

SDS National Council Meeting Report, 4-16-68, by Charlie B.

The National Council of SDS met in Lexington, Kentucky, March 28-31. On the one hand the NC reflected the deepening radicalization and politicalization of American youth; on the other hand it reflected the inability of SDS to explain current developments, or to present a clear political perspective which would enable it to understand or take advantage of these developments.

Although the NC was held in the midst of a series of major crises for American capitalism, it left SDS without a program to deal with the most direct expressions of these crises -- the Vietnam war, the Afro-American struggle and the 1968 elections.

The two main topics of discussion at the NC were the draft and the 1968 elections. Unlike their last NC meeting, there was virtually no discussion or debate about SDS's attitude toward the antiwar movement, and virtually no mention of the student strike, and the April 27th demonstrations.

At the last NC meeting of SDS in December, and in a series of articles that appeared in New Left Notes, the SDS leadership displayed a more flexible attitude toward carrying out some actions in collaboration with the national antiwar coalition, particularly the National Mobilization Committee. The reasons for this were (1) the growth and influence of the SMC relative to SDS and the changing relationship of forces; (2) the growth and impact of antiwar sentiment and actions; and (3) the desire of the North Vietnamese and the NLF to see the mass actions continue.

Although the national leadership still seems willing to collaborate on somethings, they are not anxious to push for this perspective within SDS, especially at national gatherings. The two main reasons for this are (1) the hostility of local SDS leaders to this perspective (people like Fuerst in Madison, Gottlieb at Columbia, etc.); and (2) the existence of PL as an organized political tendency in SDS. The hostility to the antiwar movement was manifested in the fairly bad response at the conference to SMC literature, especially by this local leadership layer. Kipp, who was the official representative from the SMC was told that she would have an opportunity to speak, but as the conference proceeded, the excuse of a tight agenda caused her presentation to be cancelled.

The discussion on the draft was an attempt by SDS to come to grips with the war, the growing antiwar movement and groups like the Resistance and the SMC, which most SDSers consider as opponents in the antiwar arena.

The proposal on the draft that was adopted by the NC was a compromise resolution agreed upon by PL and the leadership. It pointed out the importance of organizing opposition to the draft, and of tying the draft into other issues like racism and

the problems of the working class. It took the draft, not the war, as the focus of the radicalization in the U.S. and of "anti-imperialist" activities. A vague program of continuing general activities around the draft was adopted. This included undefined "community work" (including PL's proposal for "work-ins" -- students working and organizing in factories for the summer), campus demonstrations, draft counseling and other activities which SDS has carried out in the past.

The NC made two important revisions in SDS's approach to antidraft work. There was considerable friendliness to a proposal by PL that SDS support those who chose to go into the army instead of refusing induction. A PL proposal calling upon some who are faced with the draft to go into the army was passed as part of the antidraft resolution. In addition, the resolution contains statements of sympathy with the GIs and indicates interest in working with GIs.

The second change in SDS's approach to antidraft work was that the NC adopted a proposal by Mike Spiegel calling for SDS initiative in setting up a national summer antidraft coalition. The proposal was passed nearly unanimously. It is here that one could see the pressure on SDS from the growth and influence of organizations such as SMC and Resistance. The only hostility to the resolution came from some of the sectarian elements led by PL, who looked upon the growth of Resistance as an "unhealthy development" of a "non-political" group which was not "anti-imperialist" like SDS. Many of these people voted for this resolution anyway, not because they view united actions as the best way to build the antiwar movement, but because they wanted to reestablish SDS as the central organizing force of the antidraft and antiwar movement.

The discussion of the '68 elections opened up in the midst of the discussion on the draft. When the Saturday session on the draft reconvened during the evening, a motion was placed on the floor to allow Carl Oglesby and Greg Calvert 15 minutes each to present their perspectives for 1968. After a lengthy debate over this question, where the hostility to the national leadership was sharp, they were finally allowed to speak by a vote of 38-34.

Oglesby said that the radicals of today no longer have to concern themselves with organizing against the war. It will be ended by the capitalists Kennedy represents, because they no longer want to maintain American imperialism in South East Asia. In order to maintain a base in the radical movement, he said, SDS must now turn to organizing around the question of racism. He came out in support of Kennedy, although he now denies this.

Calvert, on the other hand, gave an analysis of the electoral system and the two major parties, emphasizing the need to have

a class perspective. He said liberalism is a tactic of a certain segment of the ruling class; we cannot depend on our enemy to do anything for us; SDS cannot collaborate with Kennedy or any segment of the ruling class; SDS must expose capitalism and racism, which is a tool used by the ruling class to split the working class. Calvert further said that SDS cannot support any capitalist politicians. His conclusion was that SDS should develop an educational program for students and for the community, dealing with the capitalist electoral system. His conclusion implied that SDS should abstain from electoral activity.

Most of the SDSers present agreed with Calvert's analysis and were opposed to Kennedy and McCarthy. During the discussion of electoral politics another compromise resolution, signed by Bob Pardum, Jeff Segal, John Levin (PL) and others, incorporated many of the basic tenets of Calvert's presentation, but further added that "radicals should not participate in the bourgeois sense of trying to win so that their candidates can get concessions from the ruling class, but in a revolutionary sense of using elections as an organizing tool. We should participate in radical, independent electoral politics which would involve new people who through their struggle would come to understand how the bourgeois electoral system works. This radicalization cannot be accomplished through the two capitalist parties or through national independent protest campaigns which have no relation to local organizing campaigns." It urged a boycott of the national elections while leaving open the possibility of supporting local peace and freedom type formations.

Most of the SDSers reacted coldly to Tom Kondit, a member of the Independent Socialist Club (ISC) in Berkeley, who spoke about the California Peace and Freedom Party, as well as to a resolution which would have given SDS support to the Choice '68 campus election by voting for Halstead, King and withdrawal. Response to our election campaign literature was rather cool although everyone received a piece of our literature and about 15 signed up as endorsers of the campaign. Even though the leadership has adopted this abstentionist policy, a lot of rank and file SDSers will get drawn into the Kennedy - McCarthy campaigns. But even more important, the compromise resolution was never passed by the body as the leadership decided not to push it through, and the question of electoral politics has been tabled. SDS now has no position on the '68 elections. This reflects their confusion and also gives us more opportunities to reach the healthy layer of SDS with our campaign. We should make every effort to enlist the active support of SDSers in our campaign.

The identification with the colonial revolution continues to deepen in SDS. A report by 4 SDSers who went to Cuba on a recent trip showed the deep influence that the Cuban Revolution has had on them, and they tried to convey this feeling to all the SDSers at the NC meeting.

There were a few reports from local areas on the ten days of antiwar activities but the reports showed that even in areas where SDS chapters are involved heavily in these actions the regional leadership is largely not on top of the developments.

There is good reason to believe as in the past that there will be a number of local SDS groups that will participate in the student strike and the mass marches on the 27th.

A third major point on the agenda was racism. In the closing minutes of the conference they passed a little discussed resolution. The resolution has many weaknesses and misunderstandings about the nature of racism but in general it does take a positive attitude on the black struggle.

Representation at the conference was fairly evenly distributed and there were a sizable number of PLers present from Boston, New York, Chicago and San Francisco. PL made no direct attempt to move against the national leadership on any question, but there was more PL baiting at this conference than at any other Council meeting. Earl Silbar, a Pler from Chicago who had been on the National Administrative Committee of SDS for over two years, was not reelected as a full member. PL had about 25 people present. The CP was not present except for a couple of people from Austin, Boston and Detroit, and the ISC had only a few in attendance. YAWF had none.

Over \$90.00 worth of our literature was sold at the conference.

In general the SDS leadership has been forced more and more to try to confront the major political questions of the day. They feel the increased pressure from us, the antiwar movement and from the PL faction in SDS. They have been faced with the fact that the "old left" is not so irrelevant, and they try more and more to come to grips with objective reality.

Their lack of a clear cut program continues to make them react abruptly to quickly changing events, severely impairs their ability to understand them, and generates widespread confusion. SDS's continued abstentionist attitude toward the antiwar movement still plagues the organization. There has been no apparent growth of the SDS since their last NC meeting.

With the continued crisis of American capitalism, the growth of the antiwar movement, and the substantial increase in our own ranks we have the best possible opportunity thus far to talk to rank and file SDSers about our revolutionary socialist program. This can best be done through our election campaign. Many of these SDSers who are groping for a perspective will be open to our ideas especially during this election year. Our job is to reach out to these people with our ideas and recruit the best of them.