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Radical Students in America

There are approximately 6.3 million students enrolled in US colleges and universities. The overwhelming majority are politically apathetic. Many others are pursuing professional or preprofessional training and are loath to take time to participate in activities not directly related to the classroom.

Of those who are politically active, some 250,000 are affiliated with the Young Democrats and Young Republicans--just as in most Western countries, where far more students belong to youth adjuncts of major political parties than to radical groups. On balance, they contribute only marginally to the political dialogue. It is doubtful that they could be mobilized effectively to provide much counterforce to the radicals, even if one of the major parties were to field the kind of candidates who would excite a significant campus following.

There are conflicting estimates of how many American students are involved in protest. The figure 300,000 frequently is cited both in official reports and newspaper articles. It apparently is an extrapolation from total university enrollment based on an arbitrary estimate made five years ago by Columbia University professor Amitai Etzioni, who estimated that no more than five percent of all students were involved. Etzioni had little data from which to calculate; he worked principally with statistics gleaned from the early period of the Civil Rights Movement--material which has little relevance today.

A more plausible figure would be 120,000--and that would include a good many students who can be activated only in behalf of local causes which have little or no political ramification, as well as members of the Negro Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and other Black Power groups which seem less and less disposed to participate in protests not aimed at relief of their specific complaints. If we eliminate

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the Black Power advocates, the one-time protesters seeking less stringent campus curfews and visitors' rules, and such organizations as the California-based League for Sexual Freedom, we are left with a hard core of between 30,000 and 35,000. This includes the 2,000 or so members of the CP/USA's DuBois Clubs, the several hundred members of the Progressive Labor Party, the Young Socialist League, etc.

By far the largest and most vocal group included in the 30,000-35,000 figure is Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). SDS is not a typical radical organization, but none other approaches its visibility or range of activities. A study of SDS may be useful because the organization has achieved considerable success and is more and more a magnet for student dissidents and because its organizational framework could serve as a model for radical students in industrialized, urban societies abroad.

The Founders

SDS' evolution dates from 1959, when a group of students belonging to the Michigan University chapter of the socialist-minded League for Industrial Democracy founded a separate organization to support the kind of civil rights activity which the Congress of Racial Equality and others were launching in the South. The following year, in June 1960, thirty students with similar ideas met in New York to expand the Michigan organization nationally.

A so-called National Executive Committee of SDS met at Ann Arbor in December 1961; most of the participants had spent the preceding several months in voter-registration drives in southern states. Tom Hayden, a student at the University of Michigan, was charged with drafting a statement of purpose, which was adopted the following year at Port Huron.

"We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit. The first effort, then, should be to state a vision: what is the perimeter of human possibility in this epoch? The second effort, if we are to

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be politically responsible, is to evaluate the prospects for obtaining at least a substantial part of that vision in our epoch: what are the social forces that exist, or that must exist, if we are to be successful? And what role have we ourselves to play as a social force?

The Port Huron Statement rehearsed the complaints of alienated, politically powerless students in an industrialized society. It was not remarkably radical by today's standards (recent SDS tracts describe it as "quaint") and drew heavily on the ideas of the late sociologist C. Wright Mills.

Like SDS statements to follow, it also was indebted to social critic Herbert Marcuse. It expressed despair of genuine reform in a political system in which both major parties allegedly had become spokesmen for a gigantic technocracy, and saw little reason to look to a middle class bound to its material possessions.

It was equally critical of the Communists, adding that their nostrums offered no great promise for man's future--but renounced what it termed professional anti-Communism, which, it said, served only to inhibit dissent.

Relations between SDS and its parent organization, the League for Industrial Democracy, had been strained from the beginning. Fearful of losing its tax-exempt status, the League censured and then cut the students adrift.

SDS undertook to organize the urban poor in the north and midwest, with much the same objective as voter-registration drives in the south--redressing the balance of effective political power. To this end, it launched its Economic Research and Action Program (ERAP) with nine projects, such as the Newark Community Union Project that Tom Hayden started with an initial \$5,000 grant from United Auto Worker's President Walter Reuther. Most foundered.

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In the meantime, in 1964, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement saw the successful use in the north of sit-in tactics, and adaptation of that technique began. A group of students at Ann Arbor, many of them SDS stalwarts, devised the first of the academic teach-ins to oppose the escalation of the American effort in Vietnam. Though much publicized, the wave of teach-ins which followed across the country was not wholly successful and petered out after several months. Many of those who participated turned away from direct opposition to the war out of a conviction their efforts had failed to impress the policymakers; they no longer sought to stimulate a dialogue which had proved largely one-sided.

For their part, Students for a Democratic Society began to oppose actively anything connected with the Vietnam conflict. They forged alliances with disparate groups, many ad hoc or letterhead organizations. They participated in the formation of the National Vietnam Day Committee (VDC), which led two days of protests at Berkeley in May 1965, and supported the more extreme efforts of the VDC to publish tracts designed to subvert members of the Armed Forces and to stage sit-ins on railroad tracks over which troop trains were to travel.

Four hundred SDS members met at Ann Arbor late in 1965 to formulate a more cohesive program than that which had been set forth at Port Huron. Splits developed between those, like Tom Hayden, who favored a maximum effort in the city slums, others who wished to activate nonradical college students, and a third group that seemed to favor the formation of a more selective and intellectually disciplined core of social critics. Factional disagreements, however, were papered over out of common resentment at the deepening US involvement in Vietnam. The Port Huron statement was amended to drop the ban on Communist membership in SDS and the meeting voted to seek alliances with any group opposed to the Vietnam conflict.

Journalists and academicians who had been favorably disposed toward SDS began to express

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dismay over the organization's increasingly tolerant views of institutional Communism and the kind of myopia that caused it to castigate the United States for its involvement in Vietnam without expressing even the mildest criticism of the North Vietnamese or their Viet Cong allies.

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Quest for an Outlook

Some members of SDS tried during their 1965 convention to redefine the organization's relationship toward society. They failed to attract much support, however, because anti-Vietnam sentiment dominated all of the discussions.

A year later, 1966, the SDS National Council founded the Radical Education Project (REP) as "an independent education, research, and publication organization" to be "devoted to the cause of democratic radicalism" and "the creation of a new left in America." REP quickly solicited the assistance of "all people who identify with the forces of radical democracy in America and abroad."

With a growing list of sponsors (Philip Berri-gan, Julian Bond, Hal Draper, Jules Feiffer, Andrew Kopkind, William Kuntsler, Staughton Lynd, Herbert Marcuse, Barrington Moore, Linus Pauling, James A. Pike, and others) it set about to subsidize the creation of a new body of critical literature.

To aid in this effort, it stipulated certain "convictions" as a basis for research:

- the promise of American abundance has been perverted and thwarted by contemporary capitalism,
- class division, privilege and exploitation are unnecessary for abundance,
- the possibility of greater wealth for Americans does not justify exploitation of other countries.
- democracy must be judged in practice and by the accountability of officeholders to the voters who are affected by their decisions.

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- present-day US Government does not allow for democratically arrived at decisions which affect social development or the quality of individual life.
- America is held in moral and political stalemate by economic and political forces and by a 'deadening' belief in national chauvinism, i.e., "the American way of life."
- anti-Communism is central to the ideological manipulation of the people and provides a cover for "the most brutal application of military and economic power."
- violent revolution, though deplorable, may be necessary where the oppressed lack political leverage to attain economic and political freedom.
- issues such as "Vietnam and the oppression of the American underclass" cry out for action. The work of long-term research, education, organization, and theory does not relieve the obligation for immediate passionate protest.

REP asked for concrete proposals necessary for effective political action--action of the kind which would broaden the interests and commitment of students drawn to SDS by "single issues" or "gut reaction" and serve to extend SDS' appeal to a constituency broader than the students or urban poor. It pledged cooperation with the University Christian Movement, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in founding a Latin American Institute "to coordinate research, monitor information and maintain contacts between radical student, church and academic groups in this hemisphere."

The Radical Education Project has become the focal point of much of the controversy surrounding SDS. Several of its members have been active in Communist-front groups, such as the Dubois Clubs,

the Tri-Continental Information Center, and the American Institute for Marxist Studies. Others belong to the Socialist Workers' Party.

REP publishes "scenarios" designed to enable students to introduce "relevant" material into classroom discussion. In its latest circular notice, REP advertises close to one hundred diverse publications, ranging from a 5-cent pamphlet on "Wildcat: Anatomy of a Work Stoppage" by Steven Fox, through a 20-cent edition of Regis Debray's "The Long March: Guerrilla Movements, Theory and Practice," to a \$4.75 hardbound edition of Containment and Revolution, edited by David Horowitz.

Leadership and Organization

SDS is an amorphous, polycentric organization--really little more than a collection of local chapters, not all of which respond readily to any leadership.

Its adherents often mirror the community in which they live. In New York they have a pragmatic, liberal concern for the problems of the underprivileged and an acute appreciation of urban and state political dynamics. In the south they have a quasi-religious cast. In Berkeley, California, they have a decidedly literary-existentialist cast. (Student activists are not societal drop-outs, i.e., "hippies," and they bitterly resent being mislabelled. Activist Sherman Chickering admits that both activists and hippies are true believers in what he calls "Youth Culture," but insists that the two differ in origin. "The activist is most likely to be the child of liberal Democratic parents; the hippie is most likely to be the child of a conservative Republican. The one considers his father a New Deal sellout, but adopts his father's Constitutional ideas; the other considers his father irrelevant and rejects the prevailing culture entirely.")

SDS members boast of their lack of leadership and hierarchy. Their top policy-making body is the annual convention. Between conventions, a National Council meets at fairly regular intervals. There is a national staff of approximately fifteen

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full-time, poorly paid employees and an annual budget of upwards of \$80,000--much of it evidently raised through public appeals.

Record-keeping, like finances, is haphazard. Headquartered at present in Chicago, SDS counts some 6,000 national members in more than 225 local chapters. There are said to be as many as five local chapter members for every national member. As of a year ago, national members paid dues of 50 cents a month; local chapter members contribute nothing to the national office, and not all chapters--no charter from the national body is required--remit funds to Chicago, either.

SDS meetings have been described as chaotic. There have even been attempts in the past to abolish the post of National Secretary and to adopt the Quaker method of consensus as a decision-making technique. In some chapters no member is ever denied the right to speak--however irrelevant his remarks.

SDS has opted for the "Politics of Controntation," has grown steadily more militant--partly in response to the pressures brought to bear upon it by better organized leftist groups which seek to restructure it as a typical party-line mass organization and partly, one suspects, because of the constraints felt by several changes of national leadership to keep ahead of their followers. The most determined of the SDS members are convinced that passive demonstration is ineffective and are out to challenge what they deem the "Rotten Society" with "Institutional Resistance."

This element, which one-time SDS member Paul Goodman has termed "the neo-Leninist wing of the New Left" regard strikes, picket lines and sit-ins as ineffective and disparage what they call "that old mass-mobilization thing." In the space of six months, between the spring and fall of last year, this group nudged SDS away from demonstrations, of which the Pentagon protest seems likely to prove the last, toward smaller, more violent protests--of which Columbia is the best example.

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Funds

SDS militants travel continually at home and abroad--to Cuba, Europe and the Far East. They pay their own expenses wherever possible and probably count on financial assistance and lodging from parents, relatives, and friends. While abroad, they presumably receive similar help from local student organizations or, in Cuba, from the Castro government.

SDS and the Armed Forces

SDS seeks allies wherever they are to be found--in the city slums, among young university faculty members and poorly paid secondary school teachers, and more and more determinedly among younger servicemen bound for Vietnam. It is SDS' conviction that the Vietnam conflict is unpopular among all young people, and particularly repugnant to those being trained for combat in Southeast Asia. The organization's leaders may also believe that the influx into the military of recruits with at least some college experience ensures a sympathetic if not completely receptive audience.

During the Algerian conflict, the French students learned that the military were not a profitable target for infiltration and subversion. On the basis of that experience, a number of them later advised militants elsewhere to concentrate their efforts against men subject to induction so that potential inductees could be won over to the cause before they were removed from the campuses or cities and subjected to military discipline.

Except for occasional picketing of Army and Navy depots or ports of embarkation, for the most part, the American student radicals followed this advice for several years. In December 1966, however, the SDS National Council set out to organize a "draft resistance program." New Left Notes (SDS' weekly publication) on 27 March 1967 called for a three-part campaign aimed at providing assistance to men seeking to avoid the draft, broader support of the Anti-Draft Union, and the transformation of anti-draft sentiment into a general protest against

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US involvement in Vietnam. New Left Notes listed the names of nine regional "coordinators" of this program and added a catalogue of non-SDS-campus and local antidraft organizations. A correspondent for the paper reviewed step by step the tactics he had employed to obstruct his induction in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the spring of 1966. Occasionally, beginning in mid-1967, SDS began to employ servicemen they had won over while still in civilian life or lower ranking enlisted men, who had sought out anti-war groups in various localities, to smuggle anti-Vietnam tracts into military reservations. They also collected funds for or lent moral support to a small number of Army men courtmartialed for refusal to go to Vietnam.

The defection of four US Navy enlisted men in Japan in November and the role played in their subsequent travel to the USSR by the rabidly anti-American Japanese peace group Beheiren seem to have caused the SDS to adopt a more aggressive stance toward the military here in the United States. In collaboration with the Nationalization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, SDS agreed sometime early in 1968 to stage a "Summer of Support" to demonstrate to servicemen that the peace movement is genuinely interested in their welfare and to solicit "grievances" from young or disgruntled GIs. SDS undertook to operate "coffee houses" adjacent to such major installations as Fort Leonard Wood, Fort Hood, Fort Ord, Fort Lewis, and Fort Polk. Others are planned for Fort Sheridan and Fort Dix. In Washington, D.C., one is scheduled for the Greyhound Bus Terminal.

In recent weeks, the coffee houses at Fort Hood and Fort Jackson have become popular gathering places for young enlisted men and officers. A new series of underground papers designed for GI consumption--Vietnam GI, The Ally, The Bond--have been found in the barracks at both installations. These mimeographed or offset throwaways also have shown up in South Vietnam. In shifting the focus of their attention to the young GI, the student radicals have left behind many of the privileges and immunities--and many of the advantages--which are theirs within the university structure. They are more vulnerable to sanction

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from federal, state and local authority. They know this; there is little doubt that they are conducting their newest venture with considerable circumspection. Eventually local authorities may find some pretext for stepping in--if only to deny whatever licenses are required for establishments which cater to the public.

Too blatant interference with attendance at the coffee houses might prove counterproductive, especially as increasing numbers of college students and recent university graduates are inducted and turn to them for relief from the tedium of military life.

The Summer of Support could become a major undertaking for the duration of the Vietnam conflict. It affords the dissidents an opportunity to propagandize under conditions they deem almost ideal and simultaneously enables them to strike out against as pivotal a structure of government as the Army.

Over the next few months, however, the young American radicals are more likely to shape their activities with an eye to the November election.

If the psychologists are correct in contending that many of the radicals' demands for a voice in administering the universities cloak their lack of authority over their personal lives, then the opportunity to help elect the nation's Chief Executive should prove a powerful magnet. However, it is unlikely that any candidate for national office will succeed in establishing a meaningful dialogue with the radicals--any more than any recent office-holder could for long have sustained a dialogue with young people who have few live heroes. To them, this year's campaign is an opportunity to propagandize, to exploit the "issues," to disrupt political rallies by the use of ridicule--just as they have belittled speakers on a number of campuses.

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