Metamorphosis in S. D. S.
The New Left Is Showing Its Age
By THOMAS R. BROOKS

Haroldly a college campus now alive with student strife is without its chapter of Students for a Democratic Society. It's been one of our most successful years," an S.D.S. national officer said recently. "The strike at San Francisco State lasted for five months, which makes it the longest student strike in American history. Columbia again. And the fantastic strike at Harvard." Another spokesman, after telling me that the national office staff had voted "not to grant any interviews," boasted a membership of "upward of 100,000.

But political moods, like spring weather, are notoriously changeable. It is clear from interviews and talks with S.D.S. activists and members, friendly and unfriendly observers, and political analysts that S.D.S. is going through a metamorphosis, a change that may mean the demise of the New Left as we know it.

For one thing, there is a growing fear of repression or retaliation. At the S.D.S. national office on West Madison Street in Chicago, which used to be open to all, the door is now kept locked and a visitor must ring for admission. At the New York City regional office on Spring Street, I was told: "Someone's here all the time to guard the place against crazy Cubans..." S.D.S.-ers are warned not to answer questions by the "survey-pigs," currently conducting a study of "campus unrest" for the American Council on Education. "Just as when the F.B.I. comes knocking," states an unsigned article in a recent issue of New Left Notes, "we must educate ourselves to understand that there is no friendly, or innocent, or 'objective' discussion with The Man. Aside from compiling dossiers on hundreds of thousands of people, these 'surveys' are part of the basis for the infiltration of The Movement. Where does an agent get his information about what to say, how to look and, most important, how to disrupt, divide and provoke? Straight from this type of material."

And recent events seem to lend weight to the S.D.S.-ers' fears. There have been arrests, not only of campus demonstrators, but of five S.D.S. leaders in a police "raid" on the national headquarters after a false report of a fire there. There was the severe beating of an S.D.S. founder, Richard Flacks, an assistant professor at the University of Chicago, by an unknown assailant. There have been Congressional hearings, notably by the House Internal Security (formerly Un-American Activities) Committee, and proposals for legislation to penalize disruptive students. President Nixon was moved to warn "self-righteous" radical students and "permissive...faculty members who should know better" that "we have the power to strike back."

In addition to threats from the outside, S.D.S. is beset by internal difficulties. Factionalism is so acrimonious within the organization—"racist" is a pet epithet—that Staughton Lynd, once a mentor of S.D.S., was prompted to write in a letter to New Left Notes: "Is it too much to ask that we try to recover the sense that we face overwhelmingly difficult objective problems to which no one has ready answers, and that we are all going to need each other in finding a way through them?"

Noting that, in the past, S.D.S. approached its political tasks experimentally, learning from its failures and its successes, Lynd bemoaned: "Present S.D.S. practice appears to me indistinguishable from that of the Old Left sects in the days of my youth. Caucuses form, meet secretly, and circulate position papers. Finally, amid much mutual denunciation, there is a vote. Whatever factional position gets most votes becomes 'the correct political perspective for the coming period.'"

What is missing, Lynd fears, is the formerly "shared commitment to certain ways of behaving toward each other, and toward all human beings. We did not feel this ethical commitment stood in opposition to Marxist analysis. It was one way to begin to "build the new society within the shell of the old."

S.D.S. is going through a political and generational change. Its founders are now going "over 30," and the present lot are barely into their 20's. For them, it scarcely seems possible that it was only seven years ago this month when 45 young people met at the old C.I.O.-U.A.W. summer camp at Port Huron, Mich., to consider, among other things, a 63-page document drawn up by a thin, pock-faced University of Michigan student, Tom Hayden. "We are people of this generation," the Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society began, "bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit." Two "immediate and crushing" problems—"human degradation, symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry" and "the enclosing fact of the cold war, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb"—compelled an end to silence and demanded "that we as individuals take the responsibility for encounter and resolution."

Finding the conventional moral terms—"free world" and "people's democracies"—wanting and "the dreams of the older Left...perverted by Stalinism and never re-created," the statement continued: "We would replace power rooted in possession, privilege or circumstances by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason and creativity. As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central claims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation."

Participatory democracy also entailed an abhorrence of violence, which "requires generally the transformation of the target, be it a human being or a community of people, into a depersonalized object of hate." The means of violence must be abolished, and institutions "that encourage non-violence as a condition of conflict [must] be developed."

Within two years, 20,000 mimeographed copies of The Port Huron Statement were distributed by S.D.S. The S.D.S. style—anarchistic, anti-ideological, committed and, above all, open—infused the so-called New Left, or The Movement, as the youngsters preferred to call it. High on personal relationships, S.D.S.-ers, for the most part, were down on "maintaining a dependency on fixed leaders." The 1965 S.D.S. convention downgraded the role of the presidency (later abolished) and virtually eliminated the key office of national secretary. Hair grew longer, beards and mustaches flourished. S.D.S. chapters began calling themselves "communes," and members began turning on.

In April, 1965, S.D.S. sponsored an antiwar march on Washington, bringing 25,000 students to the nation's capital. However, as Paul Booth, then national secretary of S.D.S. and now in the research department of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America,
Factionalism (opposition to the war, black power, Maoism, guerrillaism, hippieism, you name it) is dividing S.D.S., even as it confronts the status quo

A.F.L.-C.I.O., recently put it: "We had funny notions about the antiwar movement. After starting things up, we dropped it for a year and a half. It was a mistake." S.D.S., at the time, shied away from single issues, and favored a multi-issue orientation and the organization of local power bases.

In Berkeley, Chicago and Newark, S.D.S. went to the people, much as the Narodnicks of 19th-century Russia had done. Tom Hayden's Newark venture, now disbanded, was the most successful of the community union projects. S.D.S. was shut out, in the end, by the growing militancy of young blacks, and by the failure of the antipoverty forces to build alternative political structures to existing political parties and channels.

The 1965 S.D.S. convention took another step that was to have fateful consequences for the political coloration of the New Left: It removed the Communist-exclusion clause from its constitution. S.D.S. became open to all left factions - socialists, anarchists, populists, syndicalists, Communists (including Stalinists, Trotskyists and Maoists) and humanist liberals.

For a time, however, the Old Left showed little interest. The Communist party, for example, concentrated on building Du Bois Clubs wherever it could on college campuses; the Maoist Progressive Labor party concentrated on its own youth groups. Over the past two years, however, Progressive Labor has emerged as one of the major factions within S.D.S., the so-called Worker-Student Alliance caucus. Meanwhile, the Communist party was having its problems with the Du Bois Clubs, whose members were pulled two ways - toward black militancy and toward S.D.S.

As Mike Zagarell, the Communist national secretary of youth affairs, put it in a recent report to the C.P. national committee: While S.D.S. in 1966 "blossomed into a mass organization," the party youth "did not adequately get into S.D.S. for a number of reasons, two of which were (1) we did not see what was new and (2) so long as we tried to build Du Bois as a substitute for other movements we would not have a cadre for participation." However, all signs point to the Communist

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(Continued from Page 15) party's rectifying the error of its ways, and C.P. youth are now active in S.D.S., although as yet as a minority force. In the maneuvering within S.D.S. both the Communist and Progressive Labor party factions enjoy the tactical advantage of a national discipline imposed by an outside body.

MEMBERSHIP in S.D.S. is ill-defined, vague, a do-your-own-thing affair. Five dollars a year entitles a student to be a "national member" and to receive a subscription to New Left Notes. Not everyone who belongs to a chapter, however, becomes a national member. As one S.D.S. chapter member told me, "We don't push national membership very much." Chapter memberships sometimes swing wildly, rising and falling with attendance at S.D.S.-called meetings.

Nationally, S.D.S. membership fluctuates with the college year, and with the kinds of excitement S.D.S. generates on campus. Hard figures simply are no longer avail-

CONFRONTATION CONTRAST—During the 1968 crisis at Columbia, above, S.D.S. leader Mark Rudd rallies students against the university administration. Below, during this spring's S.D.S. sit-in at Columbia, an anti-S.D.S.-er is forcibly restrained.
A determined minority kicking a soft underbelly can hurt. The last count I could find appeared in the June 26, 1967, issue of New Left Notes, and it recorded membership of S.D.S. stands at 6,371. In addition, there are 588 people who subscribe to N.L.N. but are not members. Of the 6,371 members, over 4,774 have died since Jan. 1, 1967." The total chapter number was given as "almost 250," and "heavy membership states"--New York, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois and California. States in the South, Southwest and Rocky Mountains (except, Colorado) had few chapters and few members. Membership, of course, is not the sole criterion of strength, as the recent university shutdowns so clearly demonstrated. A determined minority kicking a soft underbelly can hurt. S.D.S., moreover, has always claimed a following beyond that of parallel membership. In March, 1967, issue of Tricontinental, published in Cuba by the executive secretary of the Organization of the Solidarity of the People of Africa, Asia and Latin America, an S.D.S. statement claims "over 40,000 national and local S.D.S. activists in more than 300 chapters in universities across the country." (My italics.) This spring, that claim rose to 70,000 to 100,- 000. My best estimate is that S.D.S. has roughly 7,500 national members, and influences some 10 times that number more or less directly.

S.D.S. chapters vary widely in character—from the highly factionalized chapters at Columbia, Harvard, the colleges of the City University of New York, the University of Chicago and several of the California colleges and universities to nonfactionsal chapters at such colleges as Stanford and Northwestern. There are also such S.D.S. splinters as the Crazies, who recently broke up a Norman Mailer mayoral campaign rally in New York, and the Lower East Side’s Up Against the Wall, Mother-—s. Both of these see themselves as unifying two groups, clowns, poets and pioneers of the revolution—as part of the "international wormyew conspiracy"—but, tied as they are to the drug culture, their chief link to the organized New Left appears to be compassionately liberal hall.

There is, I am told, a "lot of overlap" in membership between the Crazies and the Mothers. As to the Crazies’ exact relationship to S.D.S., I have heard of a best put by a New York S.D.S.-er who told me: "It’s hard to say. I don’t think they pay dues, but they do have a chapter." The Mothers actually are a chapter, while the Crazies are an irruption. Both, it seems to me, share a cult of violence, valuing disruption for disruption’s sake, even within S.D.S. meetings, and accent a destructive strain now evident on the hippie-cum-acid-head sector of the New Left.

RESUMABLY, when S.D.S. disrupts, as it did when it prevented South Vietnamese Ambassador Nguyen Huu Chi and The Times’s correspondent from speaking at New York University, it does so for political purposes, comprehensible as the act may be. The Crazies, however, seem motivated solely by the wish to destroy. It may be a distinction without a difference, since both act to suppress free speech, still, the one—the S.D.S. act—is an expression of left fascism, while the other is sheer nihilism.

As might be expected, the West Coast has its wilder fringes of the S.D.S., too—namely, a chapter once known as the Berkeley commune, but now calling itself the Molotov Cocktail party. Jack Nicholson and Peter Orberg, writing in New Left Notes, describe it as "a group of anarcho-Communists inspired by Hell Riders, a cycle club; Herbert Marcuse, the Mother—s of New York; and the peculiar state of war in which they now find themselves."

There are gentler communes, like the "new world commune," which announced itself in a mimeographed leaflet stapled to an ancient trunk outside Mathematic Hall during this spring’s S.D.S. seizure at Columbia as "unabashedly" seeking "communal love." It went on: "We have found loneliness ended in love, and finally touched. Now we seek to be together."

There is a Trotskyist group, the Council of Socialist Alliance, active within S.D.S., but a minor influence. Finally, there

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*I find another count of sorts. In the June 10, 1968, issue of New Left Notes, the editor makes a passing reference to 3,600 or so readers."
are S.D.S.-ers, as one regular put it, "who quote Bobby Kennedy, and consider that very revolutionary." Another, New York activist, who had been invited to speak at an Orange County Community College, was marched and tear gassed by S.D.S., returned to report how he spoke from a bandstand draped with red-and-blue bunting, "like it was five years ago." Such chapters and members might be classed among The Open Left, a loose collection of S.D.S.-ers from the smarter, less sophisticates chapters combined with a smattering of anarchists and suchlike. They are skeptical on rhetoric, ideology and centralism, and remain close in style to your hair." The Up Against the Wall types want to turn The Movement on. But, much more alarmingly, The Mothers have raised the slogan: "The Future of Our Struggle is the Future of Crime in the Streets." Their statement in New Left Notes last fall went on: "Being outside is the unifying characteristic of all those opposing America now, and being outside creates the needs that will motivate our struggle until it has destroyed all that we are outside of... A New Manifesto: There Are No Limits to Their Lavishness.

Some skepticism still exists within S.D.S. toward this sort of mindlessness. Specifically rebutting the Mothers, Fred Gordon, S.D.S. international education secretary and a leader of the Worker-Student Alliance group, asks: "What will the traditional working class (and other social groups) think of new lumpen classes that live off of other people and celebrates violence in the streets as a political program?""The Mothers, Gordon points out, justify their violence by saying they express the new mood of the nation's youth—that there already in process a tremendous movement toward violence and disruption. They are right about the changing mood. But do people really want every political meeting to end into a battle (provoked by us), and are our potential constituencies—such as the McCarthy youth drifting leftward—ready for bricks and bottles?"

Note, however, that neither Gordon nor other leading members of the S.D.S. reject violence out of hand. But, in 1967, George Calvert, then S.D.S. national secretary, announced: "We are working to build a guerrilla force in an urban environment. We are actively organizing sedition....Che's message is applicable to urban America as far as the psychology of guerrilla action goes."

"Violence," writes Gordon, "is good medicine for personal alienation; but now, as always, it is necessary to think in social terms in order to do good politics. If we are to use violence, let us use it politically."

The serious factional fight within S.D.S., however, does not turn on the question of violence, or the role of the Mothers, who are a tiny minority.

The no-holds-barred struggle is between the Progressive Labor party faction and
Progressive Labor's key resolution was entitled "Build a Worker-Student Alliance." It acknowledged that the struggle was about more than simply finding a voice for black students at S.U. The resolution opposed racism, but argued that "propagating [black] nationalism" would only play "the ruling class's game and do its work and make a profit on the basis of anything but class." The resolution ended with a call for revolutionary violence as necessary, and any compromises from the ruling class.

The National Office faction, in a sense, outflanked the P.L. on the left by embracing the Black Panther Party. The Panthers, said one N.O. speaker, "recognize the dialectical relationship between the liberation of the black conscious and socialist revolution for the whole society." As for the charge of "nationalism," Bob Avakian, of the Berkeley S.D.S., condemned Lenin and Mao as revolutionaries who supported nationalism.

The National Office resolution was adopted by a vote of about 2 to 1. The only società reservations were against the Chinese against "U.S.-Soviet collusion." The only opposition was from a tiny group of C.P. youth.

When I first wrote about S.D.S. for the Times (Nov. 7, 1965), I saw it as the emerging voice of "a new national student and radical Jewish youth. The struggle in Germany had money."
around our universities—students, college dropouts, gradu- 
ate students, graduates who have left the university but who have not left the uni-
versity neighborhood (espe-
cially in the larger cities), 
recent college and univer-
sity graduates, and profes-
sors in the lower ranks." I 
had in mind a rough analogy 
with the trade-union move-
ment—the C.I.O. of the nine-
teen-thirties or the Wobblies.
S.D.S. has taken up the 
grievances of this rather amor-
phous university-bound group-
ing. Even S.D.S.'s antiwar campaign has its roots in the movement.

Harry Harrington has pointed out: "For these young people, their trade-union interest is the war; it's as important to them as wages are to the worker."

Yet it seems to me that S.D.S. is currently swaying away from this "trade-union" line. It is increasingly scornful of student-power issues "fac-
ulty-student committees, and all that garbage." Trying to make the point that the word "repressive" is not quite the same thing as trying to re-
form them. Most students, in cluding a goodly number at-
tracted by its militant spirit to specific campus brouhahas, I take it, have a greater interest in the latter than in the former.

As the Paris peace talks 
took place, student-group spokesmen would expect a falling away from S.D.S. of many of the students initially attracted by its anti-
war tactics. It is clear that S.D.S. wants the revolution to go on, and Ho Chi Minh has been criticized by some in the Movement for his will-
aging to bring out the "right S.,

according to Klonoski, "is part of an international strug-
gle against imperialism and 
racism." Students wanting sim-
ilar things to the revolution to be the 
draft and R.O.T.C. are not li-
ely to take up cudgels for China against U.S.-Soviet collusion.

In short, I do not agree with those who argue that an 
end to the war will mean S.D.S. will go away and cam-
pus disturbances come to an end. S.D.S. has its foot in the door to radicalism, rebels against pa-
rental influence and those who find the drug culture and rock music and will continue to find S.D.S. as its vanguard ide-
ology attractive.

Percisely the best way to decide where S.D.S. is at—is its position on the political scene—to is to compare S.D.S. with the black students. The latter, I would argue, no matter how destruct-
ive than the universities are not out to destroy the universi-
ties. The black students want to carve out a piece of the
college turf, take some buildings for their very own—and, right or wrong, this is not the same as wanting to burn it all down. By now, I think it is clear that S.D.S. wants to shut down the universities, holding that that would expose, even more clearly than the Chicago police on a rampage, the repressiveness of our society.

For S.D.S., the issues do not matter. In New York City, for example, S.D.S. has given support to the black students and to their demands for opening up the universities to minorities. By so doing, S.D.S. has contributed to the shutdowns. At Oberlin, to cite another example, S.D.S. demonstrated against the Peace Corps, a move that won little student support. But the demonstrators had the good fortune to run up against an administration that happened to punish them outside the normal channels of discipline. As a result, student opinion rallied to their defense, and Oberlin was effectively disrupted for a time.

This indicates that all S.D.S. has to do on campus is to plug away until it hits upon an issue or event that produces the shutdown effect. And you need only a handful of students to accomplish this. Judging by recent legislative and trustee mutterings and actions, I would say that, for liberals and those interested in university reform, S.D.S. has become counterproductive. That is to say, almost whatever it does is more likely to produce a backlash, a counterreaction, than significant, positive change—unless, of course, campus disturbances are handled with considerable wisdom.

THIS does not mean there are no alternatives for radical youth. Unhappily, however, the democratic socialism of the Young People’s Socialist League, say, does not appeal to the extremism of the militantly mindless, bored-Bohemian, wild-in-the-street children of affluence. To be a radical is hard without the sustenance of a visible movement among one’s countrymen. A fake Leninism then becomes a way out for those who cannot take the lonely radical path. It offers an emotional tie to the toiling millions of the so-called third world, an identity with the romanticism of a Che Guevara, and a psychological lift through the power of Chairman Mao. Membership in S.D.S. combines an existential excitement along with an assurance of being with it in History.

Commitment is what counts. S.D.S.-ers could not care less that the Marxism-Leninism of Stalin murdered millions; that “morally wrong” means “wreak havoc with the noblest ends”; that violence only breeds violence. S.D.S. is not going to disappear, nor suddenly cease in importance if the Paris peace talks pay off in an end to the war in Vietnam. The very things that condemn it—a cult of violence, a totalitarian temperament and an elitist contempt for the values of working people—insure its survival. The New Left is no longer new, and the resurrection of the old sectarianism ordinarily would mean obscurity. But these are not ordinary times, and S.D.S. provocations may set loose the beast within us.