of the chapters which were not controlled by the WSA prior to the convention are moving toward RYM, this process is not completed. RYM was able to expel PL from SDS in the sense that they were able to cut PL off from a large proportion of the most alive and dynamic people in SDS. But it must be made clear that the RYM formation and all that it has attracted around itself is quite a different thing from just the old SDS minus "the disruptions from PL."

The principles of unity were not so much the basis on which PL was expelled. Rather, the expulsion of PL provided the basis for their promulgation. To be sure some chapters are not enforcing the definition of political bership that has been declared: "All people who do not accept the above two principles are no longer members of SDS." But those principles, even for the present unenforced, provide the foundation for the transformation of SDS into a sect, and a bad one at that. Of course modifications no doubt will be made. Political support for Albania will probably be removed from the list of litmus tests which distinguish true revolutionaries from counter-revolutionary traitors.

The leadership of the two RYM factions will continue to work together against mutual enemies. But each, though more consciously on the part of RYM II, is working toward the elimination of all political opposition to it, including the other faction. Each has as its goal, the transformation of SDS into a bureaucratically centralized Stalinist group, or into a wholly-owned subsidiary of one.

The "principles of unity" form a precedent for purging the organization of political opponents. Unless that precedent is destroyed, they or newly declared principles will be thrown at the organization whenever the basis has been laid to get rid of another "enemy." The reason PL was so hated is that they considered everyone unwilling to subordinate themselves politically to PL to be enemies which must be destroyed. The RYM groups, particularly RYM II, have the same idea. They, however, know how to bid their time and do the job more effectively.

Many of the politically healthiest people and groups in SDS have decided, with some misgivings, to affiliate to RYM. They believe it is the closest thing to the old SDS they used to know—they see in it people they can work with. The "principles of unity" they either ignore or consider unimportant to them or their chapters. Some even consider them basically a healthy step toward the political development of SDS in a revolutionary direction. They tend not to consider the growth of Stalinism in SDS to be a very important question at this time. "We can work with these people."

But by playing ostrich, by not opposing, they are supporting those tendencies which are in the process of transforming SDS into a bureaucratic monopoly. They are helping to pave the way for the day when they will have to decide whether to give up their politics, to quietly leave SDS, or to themselves be branded as counter-revolutionary traitors.

The answer is not to run away from SDS—to desert the many people still in it, to relinquish all claim to the good connotations which our movement has built into the name SDS. But the answer is also not to accept the RYM leadership, with misgivings, as the "real SDS." What is the "real SDS," as we said earlier, will be decided by the local chapters, and it will be decided over the period of the next year or so. What is critical is that there not be presented a mere lesser evil choice—RYM or WSA.

We urge that chapters and collectives explicitly vote to reject the "principles of unity" which were laid down in Chicago. We urge that they be clear that they will never accept principles which define membership in their organization handed down with neither an opportunity for prior chapter level discussion nor even the opportunity for a serious discussion at the convention itself. We urge chapters, collectives, and individuals to announce their affiliation to both national offices as opponents of both leaderships—to orient to open people in both, to put themselves in a position to lead fights against both leaderships. Affiliation to both makes it possible to participate in the real struggles going on in SDS nationally, struggles which still have a great effect on the consciousness of thousands of militants. At the same time it very clearly concretizes the unwillingness to accept either leadership as a lesser evil and thus objectively to become a supporter of that leadership.

The American working class today has no revolutionary vanguard. At first glance, it appears that groups which proclaim themselves to be that vanguard are either

being ludicrous or have delusions of grandeur. Neither a signed franchise from Chairman Mao himself, nor for that matter from the ghost of Lenin, Trotsky, or even Karl Marx, would make any existing American group the "vanguard of the proletariat."

The essential question is neither lineage nor "correctness of perspective." Mysticism aside, the working class can only have a revolutionary vanguard when there exists a revolutionary party, rooted in the working class, which has the size, support, and program to enable it, on a nationwide basis, to play an organic role in the class struggle on the shop floors. To be sure, it will have a program of struggle going far beyond the point of production and directed to all classes. But the presence of the party throughout the working class, at the point of production, is essential. The building of such a party with hard, consistent, working class revolutionary politics is a necessary prerequisite to a socialist revolution in America.

Such a revolutionary party of the working class can neither be wished nor proclaimed into existence—certainly not by relatively small groupings consisting primarily to students and intellectuals. Political struggles today create potential cadres and nuclei for generating such a party. They transmit, modify, create, and fight over the revolutionary theory and analysis with which such a party will initially be armed. And they will develop the people who will bring the theory, analysis, and program into the working class.

The heating up and politicizing of class struggle in America is a prerequisite for the development of such a party. Today's revolutionary groups and collectives can help to speed up the process. They must go to the working class; it will not come to them. They must help and encourage it to build its party, not conceive of themselves as winning workers to "their party," to be their base of support.

We have no crystal ball that tells us how the American revolutionary socialist party will come into being. We believe, however, that the political struggles going on today, struggles in both practice and theory, could play a key role. We oppose Stalinist developments on the left, not out of abstract morality, nor even out of fear that they will make a Stalinist revolution in America. We do not believe that Stalinism can ride the American working class to power. The revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by an indigenous Stalinist movement is only possible in countries facing economic underdevelopment coupled with the economic stagnation imposed by the world capitalist imperialist market. But the dominance of Stalinist theory among potential cadres and catalyzers of a future revolutionary party will make it impossible for them to aid the development of a party which can lead the working class. It could even lead to the development of a party which in a future revolutionary situation retards rather than leads the seizure of power by the working class.

Over the next few years, both theoretical struggle and practical political work must be intensified. As the current crisis in American capitalism develops and deepens, theory and practice become increasingly dependent upon the other. The development of both, and of nationwide revolutionary organization, communication, contacts, and programs, becomes crucial. As American capitalism comes apart at its seams, when its disintegration reaches the proportions of revolutionary crisis, either the working class will be prepared to make a revolution and usher in socialism, or a new and previously undreamed-of barbarism will emerge over their crushed bones.

We believe that there are large numbers of people in and around SDS who are committed to a working class orientation; to substantive democracy within the movement, whether coupled with centralism or not; to proletarian democracy as the basis of socialism in the society; we are working to build; to the struggles for black and third world liberation, an end to imperialism, and women's liberation; to building a revolution at home as our primary task in working for the liberation of all the people of the world.

It would be less than useless to attempt to build a political opposition to RYM without the projection of alternate politics and program. We believe that a serious discussion of politics and program must be started among individuals, collectives, chapters, and even regions, which essentially have no ideological points. We propose a discussion bulletin to begin such a discussion. We will try to reproduce all discussion pieces sent to us. (We may have problems with very long pieces, or if we are really flooded. Articles on mimeo stenics would be appreciated.) We will send them to all who request to participate in such a discussion. We will also send out the list of names we receive to all who send in their name (unless of course we get a specific request not to). We are anxious to give up this task to some chapter or collective who can carry it out, or turn it over to one if it is already being done.

With the shit coming down on all sides, a lot of us have waited too long in getting ours together. As our movement intensifies, politics without a national expression become increasingly irrelevant.