

The New Left Is Showing Its Age

By THOMAS R. BROOKS

HARDLY 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 "surveyor-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*, an S.D.S.

weekly, "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 expletive—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,

THOMAS R. BROOKS is a freelance writer specializing in labor and politics. He wrote "Toil and Trouble," a history of the American labor movement.

Printed in *Liberation*, March, 1969.

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 Narodniks 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

(Continued on Page 20)

Drawing by
ROBERT M. CUNNINGHAM



The New Left is showing its age

(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"

able. The last count I could find appeared in the June 26, 1967, issue of *New Left Notes*: "The 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, only 875 have paid dues since Jan. 1, 1967." The total chapter number was given as "almost 250," and "heavy membership states" as 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 demonstrate. A determined minority kicking a soft underbelly can hurt. S.D.S., moreover, has always claimed a following beyond that of paid-up membership. In the March, 1967, issue of *Tricontinental*, published in Cuba by the executive secretariat of the Organization of the Solidarity of the Peoples 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 nonfactional 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 mayoralty campaign rally in New York, and the Lower East Side's *Up Against the Wall, Mother—s*. Both of these see themselves as wandering troubadours, clowns, poets and pioneers of the revolution—as part of the "international werewolf conspiracy"—but, tied as

*I find another count of sorts. In the June 10, 1968, issue of *New Left Notes*, the editor makes a passing reference to "5,000 or so readers."

they are to the drug culture, their chief link to the organized New Left appears to be constant police harassment.

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., it is perhaps 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 come around." 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.

PRESUMABLY, when S.D.S. disrupts, as it did when it prevented South Vietnamese Ambassador Nguyen Huu Chi and *The Times'* James Reston from speaking at New York University, it does so for political purposes, reprehensible 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—notably, a chapter once known as the Berkeley Commune, but now calling itself the Molotov Cocktail party. Jack Gerson and Doug Norberg, 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."

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

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

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 peace march sponsored by S.D.S., returned to report how he spoke from a bandstand draped with red-white-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 smaller, less sophisticated chapters combined with a smattering of anarchists and suchlike. They are skeptical of rhetoric, ideology and centralism, and remain close in style to



NEW LEFTIST—Tom Hayden, who helped found S.D.S. just seven years ago.

the S.D.S. of the old participatory democracy period.

WITHIN such diversity, however, there is a hardening of lines. Credential fights take place at S.D.S. conferences (quarterly) and conventions (annual) with increasing regularity. Last fall, the Columbia S.D.S. chapter expelled its own labor committee for supporting the United Federation of Teachers in the school-decentralization dispute. And this spring, the Columbia S.D.S. ordered that its expansion committee, sympathetic to the Progressive Labor party, be disbanded. True, these decisions do not seem to have meant much—both dissident groups still function at Columbia. But their members have been threatened, verbally, with bodily harm, a new development on the "loving" New Left.

Palpable hate exists between the clean-shaven, neatly dressed P.L.-ers and the acid-rock New Leftists. As one of the latter scornfully put it: "First thing you got to do when you join P.L. is cut

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 Our Lawlessness."

Some skepticism still exists within S.D.S. toward this sort of mindlessness. Specifically rebutting the Mothers, Fred Gordon, S.D.S. internal education secretary and a leader of the Worker-Student Alliance group, asks: "What will the traditional working class (and other social groups) think of a new *lumpen* class that lives 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 is already in process a tremendous move toward violence and disruption. They are right about the changing mood. But do people really want every political meeting to turn 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.

Back in 1967, Greg 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

the National Office faction, so called because its leaders include two of the three functionaries in the national office: Michael Klonsky, 25, national secretary, and Bernadine Rae Dohrn, 27, interorganizational secretary. Fred Gordon, 24, the other national officer, is a leader of the P.L. faction.

Both sides want a highly centralized organization, both toy with the notion of a "New Working Class"—comprising the unemployed, the minorities and student dropouts—as an instrument of revolution. The difference between them, very roughly, is that the P.L.-ers seek a class-vs.-class "economic" struggle, while the N.O.-ers envision a race-vs.-race "anticolonial" struggle.

Their factional fight peaked at the S.D.S. national conference in Austin, Texas, last March. Progressive Labor pushed its Worker-Student Alliance line, ridiculed "student power" and criticized Black Power as black bourgeois nationalism, which like all nationalism is fundamentally opposed to proletarian internationalism. The National Office faction called for an all-out fight against "white skin privileges" and generally held, on the race question, that the blacks were not only a superexploited section of the working class but also an oppressed colony within the mother country. When Fred Gordon challenged this view, asking if American blacks were an oppressed colony, why weren't the German Jews, a N.O. advocate shouted angrily: "How dare you tell me that Jews in Germany are the same as blacks in America! The — Jews in Germany had money."*

"There is a growing anxiety within the Jewish community, I am told, about the couldn't-care-less attitude among Jewish youth active in the New Left toward anti-Semitism, Israel, Jewish identity and other concerns of the Jewish community. When a friend of mine expressed worry about the rise in black anti-Semitism to a young Jewish S.D.S.-er, the youth sneered. "Oh, come on, tell me about the holocaust."

Sociologist Nathan Glazer estimates that among the committed, identifiable radicals on the most active campuses probably one-third to one-half are Jews. Assuming that roughly the same proportion of Jews were present among the 800 to 1,000 youths at the S.D.S. Austin conference, I find it surprising to discover that only seven people in all attended an "international" workshop devoted in good part to a discussion of S.D.S.'s anti-Israel, pro-Al Fatah (Arab

Progressive Labor's key resolution was entitled "Build a Worker-Student Alliance." It argued that there is only one struggle that S.D.S. should be concerned with—"the class struggle of the working class and its allies against the ruling class." The resolution opposed racism, but argued that "propagating [black] nationalism" would only play "the ruling class's game of organizing people to fight on the basis of anything but class." The resolution ended with a call for revolutionary violence as "necessary to win any real concessions 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 colony and socialist revolution for the whole society." As for the charge of "nationalism," Bob Avakian, of the Berkeley S.D.S., cited Lenin and Mao as revolutionaries who supported nationalism.

The National Office resolution was adopted by a vote of about 2 to 1. But despite all the acrimony over doctrinal differences, there were a few points on which both factions could agree: The N.O. actually introduced a P.L.-written resolution supporting 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 intellectual underclass growing up
(Continued on Page 30)

terrorists) stand. Recent issues of New Left Notes have carried, without apparent protest, a series on the "Middle East Liberation Struggle," and the youth corps of Al Fatah is described as "the vanguard of the struggle of Palestine."

S.D.S.'s pro-Arab stance may not be widely known. It certainly was not stressed at any of the meetings or rallies I attended. If it were, I should think it would do S.D.S. no good among liberal and radical Jewish youth. In any event, S.D.S. has not really done too well in attracting Jewish students as far as total numbers are concerned. Rabbi Benjamin Kahn, the national director of B'nai Brith's Hillel Foundation, cites studies by his organization indicating that radical Jewish students, though highly visible in the leadership and ranks of the New Left, generally make up "not much more than 5 per cent" of the total Jewish student enrollment of 350,000.

(Continued from Page 26)
around our universities—students, college dropouts, graduate students, graduates who have started on their careers but who have not left the university neighborhood (especially in the larger cities), teaching assistants and professors in the lower ranks.” I had in mind a rough analogy with the trade-union movement—the C.I.O. of the nineteen-thirties or the Wobblies.

S.D.S. has taken up the grievances of this rather amorphous university-bound grouping. Even S.D.S.’s antiwar activity fits in. As Michael 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 swinging away from this “trade-union” or interest-group, function. It is increasingly scornful of student-power issues, “faculty-student committees, and all that garbage.” Trying to show up the universities as repressive is not quite the same thing as trying to reform them. Most students, including a goodly number attracted to S.D.S. in specific campus brouhahas, I take it, have a greater interest in the latter than in the former.

As the Paris peace talks—we hope—progress, I would expect a falling away from S.D.S. of many of the students initially attracted by its antiwar position. 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 willingness to negotiate. S.D.S., according to Klonsky, “is part of an international struggle against imperialism and racism.” Students wanting simply an end to the war, the draft and R.O.T.C. are not likely to take up cudgels for China against “U.S.-Soviet collusion.”

However, I do not agree with those who argue that an end to the war will mean S.D.S. will go away and campus disturbances come to an end. Upper-class converts to radicalism, rebels against parental affluence and those who find the drug culture empty will continue to find S.D.S. and its vanguard ideology attractive.

PERHAPS the best way to decide where S.D.S. is at—its significance on campus and on the political scene—is to compare S.D.S. with the black students. The latter, I would argue, no matter how destructive they may seem, are not out to destroy the universities. The black students want to carve out a piece of the



"PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY"—An S.D.S. meeting during the student strike at Harvard this spring.

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 multerings 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 counteraction, 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 couldn't 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 élitist 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. ■