

SSOC Annual Membership Conference Report, 5/10/68 by Nelson B.

The Southern Student Organizing Committee held its annual membership conference at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia, May 3-5. About 200 people attended, with representation from most southern states.

The local SSOC-SDS chapter had made arrangements to hold the conference on the university campus, but at the last moment, the reactionary administration withdrew permission for the use of any school facilities. The site of the conference was first shifted to a private home, then to the local McCarthy headquarters. Most of Friday night and Saturday morning was devoted to discussing what response to take to this action by the university. After taking an hour off to picket a speech by Dean Rusk, it was finally decided to move the conference into a large lounge in the Student Union and to hold workshops in vacant classrooms, without any permission from school officials, even this could result in actions against participants by the administration. However no such actions were taken.

Because of the general confusion and the changes in schedules, a decision was made that no legislative actions would be taken at the conference, as was originally planned. A legislative membership conference will be held in August.

In order to understand SSOC, a little background is necessary. SSOC was founded four years ago by white southern students who had been drawn into activity in the Civil Rights movement. With the growth of black power and the anti-war movement SSOC's original program, which was vaguely multi-issue with emphasis on civil rights, shifted in the direction of more emphasis on the war and student power. It only became a membership organization two years ago.

From the beginning, a sort of fraternal relationship has existed between SSOC and SDS. There was a tacit agreement that SDS would leave the South to SSOC which was supposed to have an understanding of the unique problems of the region. Some SSOC chapters, as in Athens and the University of Florida are also SDS chapters. Mike Spiegle was the official representative at this conference for SDS.

SSOC leadership has generally been weak and ineffective. The leadership is now proposing that the office of chairman be abolished. The headquarters of SSOC in Nashville serves primarily as a distribution center for literature (largely reprints of SDS material) and SSOC's monthly publication The New South Student.

Although little was said about it at this conference, SSOC has often played up the "Southern nationalism" angle. This was done more as a gimmick to attract students than as a serious program. For the same week as the Student Strike

SSOC issued its own call for "Ten Days of Secession" paralleling the SDS call for "Ten Days of Resistance." Although there were antiwar demonstrations around the South little was done on the "Secession" theme.

In the past SSOC has shown more willingness to work with the national antiwar coalitions than SDS has. The present chairman of SSOC, Tom Gardner, who has cooperated with the SMC in the past, feels that SSOC must turn much of its attention to the issue of racism.

Carl Ogelsby of SDS led the racism workshop at the conference. He gave his analysis saying that racism not the war should be the students primary concern. Ogelsby presented no programmatic proposals by which students could approach this issue other than holding teach-ins. SSOC will have a summer project in North Carolina for those students concerned with racism. The project is designed to fight racism in the poor white and middle class communities through educational activities.

A proposed workshop on the 1968 elections did not take place. The SSOC leadership takes an abstentionist policy and do not support Kennedy or McCarthy. The leadership feels threatened by the campaigns of these candidates. Possibly ten percent of those present were wearing McCarthy buttons but no one took the floor in support of him.

Workshops were also held on the draft, student power, plus community and working class organizing.

Because of the circumstances under which the conference was held, and because the local SSOC-SDS leaders felt our literature might provoke reprisals against them by the university administration we were only able to have our literature table up for about an hour. Significantly however, in that brief period we sold \$35.00 worth of literature. Students in the South have a limited access to revolutionary literature, and several students wanted us to set up tables on their campuses (Arkansas and Florida). The McCarthy Truth Kit was the best seller.

For the first time PL's man in the South, Ed Clarke of New Orleans, did not show up at a SSOC membership conference. PL is pushing for building SDS to the exclusion of SSOC in the South. Clarke has alleged that SSOC is a front for the NSA which created resentment in both SSOC and SDS. One Spartacist from New Orleans was present.

SSOC claims that their membership has grown from 170 last year to between 600 and 700 people at the present. This growth reflects the spread of the antiwar movement and the depth of the student radicalization in the South and the rest of the country.

A significant base exists in the South for building the Halstead-Boutelle campaign and for the further growth of the YSA.