

# REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST CAUCUS Newsletter

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## FINAL SDS CONVENTION?

Faction-ridden and impotent, crippled by lack of a working class program, SDS limps on, its continued existence as a national organization looking ever more doubtful. That at least is the conclusion we are forced to draw from the recent SDS national convention held in Chicago over Christmas, 1970, which was poorly attended and tightly controlled organizationally by the Worker-Student Alliance and Progressive Labor. The first SDS national convention since the split convention of '69 (over a year ago), it exposed clearly the disastrous consequences of PL-WSA's bad politics and misleadership.

Forced by membership pressure to finally call the convention, the existing PL-WSA leadership could not avoid confronting two distinct oppositional currents which it has tried to smother and ignore for over a year--a large, heterogeneous rightward moving group of ex-WSA'ers and ex-PL'ers, and the left-wing Revolutionary Marxist Caucus. Any analysis of the new rightward movement in SDS must begin from the basic point that these groups have emerged directly because of the failure of the PL-WSA leadership to provide a militant and consistently working class program for SDS, as well as its stupidly bureaucratic handling of political opposition.

The right wing forces, although comprising about 30% of the total attendance (about 650 at most sessions, although registration was over 900), certainly a sizeable minority, were unable to agree on any common program except opposition to PL, and managed to discredit themselves thoroughly by their inability to handle the political issues

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raised during the convention. The Revolutionary Marxist Caucus fought consistently for its proletarian socialist program, emerging as the only serious left alternative to the old leadership.

### The Right Wing--Moralism, Liberal Guilt, Maoism

The right wing, although forming a loose coalition among themselves during the convention, nevertheless actually represented two distinct trends; one, a growing trend back to old New Leftism--the swamp which can go no further than moral horror at burned babies. The proponents of this guilt-ridden, reformist liberal orientation were primarily the Rosoff group from NYC, the remnants of the Hacks and supporters in Chicago, and The Midnight Special group from New Orleans. The other trend was the newly emerged orthodox Maoist Columbia-Barnard split from the WSA, which at least had the virtues of being more vocal, better organized, and politically more consistent than the softer New Leftists. Ed Clark, editor of The Midnight Special, former PLer, speculated in endless rightwing caucuses on the advisability of splitting from SDS entirely, and was only dissuaded then by the realization that, if the right wing split from SDS, since opposition to PL was the only thing holding them loosely together, they would promptly fall apart. These right wingers decided to make their main fight on organizational, mostly agenda points, since, as Rosoff pointed out, they obviously couldn't agree among themselves about anything else.

### Clark Makes His Move--And Blows It

Ed Clark, well known crusader for democracy (particularly when finding himself in a minority), whose pre-convention writings indicated a desire to lead SDS back to the non-existent "good old days" of participatory democracy, chose only two organizational points to fight on: 1) that agenda time slotted for mass leafleting be given over to political discussion, which he capitulated on at the last minute, withdrawing his originally correct motion, which the RMC had supported, and 2) a cynical maneuver, obviously destined to failure before a clear WSA majority, to attempt to disqualify a WSA proposal. After the failure of both these proposals, The Midnight Special crew spent most of its remaining time at the convention sulking in the back of the hall. Upon returning to New Orleans, they pronounced SDS dead and washed their hands of it, thus continuing the avoidance of political struggle which has been the hallmark of this group since its inception. (see TMS, Feb. '71)

### Some Other Disasters

The Rosoff mini-group was virtually ignored by the leadership, while the similar Roger-Coffield tendency from the West Coast was conciliated with election to the NIC--an apparent indication that PL control over west coast SDS is slipping. The Revolutionary People's Caucus from Boston (who prior to the convention convened a motley meeting of White Panthers, nationalists, hippies and yuppies, supposedly to "free SDS"; an explicitly anti-working class meeting which the WSA and RMC walked out of), distinguished itself by quoting that "great revolutionary leader", Bernadette Dohrn, getting only derisive laughter and booing from the floor. After that debacle, the RPC also retreated, maintaining pristine silence (except for some heckling) on all political questions.

Staying in SDS for basically opportunist reasons, these New Lefters attempt to use the Worker-Student Alliance verbiage with an entirely different content, challenging the correct SDS line of non-alliance with liberals. Their utopian belief is that linking up SDS with any and all organizations (primarily campus), regardless of rotten politics, will build SDS in some way. This demonstrates complete naivete concerning political development--with such a strategy, SDS would at best become the left cover for liberal politics, and more probably, be completely lost within the morass of liberalism. The right wing cynically covers up its opportunist maneuvering by denying that the basis for political alliance must be agreement on program. Sinking to the lowest common denominator of anti-Nixonism is nothing more than a betrayal of the left. We note that Gi Schafer, of New Orleans SDS, is sponsoring the National Peace Action Coalition (another one of those SWP-YSA-SMC

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peace fronts) in the name of New Orleans SDS! This only a few months after The Midnight Special denounced the YSA-SMC, proclaiming that they are "being used as or are tools of the bosses... they should be given the same treatment that one would give a cop." (TMS, Dec. '70). Apparently The Midnight Special and/or New Orleans SDS considers the proper way to treat cops is to support their actions! Or is this a new split in The Midnight Special group?

### Columbia-Barnard Maoists

The most important of the right wing oppositional groups is the Columbia-Barnard group, led by former PLers and WSAers. Their proposals received the largest number of votes of any of the oppositional tendencies. PL-WSA continually attempted to conciliate this group in an attempt to maintain organizational control of the New York region (a conciliation which later developments show has not worked very well). Columbia-Barnard split from the WSA in the name of orthodox Maoism, a development which points out most clearly PL's unique position of being neither fish nor fowl--a Stalinist tendency that would rather not talk about Stalin, an ex-Maoist sect that refuses to define its difference with Mao--i.e., a political tendency with no other base than empiricism. In donning the mantle of orthodox Maoism and "serve-the-people"ism, Columbia-Barnard demands SDS support of the Black Panther Party, an organization which calls the working class, both black and white, sell-outs to capitalism and states that the only revolutionary force in America is the lumpen proletariat, the "street people", whose relation to the means of production is non-existent, therefore rendering them impotent in undertaking any struggle for power in this society. While the Black Panther Party and other militant organizations on the left must be defended against the capitalist class's attempt to smash them, extending this defense to political support denies the central role the working class must play in revolution, and paves the way for the complete abandonment of a working class program for SDS. Nevertheless, Columbia-Barnard's criticism of PL's vulgar analysis of the black question has some validity. Blacks are not merely more economically exploited than whites, but are subject to direct political oppression, such as pervasive police brutality against ghetto residents, as well as the psychological oppression of living in a racist society. However, it is around such class issues as unemployment that black workers can lead the entire class and thereby win white workers to oppose the extra-economic aspects of black oppression. Columbia-Barnard has no strategy for fighting racism other than moralistic propaganda that racism is bad.

Columbia-Barnard's position on the Vietnam war has a similar thrust. Rather than calling for the victory of the Vietnamese revolution, as does the RMC, they call for support of and victory to the NLF, the popular front of the Vietnamese Communist Party, whose program calls for the development of indigenous capitalism in Vietnam! Calling for the political victory of such a program means abandoning the Vietnamese workers and peasants to exploitation by their own ruling class. Considering that the Vietnamese national bourgeoisie is one of the most despicable collections of war profiteers, gangsters, grafters, shysters, gougers and pimps assembled in one place since the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek, that is not much of a reward for thirty odd years of fighting. The Revolutionary Marxist Caucus is for the military victory of the NLF and North Vietnamese forces against the American and South Vietnamese puppet troops. We would urge genuine revolutionary socialists to fight for the leadership of the Vietnamese masses against the existing NLF leadership, while combatting the imperialist forces. The principle of actively supporting mass struggles while opposing an opportunist leadership is the ABC of revolutionary strategy. On innumerable occasions, SDS members have instinctively realized this. Thus, SDS supported the General Electric and General Motors strikes, despite the class traitor Jennings and Woodcock union leaderships. SDS members have actively and correctly supported student anti-war strikes, even when these were led by liberal forces.

### PL's Responsibility for This Mess

The defection of Columbia-Barnard and the loss of control by PL-WSA of the N.Y. region is one of the most serious political defeats which SDS has sustained, while the WSA controlled the national organization. Columbia-Barnard ranks with Harvard-Radcliffe as one of the

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most important chapters which SDS has had. The responsibility for this defeat lies squarely on the shoulders of PL-WSA and is directly caused by the methodology and outlook of PL. It is no accident that all the recent splits from PL have been to the right--Fraser, Papert and the Labor Committee, Epton, and Columbia-Barnard. PL's repudiation of the essential theoretical conceptions of Stalinism and Maoism--the popular front, the stage theory of revolution, tail-ending of black nationalism--has not been based on an historical and theoretical re-assessment of the havoc wrought by Stalinism in the world working class movement, but an empirical response to the bankruptcy of these doctrines necessitated by the Vietnamese war and the rise of black nationalism. (In addition, PL finds it difficult to move itself to the right, since the SWP-YSA has effectively monopolized the old Stalinist popular front positions.) In justifying these moves PL can only exonerate itself on the grounds of the particular situation or on its authority as the (self-proclaimed) revolutionary communist party. By attempting to build on social guilt, moralism, and empiricism, the three most obnoxious and defective characteristics of the American left, PL creates the conditions for its own defeat and the continuous splits to the right. The standard argument that failures are the result of "our own racism, male chauvinism, etc." is, of course, routine method which PL employs to explain the failure of one or another of its opportunist gambits to demoralized WSA'ers while keeping the authority of PL as "revolutionary communist party" (infallible guide) intact. Rosoff and Rogers have had the ingenuity to utilize this tactic from the right for their own purposes. Once WSA'ers and PL'ers begin to doubt, once they begin to realize CWSA and Challenge selling doesn't work and is a lot of eyewash, they are unable to bring these criticisms to the party or WSA since the inherited Stalinist authoritarianism brooks no opposition. To date they have either looked for a new source of authority, i.e., back to Maoism, or retreated into New Leftism covered only by the fig leaf of verbal endorsement of WSA. Without a clearly reasoned theoretical explanation for its break with Stalinist theory, without an institution of real inner party democracy, and without a transitional program which bridges the gap between 'rubber mats' and the dictatorship of the proletariat, PL is bound to create within itself right wing splits and transmit the same process to SDS.

#### On The Floor: Organizational Hassles

PL-WSA has a hard time handling political criticism, so getting proposals discussed was difficult as always. The convention was oriented primarily towards endless pseudo-democratic workshops (where no votes are ever taken on anything), mass leafleting and demonstration-building, a rat-troupe skit, and the necessary but time-consuming election of officers.

PL-WSA's general tactic toward the right wing was attempted conciliation. The Revolutionary Marxist Caucus received different treatment. Political antagonisms were intensified by PL-WSA, which erupted during the election proceedings into open hostility and near violence. The RMC ran candidates for all national positions. Our first two candidates were booed, hissed and pelted with wads of paper during their speeches by WSA'ers. The third candidate reacted badly to this provocation by making irrelevant, distorted and personal criticisms of PL and its leader, Milt Rosen, rather than insisting on the correctness of the RMC program. This weakness displayed by the candidate was not an accident; as part of his continuing political breakdown, he shortly broke entirely away from RMC politics.

Tempers were running short by the last day of the convention; PL-WSA was able to impose a 30-second time limit on all RMC speakers, making it impossible for us to present our proposals on women's liberation and racism. In effectively silencing the RMC during the last day, the leadership made itself more vulnerable to the right wing, with whom it found itself working against the RMC. The right was quick to take advantage of this by calling for the election of an additional NIC member. Their candidate was an ex-SDSer from Columbia-Barnard who no longer attended SDS meetings. He was duly elected.

We have pointed out before, and we repeat: These bureaucratic and undemocratic procedures can only drive potentially radical students

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away from SDS. Trampling on minority rights creates only hostility and anti-communist attitudes toward SDS.

The Left Opposition: The RMC Program

Our general proposal for future SDS orientation and work--Program for the Economic Crisis--is a transitional program designed to increase the intensity of class struggle in this country through conscious radical intervention--SDS posing demands related to the current concerns of the working class; inflation, layoffs, lack of direct political power, etc. The RMC proposed that SDS agitate among the working class with demands for strike action against layoffs; a sliding scale of hours and wages, i.e., a shorter work week with no loss in pay, pay to be controlled by the cost of living; price control (without wage control); expropriation of industry under workers' control (if Penn Central can't make it, let the workers control it); and a workers' party based on the rank and file of the trade unions, a break with the Democratic party. Such a program taken politically to the working class as a way to implement their present struggles for survival would not only intensify the workers' struggles against the capitalist class, but would discredit the misleadership of the trade unions, the sell-out bureaucrats, among the rank and file.

The general proposal put forward by the WSA leadership was to build a worker-student alliance on the same general 'support' basis that existed before the convention, which won a majority of the vote. The proposal made no mention of any program to implement working class struggles, but concentrated on the vague 'ally with' tactic that has rendered SDS's working class orientation ineffective in the past. The programmatic points such as "30 for 40" adopted by PL (but not SDS) and "End Racist Unemployment" must be confronted head on as minor improvements in PL's program which appear to, but are actually insufficient to, replace this basic method. The WSA denies, in effect, that radical students can and must advance the class struggle through assisting the working class to achieve revolutionary socialist consciousness.

During the first part of the convention, the RMC was forced once again to fight for the basic democratic right of proportional representation on the panels, a fight which won the RMC a speaker on only the women's liberation panel. The question of the oppression of women has been an extremely confusing one for SDS, ever since the topic first came up for discussion at the December 1969 New Haven Conference. That conference found PL-WSA endorsing an anti-abortion line, for no discernible reason apart from the grounds that large numbers of the working class are Catholic and therefore opposed to abortion.

The problems of carrying out such a line while attempting to win radical students to SDS created a quick reversal--to part of the program of the RMC, newly formed at that conference. The sudden switch was done empirically, with no theoretical analysis of women's oppression, which allowed the PL-WSA leadership to continue to refuse to recognize the central role of the family in the oppression of women--part of a basic Marxist analysis. Rather, their position remained that the socio-economic institution of the family could be made into "a fighting unit for socialism". With such a pro-family perspective, SDS has had to concentrate on merely the economic aspects of women's oppression, giving them an extremely crude approach to a central contradiction of capitalism. The SDS position can be summed up as "women are oppressed because they are paid less, and they are paid less because they are oppressed"--with the supra-natural agency of "male chauvinism" as the prime mover behind the circle. The RMC speaker on the panel emphasized the central role of the family as an agency of oppression. The family is an economic necessity under capitalism as it provides for unpaid, socially necessary labor; further, it is a prime agency for the internalization of oppression, teaching women to seek the sole meaning of life in their children and husband, for example.

The main thrust of the RMC intervention on all questions was the attempt to bring about the fundamental recognition by SDS of its need for an openly socialist perspective, program, and internal organization, open to all political tendencies to fight for their programs. SDS had the responsibility, as the only mass-based working class

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oriented youth group in the country, to be the arena where young student and working class revolutionaries can become conscious of their tasks and test out their theories in political debate and practice. In refusing to call itself socialist and work for a socialist perspective, SDS has backpedalled its role as the leadership of the youth movement, from which must come the next generation of political leadership for the class struggle in America.

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