

Report on Oct. 11-13 SDS National Council Meeting, Boulder, Colorado
by Paul McNight, Oct. 14, 1968

Over 600 kids attended this NC meeting at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Aside from independent radicals, the attendance fell into three categories. The Progressive Labor Party, which has continued to recruit from SDS, had a fraction of about 40-50 people, including their close periphery. The Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers from New York had about 50 people there, and they had the sympathy of a lot of the independents. Then there was the National Office clique and its followers.

The conference started with a discussion of whether or not the press should be allowed to bring cameras and tape recorders inside. The SDS contract with the University said that the meeting would be open to the press, but SDS contended that they could still exclude cameras and recorders. The University Regents threatened to cancel the contract if the press were not allowed full rights. The floor discussion on this problem lasted about 90 minutes.

Next came the reports of the national officers. Fred Gordon, the Internal Education Secretary, showing the pressure that the NO people were feeling from PL, said in his report that "we have to move to the working class, move into the shops and into the military." He also said that SDS had to change its direction; that it is no longer necessary to argue with liberals because liberalism is dead.

Mike Klonsky, the National Secretary, put forth the theory that the "cultural revolution" of the youth in this country is the most important thing going on now, and that the way to link up with the working class is to see rebellious young people as part of that class and orient towards them.

Bernadine Dohrn, the Inter-organizational Secretary, spoke of increasing factionalism inside SDS at a time when they had the biggest opportunities to expand. She also stressed the need to expand SDS into the high schools and trade schools. She pointed out that many chapters had started out the fall with hundreds of people at the first meetings.

There was a small amount of discussion from the floor after these reports, mostly on the nature of the working class and how to relate to it. The film on the Columbia Strike was supposed to have been shown, but no one remembered to bring it from New York. They did show the new Cuban film on Che.

Saturday started with a panel on "New Left Internationalism." The panel included Dohrn, an anarcho-motherfucker, and a woman who had recently visited Cuba. Dohrn said that it was essential for SDS to develop international ties and an internationalist consciousness because there is a world proletariat and a world capitalist class. She said that SDS had received many requests in the past year to hook up with various groups internationally, but she proposed no concrete orientation for SDS in this regard.

There was a lot of discussion from the floor about the Cuban Revolution, Cuban art, and whether or not it was good that Cuban young people like the Beatles and North American cloths. There was also confused discussion about developments in Eastern Europe.

One of the major fights occurred over the PL proposal for a Student-Labor Action Project (SLAP). This is just another name for the "student-worker alliance" concept that PL has been pushing for years. In passing this proposal, they wanted to turn SDS into a "pro-working class" student group.

The opposition to SLAP, mostly from the right of PL, included the national officers, the theorists of the "new working class," the motherfuckers, and all the typical student types who see no role for the working class in a revolution. Almost all opponents of SLAP agreed that students have to relate to the working class somehow, but criticized PL's approach without offering an alternative approach. The anti-SLAP leaders included Jim Mellon, John Jacobs, Bill Snyder, and Jeff Jones. PL's floor leaders were Levin from San Francisco, James Israel from Boston, and Jeff Gordon from New York.

The SLAP proposal lost by a delegate vote of 60 to 40. Israel then got up and implied that the motherfuckers had packed the vote by making up extra delegate cards, but he said that he didn't want a recount.

Between plenaries there were several workshops. Topics included labor, elections, draft resistance, internationalism, campus organizing, high schools, post-student organizing, and GIs. There was an extreme amount of interest in the GI workshop on the San Francisco GI March for Peace. I gave a report on it and answered questions for about 15 minutes. I suggested that the workshop propose that the NC send a telegram of solidarity to the SF rally. This was brought to the plenary floor, but not acted upon.

In the plenary session discussion on high school work a fight broke out between the proponents of "youth culture" and pot and the PLers who said that all that stuff was "anti-working class." This discussion was tabled to a special point on "Youth Culture" that was added to the agenda. More about that later.

Another major floor fight occurred over the question of how SDS should relate to the elections. PL, with its boycott line, proposed a national march on Washington on election day with a rally on the steps of the White House, the center of "the ruling class and state power." The action would have three themes: The Elections are a Hoax; U.S Get Out of Vietnam Now. No Negotiations; and No Imperialist Law or Racist Order. PL cited the first SDS March on Washington to point out that such a thing was possible.

The National Office people presented an alternative that contained three major points: 1) A national strike of high school and college students on Nov. 4 and 5; 2) SDS regional demonstrations to make visible the extent of opposition to the elections; 3) Support to the National Mobilization Committee's National GI Week.

There was also a proposal from Peace and Freedom Party elements from California to hold demonstrations two days after the elections, allowing a mobilization of PFP to get out the vote on election day.

The vote went: PL proposal - 30 votes; Proposal from National Office people - about 60 votes; PFP proposal - 7 votes.

All during the discussion on election strategy, the motherfuckers were outside caucusing. When the point on "youth culture" came up on the agenda, the motherfuckers came back in and crowded around the microphone in the front of the room. They took over the mike and urged everyone to "get out of their straight rows of chairs and come up here, to have a real discussion, not all this bullshit dialectics crap." They drew the entire conference, except the PFPers, on to the floor in front of the chairs. An hour-long discussion followed, with motherfuckers and hippies PL-baiting, and shouting to each other across the room about the relative merits of various drugs.

PL walked out in disgust when all this began, and within one hour the National Council meeting of SDS had completely disintegrated and all that was left were about 100 motherfuckers who then went up to the mountains to "have a party."

The next point on the agenda was to have been the election of the National Administrative Committee. As far as I can tell, these elections never occurred.