

SDS Convention Report
by Carol L.

The 1967 National Convention of SDS was held in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan, June 25-30. A National Council meeting followed, July 1-2. Of the 350-400 in attendance, approximately 150 were elected delegates from local chapters on the basis of one delegate per five members as well as about 25 at-large delegates. The former had five votes at the Convention, the latter one.

Workshops, discussions and regional caucuses were held on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The largest workshops were the draft, foreign policy, relations with other groups, and the University. Other workshops included: antiwar, working class and labor, the poor, civil rights, electoral politics, the new working class, the women question and power research. Another large workshop was on organization. The YSA participated in the workshops on foreign policy and antiwar.

(We established literature tables throughout the entire convention, as did PL and Spartacist. We sold over \$250.)

The Convention plenary opened Wednesday evening with a debate on credentials and agenda. Ann Arbor, the largest delegation, was challenged and a significant number of its delegates were refused seating. Voice (Ann Arbor SDS) has recently had its difficulties with the national office and rumors during the convention were of split.

Plenary Session, Thursday, June 29

Agenda: Officers reports, Relations with Other Youth Groups, Antiwar, University, Liberation of Women, the Draft and Miscellaneous.

Officers' Reports

Nick Egleson, outgoing national president of SDS, reported on his recent trip to Hanoi as well as an analysis of the past year's functioning of SDS. Egleson suggested renewed trips to both Hanoi and Prague where meetings would be held with North and South Vietnamese resistance fighters. Egleson related how the organization functioned this past year. He said that "we should no longer consider ourselves as a paper organization" . . . "The quality of our leadership has risen and there has been a deepened political understanding of our members." Vital statistics appeared in a membership report printed in the Convention issue of New Left Notes (NLN):

"The recent membership of SDS stands at 6,371. In addition there are 588 people who subscribe to NLN who are not members. Of the 6,371 members only 875 have paid their dues since January 1, 1967. The rest seem to think

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that the only thing they have to do is pay once and then forget it.

"Since last August (1966) 38 chapters have applied for and received recognition. This brings the total chapter number to almost 50 . . . The majority of the new chapters are smaller schools with a heavy portion of them located in the Midwest and North Midwest." (p. 16 NLN)

Egleson related that the problems of the organization centered around the need for an adequate staff, for the organization to support financially its national officers and staff as well as no longer continuing the division between organizational and political officers.

(Concerning the question of paper membership, it is obvious that only, and no more than, 750 members were represented by delegates at the Convention.)

Relations with Other Youth Groups

Three position papers were placed on the floor for discussion: (1) A proposal by Bob Speck concerning the defense of radical organizations attacked by the government. The resolution was received fairly well. There were a few remarks attacking the YSA, and not wanting to support defense efforts that concern our members. The spirit of the convention and the resolution were just the opposite:

". . . Taking as our watchword the slogan of solidarity we maintain that an injury to one of us is an injury to all of us. We maintain further that part of the pattern of oppression is an attempt to splinter the Left and create self-destructive, internal conflicts. Sds will not allow itself to fall prey to the errors of the Left in the Forties and Fifties. We contend that whenever the government feels that some Left group is so dangerous that the government must attack and destroy it, we will support that group by all means at our command, regardless of the groups political ideology. . . ."

PL voted for the resolution but did not speak in support of it from the floor. (2) On SNCC and RAM A resolution was passed with little discussion supporting SNCC and RAM in the recent events in Texas and New York respectively. (3) Resolution on the Relationships with Student and Youth from other Countries The first section of the resolution was passed disaffiliating SDS from the CIA supported International Union of Socialist Youth. Other Sections dealt with establishing fraternal relationship with other youth groups and congresses as well as the possibility of calling an International Conference of radical youth and student organizations. There was general apprehension by the body to establish ties with any organization or congress about which little was known. Earl Silbar (Chicago

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PL and PL floor leader) put forth a substitute motion in essence calling off any decisions until the next December NC meeting, carrying out a literary discussion until then in NLN and establishing informal relations with various organizations to gain further information. (PL began playing it rather cool on questions on which they had disagreements which they thought were minor by passing and supporting delaying motions.) The motion passed.

During the discussion on this point, one of the periodic outbursts from the "anarchist" section of the convention developed. Paper airplanes, water pistol fights, bell ringing and song singing disrupted the convention for approximately five minutes. During an earlier discussion on the agenda, an apology was made for having to use "bourgeois" rules of parliamentary procedure -- a delegate card-burning took place.

Another Section of the resolution was passed accepting an invitation from Cuba (if it comes), to attend the July Tri-Continental Conference in Havana with an amendment making the representative an informal one. A rider was proposed by Eric Chester of VOICE (Draperite from Ann Arbor SDS) attacking Cuba from a third camp position. The amendment was categorically defeated.

Antiwar

A resolution was passed attacking the call for the Washington demonstration in October and the need for mass actions. It urged SDS Chapters to participate in the mobilization according to the following conditions: (1) to urge the mobilization committee to adopt the position of "immediate withdrawal" and if it doesn't, for all chapters to participate under this banner, (2) to urge the NMC to use the demonstration only as a tool for organizing and (3) to recognize that visits to the White House will not end the war and that statements to this effect should cease. Only one SDS'er urged support to the mobilization on the basis of support to mass actions against the war. He received no support.

A second resolution to mandate SDS to send an observer to bodies of the National and Student Mobilization Committees without officially using SDS's name was passed. The Student Mobilization Committee was attacked under this point and there was strong opposition to even sending an observer. The motion passed by a slim majority of 246-201. PL opposed the motion.

A third resolution was passed stating a position against "negotiations" and the "stop the bombing" slogan and reaffirming their position of withdrawal as the only slogan.

The University

An eight point program for a national student strike against

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the war in Vietnam, with a multi-issue approach, was proposed from the workshop. There was general support for the idea but the concrete situation left much to be desired (i.e. they mentioned that it would take a change in the war and in the consciousness of the students to carry it out). The strike was to be considered in the spring. An amendment was presented and passed as follows:

All chapters should discuss the strike. We should hold a literary discussion in NLN. All chapters are requested to send a report to the N.O. on the feasibility of a strike before the December N.C. meeting. On the basis of the above information, if at least ten chapters say they can hold an effective strike -- then the December N.C. can consider it.

The eight point program was passed as amended above except for the last point dealing with the goals of the strike. Included in the motion was support for and participation in the fall campus referendums called by the SMC.

Liberation of Women

Discussion opened on this point with cries of "pussy power" from the floor. The discussion lasted two and one half hours. The level of discussion left much to be desired. A whole layer of the women in SDS placed themselves in the same status of colonial subjugation and second class citizenship as their "black brothers" and "3rd world toilers." There was some attempt to discuss the problems that women face in SDS today, but the discussion degenerated into a soul session.

Anti-draft

There were four resolutions submitted for plenary discussion. (1) SDS draft resolution -- 1967 Convention, (2) Vietnam War and Draft Resolution -- PL, (3) We will go -- a resolution on the draft -- Spartacist, and, (4) A resolution on the October 16 Movement (a proposal to have individual anti-draft activities in a number of cities on October 16).

The chair placed the first resolution on the floor for discussion -- allowing discussion and debate in relation to this resolution. (CBS was allowed to film the first hour of discussion on the draft for a documentary on the New Left.)

After a 20 minute committee-as-a-whole discussion, the floor was opened for debate. Jeff Shero, Texas SDS, introduced an amendment:

"SDS encourages chapters and draft resistance unions to aid servicemen in disseminating information on conscientious objection and the war in Vietnam, as well as aid them

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in opposition and disruption within the army. We also urge aid to servicemen who wish to terminate their association with the army by going underground."

Discussion for the following hour or so centered around the recent antiwar sentiment among the soldiers. There was overwhelming support for the amendment. There was no inkling during the discussions in the draft workshops of SDS moving in this direction. A Spartacist in the armed services spoke at one of the sessions that I attended, and no real attention was paid to the question of the GIs. They went wild during this session and began to speak about standing clearly for disruption within the army. "We (SDS) have to create a visibility -- so we can come to you." Spartacist was calmer and presented a steady line of disseminating information and educating the soldiers about the war. PL didn't speak on the motion but voted for it.

Silbar presented the "PL Resolution" as a substitute for the "SDS Resolution" and accepted the Shero amendment as friendly. PL was attacked for supporting the WW II draft as well as the war itself by the pacifists and Spartacist.

Silbar also accepted as a friendly amendment the last four paragraphs of the "SDS Resolution" as amended in an attempt to get their resolution passed. At this point for the first time PL was red baited from the floor, and an all out attack on their resolution began. The majority felt that opposition to the draft shouldn't stem from the war in Vietnam as the PL Resolution pointed to, but from the nature of the draft itself. The existence of the war, they said, only can help the anti-draft movement -- but the main focus should be the draft and not the war. The PL Resolution was defeated 192-400. The "SDS Resolution" passed as amended.

The draft resolution that was passed neither encourages SDS'ers and others to go to Canada or jail, nor does it really offer much of a program except to build draft resistance unions. Their big thing was organizing an "underground" anti-draft movement. The session ended after 5 hours of discussion.

The Shero amendment is subject to reversal by the membership and has to be ratified by a membership referendum due to it being illegal.

Plenary Session, Friday, June 30

Agenda: Cultural Revolution, Civil Rights, Labor, Organizations and Election of Officers.

Cultural Revolution
Not much.

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Civil Rights

Civil Rights workshop proposal was adopted with an amendment making more explicit organizing in white working-class communities both North and South; support for the Black struggle. Very little discussion. Passed almost automatically.

Labor

Labor Resolutions all passed with little discussion. The major force behind two of them was obviously PL, and the center of SDS labor activity and organizing will be with the Harvard chapter.

A resolution was passed in support of the Rio Grande City farm workers and support to their boycott of Star City products. Discussion on the "New Working Class" was practically nil.

Organizational

More structure was given to the National Office, with the division between organizational and political officers gone. All are to share both responsibilities. Three new national officers replaced the past structure: National Secretary, National Educational Secretary and Inter-Organizational Secretary. A national interim committee of 8 plus the three national officers was instituted to meet every month. This body will make decisions between national council meetings and the National Officers will meet between Interim Committee meetings, to make emergency decisions.

Election of Officers

Three people ran for National Secretary: Mike Speigal -- Harvard SDS; Jeff Segal -- National Anti-draft Co-ordinator; and Eric Chester -- Ann Arbor VOICE. Mike Speigal won the election, the margin not being disclosed. Speigal does not at all represent the anti-draft section of SDS and is little concerned with the draft. He has played a major role in the Labor subcommittee at Harvard, is friendly to PL, but is not a member and doesn't agree with them on many issues i.e. independent political action. Jane Adams spoke from the floor in support of Speigal and called Segal an administrative incompetent.

Other officers elected were: National Educational Secretary -- Bob Pardon; Inter Org. Secretary -- Carl Davidson; National Officers (Interim Committee) -- Jeff Shero (Texas), Sue Eanet (New York), Kathy Wilkerson (Chicago), Steve Halliwell (New York), Greg Calvert (Chicago), Jeff Segal (Chicago), John Fuerst (New York), and Mike James (Chicago).

Plenary Session, Saturday, July 1

Agenda: Internal Education, Organizational (NLN, Elect NAC and relations with the press), Draft.

Internal Education

Proposal on Radical Educational Center passed with minor amendments.

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Organizational

Motion that the National Officers of SDS shall only state to the press the views of National SDS as approved by referendum, conventions, national council meetings and in emergency NIC. National Officers should not express their personal views to the press even when qualified as their personal views. And furthermore they should not use their offices outside of SDS to further new political strategy which have not been approved by the official making bodies of SDS. Failed

Motion the two members of the NIC should be on the NAC.
Passed.

Be it resolved that the NIC should take up formally any complaints made by vote of a chapter regarding the editorial style of NLN. And that if any such complaints are widespread, they should be taken up at the next National Council meeting. Carried.

Be it resolved that the NC authorize the inclusion of letters to the editor and encourages the publication of theoretical articles and replies to them on a regular basis in NLN. Carried.

Draft

Under this discussion on the implementation of the draft, the YSA submitted a resolution in support of Petrick. The resolution read as follows:

SDS supports the right of members of the armed services to hold and express views in opposition to those of the U.S. government. SDS condemns the efforts of the U.S. government and military apparatus to curtail those rights.

Pfc. Howard Petrick, stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, has made use of his constitutional rights of freedom of thought and expression by discussing the war in Vietnam with his fellow GIs. Because he opposes that war, and because opposition to the war is growing within the army, the U.S. government has acted to silence him. Petrick has been threatened with courtmartial, the only charges against him based on his ideas and discussions.

SDS commends Petrick for his work in trying to bring the truth about the Vietnam War to those who are being forced to fight it. We support the Committee to Defend the Rights of Pfc. Howard Petrick.

Earl Silbar opposed the motion and offered a substitute. He said that the YSA is "sowing the seeds of bourgeois democracy" in this defense campaign and that the resolution is not in line with the general line of the anti-draft resolution that SDS passed at the Convention. The substitute motion was passed as follows:

SDS supports and encourages all those in the army who

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oppose the war in Vietnam e.g. Petrick, Stapp, Mora, Samas, Johnson and Levy.

We condemn the governments attempt to suppress this opposition. The government is trying by this action to intimidate soldiers and thereby continue its Imperialist war against the Vietnamese and American people. And in doing so, the government exposes its refusal to act according to its own constitution when that would threaten its interests.

The discussion lasted about 30 minutes and we were hampered in discussing much from the floor and had only one YSA-SDS member there. From what I understand (and I wasn't at the session) there was general reaction against attacks from the floor on the YSA and those who offered no support to "YSA defense cases" were booed down.

National Council Session, Sunday, July 2

Agenda: Foreign Policy and Miscellaneous.

Discussion on Mid-East: No resolutions passed. Much division in house.

Discussion on Soviet Union: Motion to send a representative to 50th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution celebration in the Soviet Union. That the delegate going try to organize opposition to the Soviet Union government's policy of peaceful co-existence, betrayal of the Vietnamese Revolution; that the delegate take Soviet Union money to finance the trip. Carried.

Motion was passed for NLN and REC to publicize Latin American events.

The last session of the National Council meeting, Sunday, was sparse and very little was taken up.