

REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST CAUCUS Newsletter

Number 1

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LEFT OPPOSITION AT NEW HAVEN

The New Haven National Council meeting late last December witnessed the emergence of a left opposition in SDS, centered around the Spartacist League and its supporters. Unlike Lynn Marcus' Labor Committee, which had played a right-wing oppositional role previously in the Eastern region of the country (but whose participation at this conference was even less than token), our role was buttressed by a number of affirmative resolutions and position papers--most notably The Fight for Women's Liberation and our motivating paper on the question of racism, Racial Oppression and Working-class Politics. As a result, the Worker-Student Alliance (WSA) leadership was compelled by the vote of the membership to allow a Spartacist spokesman to address the Convention on the speaker's panel in the Plenary session. In response to our criticism and political discussion, the apolitical, conservative nature of the WSA caucus was clearly revealed.

The focus of our criticism of the WSA caucus and its campus worker-student alliance strategy was our document "Away From Campus Parochialism and Toward the Labor Movement", (attached to this report) which concluded with the following resolution: "A major activity of SDS should be involvement in off campus social struggles, particularly labor struggles."

Campus Parochialism and Social Work

The above resolution embodies two criticisms of the CWSA. The first is its narrow concentration on the campus. A working-class orientation means, first of all, belief in the importance of the labor movement and a desire to influence its policies. In this period of rising labor struggles, to concentrate on campus labor grievances is to insure
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MEET THE RMC NEWSLETTER

We are publishing this newsletter to make our ideas and analyses available to the most consistent and subjectively radical youth in this country. Our view of the problems of building a genuine radical student and working-class youth group derives from a consistent, many-faceted revolutionary perspective. In Boston SDS this radical youth perspective has found organizational form.

There is another reason. Despite the polite fiction that Boston SDS is a genuinely non-exclusionary organization, our letters, resolutions and documents have been systematically excluded from the pages of New Left Notes. John Pennington's report of the New Haven NC in Jan. 10 NLN concealed the existence of an oppositional caucus on the vital debate for the future of SDS over the CWSA and other issues. The Guardian report and even the bourgeois press (New Haven Journal-Courier: Mon. Dec. 29, 1969) openly acknowledged our presence. But Pennington deceptively inferred that there might be a hypothetical argument against the CWSA by beginning a paragraph with the phrase "some would say." Therefore, in order to get our affirmative resolutions and declarations before the SDS membership, we have been forced to make our own channels of communication.

Helen Cantrell, Newsletter Editor Mark Tishman, RMC Coordinator
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NOT NEGOTIATIONS, BUT VICTORY FOR THE
VIETNAMESE REVOLUTION!

SDS's political irrelevance. Students are attracted to radical politics because they want fundamental changes in society, and SDS should serve as a vehicle for involving students in important social struggles. While major labor struggles were singled out, the resolution opposed the generally narrow sectarianism of the WSA, which has kept SDS out of the anti-war movement, the GI movement, the Black movement and the women's liberation movement, as well as ordinary student-administration conflicts. In fact, it was precisely in response to our criticisms, made in The Fight for Women's Liberation and on the floor, that the originally greatly defective WSA resolution on the topic was amended to insert a call for SDS to intervene in the women's liberation movement. Notwithstanding this somewhat minor improvement, our clearly superior document (as a comparison with the WSA resolution printed in the 10 January New Left Notes will clearly indicate) was ritualistically excoriated and mechanically voted down in favor of the inferior document.

More fundamentally, the CWSA is apolitical. The CWSA does not organize around a radical program, but mobilizes students to support workers' grievances (or what the CWSA thinks ought to be workers' grievances) in a manner approaching social work. In part, this apolitical "give the worker a helping hand) line stems from the CWSA's narrow focus. The major problems of society obviously cannot be resolved in the campus cafeteria. However, within the campus framework, the CWSA does not seek to change the structure of the university, even in the area of labor relations, but limits itself to agitating about this or that grievance as an isolated campus incident. For example, a genuinely radical approach to campus workers would be to work for a national, industrial union of campus employees from dishwashers through professors with a sort of formal auxiliary status for students.

A Student Auxiliary of the Labor Bureaucracy?

When the WSA does emerge from campus cafeterias, its political conceptions risk making SDS a student auxiliary of the trade union bureaucracy. The WSA caucus conceives of building the worker-student alliance simply by materially supporting workers' struggles. In practice, the WSA hasn't concentrated on supporting class struggles, but on aiding individual workers along social work lines. However, even if the WSA concentrated on strike support activities, this would alone be inadequate and conservative. The WSA opposes in principle raising programmatic demands against the trade union bureaucracy. The main argument advanced justifying this WSA policy is that students can't tell workers what to do. (They abandon this approach only on issues of racism and male chauvinism.) This abstentionist argument shows complete ignorance of the labor movement under capitalism everywhere. The goals, strategy and tactics of most labor struggles do not reflect the spontaneous will of the rank-and-file, but are imposed upon the workers by the union bureaucrats, often against considerable opposition. Radical workers facing an entrenched union bureaucracy feel weak and isolated, and would welcome support from a mass student organization.

In a certain sense, the present policy of the WSA leadership is unfortunately similar to that of SDS at its inception. SDS was initially the youth group of the League for Industrial Democracy (LID), an organization of social democratic politicians such as Michael Harrington and Bayard Rustin, supported by liberal trade union bureaucrats like Walter Reuther. A major activity for early SDS was mobilizing student support for various labor struggles, including union "struggle" to elect Democratic Party politicians. Implicit in SDS at that time was the understanding that SDS would simply mobilize student support for labor actions and not oppose the basic thrust of labor movement policy. The LID broke with SDS when it repudiated its anti-communism, support for American imperialism in Vietnam and the Democratic Party. Only the complete discrediting of cold-warrior American social democracy gives the semblance of radicalism to the WSA policy of support for labor struggles without a radical social program. The trade union bureaucracy favors a "worker-student alliance," provided they can determine its policies. Labor leaders have nothing against students as a social group, but only against student radicals who oppose their political line.

The New Old Liberalism in SDS

The difference between our concept of supporting labor struggles and the WSA's approach was clearly brought out in the debate over the GE strike. The WSA's GE strike resolution called for demonstrations, picket line support, implementing the boycott, etc. As far as it goes, this is correct. However, this in no way distinguishes SDS from the Student Mobe, the DuBois Clubs and the many student liberals who are supporting the GE strike. Moreover, the leadership of the UE and IUE is also seeking to mobilize support from student liberals and radicals. We sought to amend the WSA resolution with a statement calling upon the thirteen international unions involved in the GE strike to call a one day general strike in support of GE strikers and for the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam. The purpose of such a demand is to state explicitly that the strike is about whether the working class is going to pay for the war and its inflation, to transcend the "business as usual" tactics of the union bureaucrats, and to distinguish SDS from the liberal strike supporters, and thereby attract the most radical GE workers. The arguments used against our proposal amounted to a prohibition against ever challenging trade union leadership policies when supporting a labor action.

SDS support to labor struggles without opposition to the politics of the trade union bureaucracy can only strengthen that bureaucracy by providing a "left" cover. The fact that radicals are supporting a picket line does not, in itself, make that a radical action; to believe that it does is a form of individualistic idealism. To the extent that SDS acts like a liberal organization, it becomes a liberal organization.

The Resurgence of Anti-communism

One of the most disturbing aspects of the conference was the pervasive use of anti-communist arguments in response to our proposals. The ideological core of the WSA caucus can be characterized as "economist". Economism, as defined by Lenin, is the belief that the day-to-day oppression of workers, reflected in trade union struggles, is sufficient to develop a socialist consciousness. It denies the necessity of socialist propaganda and the raising of demands that can't be won by ordinary trade union methods. Underlying the "we can't tell the workers what to do" line is the belief or wish that the mass of American workers, simply because they're workers, are more politically advanced than SDS. In the GE strike debate, one WSA'er stated that it wasn't necessary to discredit the union bureaucracy, since the workers had no illusions about their leaders. If this is true, then how come the rank-and-file permit their mis-leaders to wield such enormous power? Moreover, if the workers have no illusions about their union leaders, then, presumably, the millions of workers who voted for Nixon, Humphrey, or Wallace have no illusions about these men, either. In that case, the workers would have to be consciously pro-capitalist or masochistic. The argument that "the workers know what's best for them" is but a step removed from the reactionary argument that capitalism is in the best interest of the American workers because, in general, they support it and are hostile to the socialist movement. If capitalism could not succeed in gaining the allegiance of large numbers of the workers it exploits, it would have died as a social system the day it was born.

Since the politics of the WSA is obviously--and grossly--at odds with elementary Leninism, a good part of the WSA's arguments consist in attacking Leninism. The idea that Lenin's concepts of socialist strategy might have relevance for SDS was greeted by WSA'ers with ridicule. Unique American activism was hailed as a superior guide to socialist theory. Speaker after speaker got up to explain how his experience organizing the CWSA at Northeastern Mass. was more important in determining SDS's policies than the writings of Marx and Lenin, the history of the socialist movement and even the nature of the European student movement. The endless and unedifying retailing of information about particular campus cafeterias almost entirely overshadowed discussion of program and the political content of the CWSA orientation. It was almost like being in the New Left SDS of a few years ago, when the likes of Greg Calvert and Carl Davidson expounded how their experiences organizing students superseded all previous "dogmatic", "obso-

lete" socialist theory. And, of course, bourgeois apologists of all kinds argue that while Marx's and Lenin's theories may have relevance for some places at some times, it obviously doesn't "work" in America today. In part, these anti-communist sentiments in SDS undoubtedly reflect political inexperience. However, for purely factional reasons, the ostensibly Marxist-Leninist Progressive Labor Party encouraged this championing of narrow empiricism and "mindless activism" over Marxist principles, theory, and practice.

WSA Even Opposes Abortion!

The WSA prefers to ignore Leninist theory and practice because Lenin wrote that to deprecate socialist ideology, or deviate from it in the slightest, amounts to promoting bourgeois ideology. Some of the WSA leaders know that Lenin argued that, and they know what his views would mean for the CWSA program of isolated small reforms which are generally even more reformist and trifling than the program of a reactionary, bourgeois-led trade union. Lenin understood that in capitalist society bourgeois ideology is much stronger and more pervasive than socialist consciousness, and it will seep into the cracks in any organization which works for reforms while ignoring ideology and program. The truth of Lenin's view, and the passive and conservative nature of the WSA was clearly brought out in the discussion of women's liberation. The WSA document on women's liberation was limited to supporting more day care centers, opposing job discrimination and male supremacist attitudes in men. Our document on women's liberation located the oppression of women in the social division of labor inherent in the family structure. As well as covering the same programmatic points as the WSA document, it developed a program aimed at opposing the family as a basic social institution. But the WSA caucus came out in favor of the family as a social institution, even going so far as to oppose demanding abolition of anti-abortion laws. This incredible and flatly un-communist position reflects a fear of criticizing cultural values held by many workers--values which are developed in the working class under capitalism precisely because they support the bourgeois order. We await with interest the position of the WSA caucus on organized religion, another institution which enjoys widespread working-class support.

The Question of Internal Democracy

We do not want the issue of internal democracy in SDS to be the main bone of contention between ourselves and the WSA and regret having to bring up the question at all. The campus worker-student alliance strategy was imposed upon SDS by the leadership in a short space of time without any serious discussion among the membership. In part, this reflects the objectionable tendency of WSA leaders to identify the interests of the WSA caucus with those of SDS as a whole. The WSA leaders like to pretend that the CWSA is a spontaneous reflection of chapter "practice". This is simply a lie. As many pro-CWSA speakers such as Alan Spector noted, the CWSA strategy was a policy decision of the WSA caucus deliberately different from the mainstream of student radicalism, which remains basically an anti-war movement.

The purpose of the December conference was not to discuss the desirability of the CWSA strategy (this was taken for granted), but to discuss ways of implementing it. The WSA leadership attempted to thwart any attempt to challenge the basic thrust of the CWSA strategy. The second day of the conference, a plenary session was held with three speakers relating their experiences in building the CWSA. The NIC denied our request for speakers opposed to the CWSA and the right for other views to be heard had to be by a floor fight. The main WSA resolutions were printed in New Left Notes prior to the conference. Our proposal to print the undiscussed documents in New Left Notes (only two of the seven were ours) was opposed by the WSA and none have appeared. It is clear that without our opposition, the conference would have degenerated into a pep talk for the CWSA, with speakers alternating between recounting their triumphs and blaming their failures on the bourgeois private attitudes of the membership. The emphasis the WSA leaders put on the "bourgeois attitudes" of the membership also has an important bearing on the question of internal democracy. If the CWSA is successful, it is proclaimed as a great strategy. If it fails, that reflects the psychological inadequacy of the rank-and-file.

Thus, leadership stays immune from criticism. We maintain that the failures and weaknesses of SDS do not stem from the "bad ideas" of the membership, but from the two-for-a-nickel reformist political program of the leadership.

Both Opportunist AND Sectarian

An equally serious breach of the norms of revolutionary conduct was the Guardian incident. The conference excluded the Guardian reporter on the grounds that the Guardian was part of the "bourgeois press," because it was hostile to SDS. By the same logic, a representative of the Black Panthers could have been excluded from the conference, since the Panthers are more virulently hostile to SDS than the Guardian, the latter's hostility stemming primarily from its belief that SDS should be the white student auxiliary of the Panthers. The tendency to regard one's radical political opponents as part of the class enemy is the hallmark of sectarianism, and can only perpetuate the disunity and ineffectiveness of the left, with each faction fighting its opponents with any method available, including use of the cops and the courts. Identifying political opponents on the left with the bourgeoisie is dangerous because it leads to failure to oppose state repression of other radical organizations. A good example of this occurred in the early '40's when the Communist Party supported the Smith Act prosecution of the then Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party, on the grounds that the latter was counter-revolutionary. The kind of tactics used against the Guardian can only strengthen irrational factional hatred in the student movement and make the development of a mass, inclusive SDS impossible.

Fight for a Socialist Student Movement!

The CWSA made no serious attempt to answer our political criticisms. Most defenses of the CWSA were mere affirmations of simple organizational loyalty. At times, this amounted to the simple-minded position that since we have worked so hard to build the CWSA, it would be a shame to abandon it now.

We believe that the majority of SDS members, as well as most student radicals, want SDS to be an organization which fights for socialist revolution in the broadest, most effective way. The majority votes for the WSA resolutions reflected not a positive belief in the virtues of CWSA strategy, but a fear that rejection of the CWSA at this time would seriously disrupt the organization and lead to the defection of the leading cadre with a political stake in the WSA caucus. This kind of organizational conservatism can only destroy SDS. Those of us who want SDS to be a militant, socialist student organization, challenging every aspect of American society, must organize a viable opposition to the WSA caucus. We call upon all members of SDS who are in general agreement with the document "Away from Campus Parochialism and Toward the Labor Movement" to become part of a left, Marxist oppositional caucus.

Mark Tishman
Jan. 16, 1970

MAJOR RMC SUPPORTERS' POSITION PAPERS FROM THE NEW HAVEN MEETING

available free on request:

"Racial Oppression and Working-class Politics" (6 pages)

and

"The Fight for Women's Liberation" (7 pages)

from: RMC Newsletter, c/o Helen Cantrell

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Away From Campus Parochialism
and Toward the Labor Movement

The Campus Worker-Student Alliance represents a step backward for the student movement insofar as it presents the main role of student radicals as one of changing the academic community. Students who are and should be attracted to SDS are interested in changing U.S. society, not their particular campuses. A working-class orientation flows from an understanding of the strategic role of the working class in society and necessitates intervention in those struggles where that strategic role is most evident. Such an orientation, further, will be a contribution to the building of the vanguard party. The CWSA's "on campus" orientation repels many politically conscious students, who want to involve themselves in the major social struggles currently taking place. Moreover, the emphasis on individual campus organizing strengthens the fragmentation and de-politicalization of the student left now taking place as a result of the splits in SDS.

In practice, the CWSA orientation has led to effectively ignoring the G.E. strike, the most important national strike in several years. Rather than making a major effort to mobilize student strike support, with radical political demands directed to the striking workers, the SDS national leadership has limited itself to a single demonstration which no G.E. worker is ever likely to find out about. This "working-class orientation" which has no relevance to decisive labor struggles must end.

Accordingly, we must agree in general with the main thrust of the recent Berkeley and Boston position papers, "For a Transitional Program--Worker-Student Alliance" and "From Economism to Leninism".

Resolved: That a major activity for SDS be involvement in off-campus social struggles, particularly labor struggles.

(signed)

Dec. 28, 1969

Ken Becker, Marietta SDS

Tweet Carter, Tallahassee SDS, Spartacist

Gene Fuchs, Stony Brook SDS

Robert Heimer, Reed College SDS

Robert Hume, Chico State SDS

Malcolm Kaufman, New York SDS, Socialist Comm. of Corr.

Chris Kinder, Berkeley SDS, Spartacist

George Kukich, MIT-SDS, Spartacist

Carl Lichtenstein, Harvard SDS

Caroline Levine, Columbia SDS, Socialist Comm. of Corr.

Linda Reynolds, SDS

Daniel Ruchames, New York SDS

Joel Salinger, NYU-SDS, Spartacist

Paul Sandahl, New Haven SDS, Socialist Comm. of Corr.

Steve Schmidhauser, Univ. of Iowa SDS, Spartacist

John Sebesta, Austin SDS, Spartacist

Cliff Taylor, Memphis MDS

Mark Tishman, New School SDS, Spartacist

FROM ECONOMISM TO LENINISM

The Students for a Democratic Society and particularly the Worker-Student Alliance caucus have arrived at a working class perspective, which, although far superior to the petty bourgeois politics of the RYM splitters, is nevertheless an incomplete perspective which leads to opportunist distortions. The SDS and WSA recognize that only the working class has the power to end the Vietnam war and put a stop to imperialism. However, their view does not go beyond this empirically derived insight, so that there is a marked tendency to see the working class as just another ally, certainly the most powerful ally, for the student movement. Thus, this alliance is at best conceived of as a form of mutual support between groups of students and workers in struggles for distinct group interests.

There is no recognition of the proletariat as a class for itself, which, because of its position in the capitalist mode of production, has an historic role to play in the destruction of capitalism and the building of socialism. Student recognition of the revolutionary primacy of the working class means struggling with the working class for a socialist program; that should be the political content of the Worker-Student Alliance.

THE CWSA - ECONOMISM RUN AMOK

Thus, while it is indisputable that the SDS policy of a campus-worker and student alliance breaks with the old "New Left" classless, anti-working class rhetoric and program, it is not true that the CWSA represents a viable pro-working class orientation for the SDS. CWSA is often presented as a way in which radical students can find the one ally which can stop the imperialist excesses which radical students oppose. Since the campus workers are the workers physically closest to students, so the argument goes, students should support the struggle of these workers against the university bosses. Once real ties are established, the workers can be expected to support SDS struggles against ROTC, university expansion, etc. The importance of the CWSA strategy lies in two important premises; one) the crucial role of the working class in capitalist society, and two) the necessity for solidarity between revolutionary students and the working class. But these fundamental insights are subordinated to a narrow, economist perspective which limits student solidarity to a marginal and, often, impotent sector of the working class. The industrial working class is hardly even mentioned:

What the CWSA perspective lacks is the realization that the working class is not just another ally, even the most valuable and powerful ally, of the radical student

movement: to pose the alliance between workers and students in this empirical fashion obscures the pivotal historic role and experience of the working class in capitalist society. Students are a multi-layered group in transition, and represent, in the bulk, an equivocal force which could tend toward either fascism, or communism, or neutrality. Only in the 30's and recently have there been radical student movements in the U.S., while the working class, both in the U.S. and other countries, has been the historic leader and motive power of anti-capitalist struggle.

The inadequacy of the CWSA can only be understood in the context of these historical facts. Without the perspective of struggling for a socialist program in the labor movement, mere support of campus or other workers can only lead to servile trailing of the most backward sections of the working class, i.e., a form of worker-priestism. SDS's concept of the worker-student alliance is merely the most minimum program of any socialist youth group, one which has been common to all socialist or communist youth organizations in the past one hundred years. The important question for the student movement in the U.S. is not a worker-student alliance in the abstract, certainly not confined to the campus, but the political program which revolutionary students raise in common with the working class. The highest form of this worker-student alliance is, and always has been, the revolutionary vanguard party, which unites students and intellectuals who have broken ties with their class origins with advanced workers in a common organization with a shared program. While SDS is not now, and can not for the foreseeable future become, a Leninist vanguard party, SDS can become an organization where revolutionary socialist youth - workers and students - can struggle for a common program which attempts to win the working class to revolutionary politics. Such a worker-student alliance would necessarily seek out the most militant and potentially radical workers, rather than exhausting itself principally in the minor skirmishes between campus workers and the university. The way to a mass worker-student alliance lies through a transitional, class program which will attract militant workers to positions that can only be won through struggle against the capitalists and their state. The central points of such a program, which SDS ought to adopt, are:

1. A break with the capitalist parties and the creation of an independent worker's party.

2. A class program on the Black question which opposes class demands to porkchop nationalism. Such a program would struggle against the special oppression of the Black workers while raising demands which would unite the Black and white workers as a class. For example, Black nationalists who have demanded that white construction workers give up their jobs to make way for Blacks should be answered. Instead, the number of jobs should be qualitatively increased through the demand '30 for 40', that is, 30 hours work for 40 hours pay, which will unite both Black and white workers against the capitalist class and the state.

3. A class line for the anti-war movement - with the slogans "Victory for the NLF," "Smash U.S. Imperialism - No Negotiations." SDS should expand the idea of a

student strike into a general worker-student strike against the war.

4. Democratic rights within the movement. SDS should reject on principle physical intimidation of political opponents within the radical movement as a means of propaganda and agitation. Gangster tactics expose their practitioners as being afraid that their politics will not stand the test of open political debate and competition in practice.

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JOIN RMC -- JOIN RMC -- JOIN RMC -- JOIN RMC

Why the Revolutionary Marxist Caucus:

Because of the ground swell of support for revolutionary Marxist positions culminating in a consistent left wing force in the Boston SDS at the December National Council meeting in New Haven. The RMC is in contention with the confused vacillations of the Progressive Labor-backed Campus Worker Student Alliance caucus and the RMC opposes the anti-communist right wing "SDS" Labor Committee. We must make real the pro-working class orientation and non-exclusionism that all Boston SDS members nominally support.

The time to form the RMC is more than ripe. All across the country there is motion in this direction. At Stony Brook, New York, the Independent Caucus has been formed largely in opposition to the inanities of the CWSA and to push for real support to the crucial GE strike. In Memphis, Tennessee, where the very solid MDS chapter went to the aid of local GE strikers, the MDS also reprints works of Leon Trotsky to help in achieving Marxist clarity in struggle.

To join the RMC you should be in agreement with its initial declaration at New Haven (printed in full on page 5A) that "a major activity for SDS be involvement in off-campus social struggles, particularly labor struggles." RMC membership, including a sub to the RMC Newsletter, costs only a dollar a year and a paid-up current membership in Boston SDS.

Enclosed is a dollar, I want to join the RMC _____.

I want more information _____.

Name _____ . School/Chapter _____.

Street _____.

City, State, Zip _____.

(return to RMC Newsletter, c/o Helen Cantrell, 161 E.99 St.,
apt.2B, New York, New York 10029)