

# SDS Takes New Turn

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## **with additional notes by Fifth Estate staff**

CHICAGO (LNS)—SDS expelled the Progressive Labor Party (PL) and its political allies from the ranks of the organization June 21.

The action was the turning point of the 1969 SDS National Convention. SDS leaders saw it as a historic step in the history of the nation's left, and as a breath of fresh air for the movement.

About half of the 1,800 delegates at the convention joined the SDS leadership in the walkout which followed the expulsion of PL.

PL was told it was no longer a part of SDS because of its failure to support the world's most significant struggles against imperialism.

PL rejects the Black Panther Party's revolutionary nationalist ideology as "reactionary;" the party also charges that the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and the government of North Vietnam are "selling out" the people of Vietnam by "making deals" in Paris; they belittle Cuba and North Korea as "revisionist."

This was the first time that a group has been excluded from SDS for political reasons.

Bernardine Dohrn, interorganizational 'secretary of SDS, told PL that they were being excluded primarily because of their consistent failure to support black struggles on various campuses. She urged PL's allies, the 600-man Worker Student Alliance (WSA) caucus, to join with SDS.

Animosity between PL and its opponents has been building up for more than two years, but the practical results of PL's presence in SDS have been felt most severely in the past few months.

PL brought intense doctrinaire ideological debate to SDS chapter meetings, compelling SDS regulars to parry with packaged rhetoric of their own, thereby turning off many newcomers.

PL's failure to support black struggles for black studies programs and open admission further exacerbated the conflict, posing an obstructionist force in numerous campus struggles around the country.

The antagonisms emerged at the convention even as the 1,800 delegates and observers filled the dingy auditorium after SDS had been turned down by hundreds of campuses.

PL and the SDS leadership disagreed on the agenda and other procedural votes, but observers concluded with alarm that PL's forces could conceivably take over SDS through passing its resolutions and electing its slate of officers.

The assault on PL sharpened Thursday. Speakers from the Young Lords and the Black Panthers assailed PL for its failure to support revolutionary nationalism and self determination.

"If you can't relate to Huey P. Newton," said Chaka, Illinois Minister of Information for the Panthers, "then you can close up your red book."

He told PL they were armchair revolutionaries and berated them for considering themselves the vanguard. The Panthers are the vanguard, he said, "We've earned it with our blood."

Chaka also chided PL for its puritanism. "As long as you do your part of the work, you can take a trip, get drunk or make love all night," he said.

He also said that the Panthers were proponents of “pussy power,” explaining that this meant that revolutionary women could find revolutionary men “to satisfy them in their hour of need,” or use their sexual powers to persuade counter-revolutionary men to become revolutionary.

The delegates—almost all of them white—responded with hisses, boos, and shouts to this comment, many of the SDS regulars joining with PL in the chant, “Fight Male Chauvinism!”

While PL took advantage of a difficult moment—and cultural barriers—to assault the Panthers, most SDSers felt it was necessary to make some response to the Panther’s chauvinist comment.

Bobby Rush, Panther Minister of Defense for Illinois, took the podium, saying that the Panthers were dealing internally with contradictions on the question of women’s liberation, and quoted Mao on equality for women.

Friday, June 20, the showdown began. As PL, SDS regulars, and a few smaller factions prepared to vie with each other over a series of resolutions on racism, a delegation of Panthers arrived in the hall.

Reading a directive from the National Panthers Central Committee, a Panther spokesman described PL members as “counter-revolutionary traitors” and told SDS, “You’ll be judged by the company you keep.”

The Panther call for expulsion was all but explicit—the tension of anticipated violence filled the auditorium.

The statement had the approval of Bobby Seale, national chairman of the Panthers, as well as of the Young Lords Organization, (a Chicago Puerto Rican group), the Crusade for Justice (Colorado Chicanos) and the Young Patriots (Chicago white working class radicals.)

The SDS leadership was being told to shit or get off the revolutionary pot.

About two dozen PL men stormed the podium, and Jeff Gordon, the party’s head student organizer, took the microphone to respond. He charged the SDS leadership with opportunism for “bringing” the Panthers to the convention, expressed general praise for the Panthers, but attacked their position on black nationalism.

Bernardine Dohrn took the mike to suggest that it was time to consider whether or not it would be possible for people to continue working in the same organization with PL. Mark Rudd—an SDS regional organizer from New York—called for an adjournment.

Before the procedural debate was over, however, national secretary Mike Klonsky urged people opposing the PL line to move into an adjacent hall to resolve the organizational contradictions.

Debate in the Coliseum annex and the main room went on for hours. Small regional caucuses went on that night, and the talking continued for some 12 hours the next day, June 21. In the main hall, PL-oriented delegates passed a “unity” resolution, invited the others back, and broke up into small discussion groups.

By midnight, debate ended, and some 1,000 delegates marched back into the main convention room to listen to Bernardine Dohrn read PL out of SDS. Almost everybody seemed to be thinking about the possibility of a huge brawl-, but it didn’t happen.

As 1,000 SDS regulars stood in a silent ring around the auditorium, Bernardine Dohrn read her statement clearly and fervently. The PL people started out in nervous silence, then tried ridicule by forced laughter, and finally jumped to their feet with shouts of “shame!” and “Smash Racism!” and “Power to the Workers!”

Many of those who had remained in the main auditorium with PL did not join in the histrionics. The SDS regulars maintained their silence, and marched out triumphantly, fists raised, as Bernardine declared the session recessed.

PL supporters chanted “Power to the Workers!” as the regulars marched out. There were no fights.

SDS ended the convention the next day at the First Congregational Church.

Different political tendencies emerged, and the group decided not to adopt an exclusionary statement of principles, but to stand on the previous night’s statement justifying the expulsion of PL.

Votes on resolutions and candidates indicated that a majority of the delegates in the church rejected the “social democracy” of the Independent Socialist Club and the politics of anarchism.

There was unanimous support for several action resolutions, including a call for massive street demonstrations in Chicago against the war in Vietnam to coincide with the Conspiracy Eight trial in September.

The group also called for demonstrations against Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, “so he won’t be welcome anywhere in the whole world,” and endorsed the Venceremos Brigade, which will send 300 North Americans to Cuba to help cut sugar cane in the 1969–70 harvest.

Mark Rudd was elected National secretary, Jeffrey Jones, interorganizational secretary, and Bill Ayers education secretary.

Eight SDSers were named to the National Interim Committee. They are: Michael Klonsky, Bernardine Dohrn, Robert Avakian (California), Howard Machtinger (Illinois), Barbara Riley (New York), Linda Evans (Michigan), Noel Ignatin (Illinois) and Corky Benedict (Ohio).

PL and friends also met June 22, affirmed that they were the legitimate SDS, attacked the “split” and elected their own slate of officers. Since the national office of SDS in Chicago remains in the hands of the “regulars,” PL will probably be forced to open a new office. It is expected that both groups will put out their own editions of *New Left Notes*.

Almost all of the 70 SDS members from Detroit were part of the anti-PL coalition.

Locally, SDS people were pleased with the results of the convention.

According to Scott Braley, of the SDS Michigan regional staff, SDS in Detroit will be organizing around the national action that will take place during the last week in September and will be doing organizing in the high schools around the issues of racism and imperialism.

He also indicated that SDS would be organizing support for such groups as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the National Black Economic Development Conference.

Diana Oughton, also of the SDS regional staff, stated that the strategy of the Summer Project in Detroit will be twofold: “We will be building the SDS regional internally through study groups and programs which will do research in political theory and compile information about Detroit that will be useful to us in our organizing.

“At the same time we will be doing external work through which we can put our theory into practice. Such work will include organizing in working class high schools, getting involved in welfare struggles, and exploring the possibilities of GI organizing,” she said.

David Watson, high school organizer for SDS in Detroit and staffer for the *Fifth Estate* had this to say about planned political work that would be initiated locally: “We will be attempting to redefine SDS by moving into working class constituencies. A main strategy in achieving this objective will be to relate to the motion developing in working class high schools around the city.

“We feel that the very nature of this motion, given the issues from which it flows—such as the tracking systems, will bring a working class perspective and content into SDS.”

Watson also stated that “We will be working closely with black high school organizers in the city and will be coordinating our activities closely with the black high school movement.”

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