The American Left has fallen upon hard times. SDS, the largest and leading leftist youth organization a year ago, has fragmented on the national level into three sizable factions, several smaller ones, and a residue of thousands of unaligned members at the grass roots. Several hundred members of the Revolutionary Youth Movement, one of the three main factions, gathered last weekend in Atlanta to try to make a fresh start. It is not clear yet how successful they will be. RYM took several steps forward, but steps whose effects have so far been felt only internally. At the same time, there were a couple of steps back, and on some of RYM's most pressing problems, little or no movement at all.

RYM's major problems have been, since the SDS National Convention in June, sectarianism, dogmatism and waved Red Books and chanted slogans at each other. The fetish of sectarianism is probably a result of several factors—the expulsion of the Worker-Student Alliance (Progressive Labor) faction of SDS, which had generated much of it in the first place; the passage of time, during which RYM has had ample opportunity to observe the effects of its rhetorical posturing on other people; and the emergence within RYM of a powerful current of RYM women who, with some exceptions, seemed last weekend to take more sensible attitudes than the men toward much things. The question is whether the pendulum can swing back far enough and fast enough before RYM succumbs to its sectarianism or drown in a sea of rhetoric.

The most unfortunate aspect of RYM's sectarianism is that it often obscures the fact that RYM is generally the most understanding, poet bourgeois attitudes and national chauvinism are seen by RYM in terms of "repudiating privilege": i.e., whites must repudiate their "white-skin privileges" over blacks; men must repudiate their "male privileges" over women. Critics may find objection to this formulation:

1) It is next to impossible to organize anyone around the concept of giving up something. 2) White workers are not privileged at all—they also are exploited by imperialism, although not as much as blacks. White workers may be the trustees of the jail, a popular analogy goes, but they're prisoners, too. 3) Repudiation of privilege is a moralistic, liberal appeal to guilt and shame, when what is actually needed is an appeal to white workers' or males' own best interests.

All three objections seem to be semantic, once one understands what RYM really is saying. When RYM people get down to specific demands and concrete situations, a seemingly negative concept becomes more positive: open admissions to universities for black people; equal hiring, pay, working conditions, promotions, and fringe benefits for blacks and women; sharing of housework and child care by men; equal representation for women in decision-making bodies, etc. White workers and men are exhorted to give up their "privileges" over blacks and women not on the basis of guilt or shame, but because it is in their interest to do so: as long as whites and men hold on to their advantages, they will never be able to unite with blacks and women against the bosses and against imperialism, which oppresses all working people, men and women, black and white. The shame and guilt seem to be straw men conjured up in the minds of RYM's critics. And finally, to admit that men have privileges over women, or white workers over blacks, does not mean that all are not exploited and oppressed by imperialism: they are. The privileges, or, are illogical in the sense that they are much smaller than the benefits which would accrue to all working people, men and women, black and white, from the overthrow of imperialism.

The struggle against male supremacy and the repudiation of male privilege, came down from the realm of theory to the nitty-gritty of RYM's internal politics and the chauvinist attitudes of RYM men last weekend. The issue was forced by the unified action of the RYM women's caucus, with the internal program. (See continued to page 18)
know of to deal with male chauvinism in all of its ramifications. This was the conference's most significant achievement, and should serve as a reminder of the potential for positive change in future histories of the movement. An anti-imperialist organization of youth led by women is putting theory into practice and has the potential of catching the eye of many organizations. Unfortunately, there was no black caucus present to force both white men and white women to deal with white supremacy and our racist attitudes, a steering committee dominated by black women would have been even more of a mind-blower.

This example of RYM's internal practice should make it clear that positive currents are stirring within RYM. It is unfortunate that RYM seems to have a commitment to doing everything, even the positive things, in terms of negation: repudiate or give up privileges, fight against anti-communism, against fascism, against the exploitation of working men and women, against the oppression of youth, against imperialism, against racism, against national chauvinism, etc., etc. There is unfortunately some basis for the subject of the book media's image of radical youth as being opposed to everything but offering few positive alternatives. In particular, alibi many in RYM consider themselves communists and their end goal the dialectics of the proletariat, RYM does not describe itself as a socialist organization and has very little to say about what a socialist America would be like.

Part of this stems from RYM's definition of terms: "imperialism" is used in the Leninist sense to mean not merely a foreign policy but the highest stage of capitalism. Since imperialism and capitalism are synonymous by this definition, capitalism is rarely even mentioned in its utmost, socialism, it seems to be generally assumed that the fall of imperialism will lead automatically to socialism, and that little more need be said; that is, that's too optimistic. That is unfortunate. The time has come for an explicitly socialist organization with a liberating but down-to-earth vision of what socialism would mean in terms of equalizing wealth and power, production on the basis of need rather than profit, abolition of alienation, the development of human potential, the elimination of sexual and other obstacles to the fullest and freeest development of human potential.

It is an open fact, in count, that RYM has taken its theoretical lead from SDS. At the time of the SDS National Convention, RYM people talked of the need for SDS to become an explicitly socialist organization: "Fight for socialism" was one of their principles of unity" circulated in RYM several months ago. RYM people say it now has been dropped because 1) "socialism" has so many meanings that so many people mean so many different things by it, that it is open to misinterpretation; and 2) it would stand in the way of building a unit front against imperialism, e.g., some SDS people feel an anti-imperialist movement aren't ready for a socialist one. Sad.

Related to RYM's failure to articulate a positive vision of the new society is the question of how revolutionary aspects of hip culture. RYM correctly criticizes the reactionary strains in hip culture, but does not provide a clear vision of how hard work, lack of class consciousness, indoctrinate pacifism, vestiges of male chauvinism and other hangovers from bourgeois upbringing. But RYM often misses the part for the whole; hip culture is extremely heterogeneous. RYM appears to have little awareness of the extent to which the institutions, attitudes and ideas are suitable for a libertarian, socialist America—new attitudes toward and new kinds of work, openness to new currents of community and egalitarianism, new forms for the family, gut aversion to all manifestations of militarism, nonrepressive personality structures, saner attitudes toward the environment—are developing and being experimented with right now by young Americans outside the political movement.

RYM reaffirmed its intention of taking a more vital role in the antiwar movement. There was a consensus that RYM should work thru the New Mobilization Committee on Imperialism (NMC), a recently-grown Student Mobilization Committee to help build the antia war movement, transform it into an anti-imperialist movement and west control of it from "bourgeois, liberal and Trotskyist" elements. The same consensus was present at the SDS National Convention in June, but those good intentions were transformed by the Weathermen-led move into an anarchy, populating, window-breaking spree in the streets of Chicago.

Right now, RYM's most pressing problems are organizational ones. It has been decided to establish a national office in Chicago, to put out a position paper on its principles, and to launch a mass newspaper. All these things and more will be necessary to halt the present tendencies toward disintegration. But in the long run, RYM's survival probably depends on finding answers to the problems which shattered SDS—specifically, RYM will have to find a way to have a ideological debate and struggle without the sectarianism, manipulation and rhetorical posturing which has accompanied it in the past. All one can say at this point is that there are a few hopeful signs.