

# Letter to SDS

Fifth Estate Collective

1969

*Editors' note:* On July 21 at Central Methodist Church over 200 persons representing the Detroit anti-war movement met to discuss a series of actions against the war that had been proposed at an Independence Day conference in Cleveland.

The proposals included an SDS sponsored anti-imperialist action for October 8–11 in Chicago; an October 15 student strike called by the Vietnam Moratorium Committee; and a “legal, peaceful” March on Washington on November 15. The New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam has appointed two staffs; one each to coordinate the marches in Chicago and Washington.

Locally, much debate has centered on the SDS call in particular. Their call for “Bring the War Home” and a seeming desire for a confrontation with the Chicago pigs has put off a large number of liberals. A leaflet put out by the Michigan Regional SDS was what brought a lot of criticism into focus. The leaflet among other things called for an assault on a high school and to “tear up the fascist courts.”

This newspaper felt the need for putting forth a revolutionary criticism of the action and sent the letter reprinted below to the SDS national office. We welcome responses to our opinion.

July 31, 1969

Mark Rudd, National Secretary  
Students for a Democratic Society  
1608 West Madison  
Chicago, Illinois 60612  
Brother Mark,

When SDS proposed having an action in Chicago October 11 focusing on anti-imperialism, we at The Fifth Estate felt that it had the potential of being a very heavy action and crucial to the growth of a revolutionary movement in this country.

Staff members of the paper have been involved in the Detroit and national “anti-war” movement since 1964 and have always felt that one of the major flaws of this movement was its total disregard for the whole issue of imperialism and the consequent lack of educational and agitational work against the capitalist system. The obscuring of revolutionary politics for the sake of broad-based liberal support could obviously only lead to the creation of non-revolutionary consciousness with a liberal movement based on that. The current national anti-war coalition has gone so far as to join with anti-communist groups such as HHH’s Americans for Democratic Action, local Democratic party organizations, and ex-CIA functionaries like Allard Lowenstein in several proposed actions for the fall.

When we heard about the SDS action, we felt that this action would provide the first real opportunity to turn people on to the systematic oppression and exploitation of Third World people and of the whole world by the profit-hungry ruling class of this country, which distorts and suppresses entire economies to meet its own narrow needs.

We have been planning to work with this perspective, using the paper to run down analyses of imperialism and encourage people to participate in the action. This would be in conjunction with the newly-formed Revolutionary Press Movement, consisting of ten to fifteen large-city underground revolutionary papers.

However, after reading about the proposed tactics of the action, we have grave reservations about their usefulness. We feel that rather than clarifying an anti-imperialist perspective, they obscure these politics behind an adventurist militancy, falsely labeled “struggle.”

Furthermore, the publicity which has been done around the action has focused on this militancy rather than on the important politics which the action is supposed to express. People are being told to come to Chicago to “kick ass,” the politics seem to be merely side-issues.

For example, the action on Thursday, which calls for people to “liberate the high schools” and “bust our brothers and sisters out of jail,” besides putting people into a questionable confrontation with Chicago pigs, implies that we can “liberate” those high schools in lieu of the people inside. This idea of the revolutionaries substituting themselves for the people is adventurism of the worst kind.

The action on Friday to “tear up the fascist courts” is an irresponsible attempt to lead people into a battle which can only prove to be a disaster.

Also, the treatment of the Saturday action as a “show of force” where “we can’t be fucked with cause we’re part of the world struggle” can lead to a dangerous audacity based on a false perception of the situation people are going to be into.

These are only three limited examples. When we hear local SDS people run down the action, the main theme of their talks turns out to be “we’re not going to Chicago to get our ass kicked, we’re going to kick ass!” The emphasis and rhetoric of the leaflets and raps are not only ineffective; they are counter-productive for pushing an anti-imperialist perspective and making people understand the real implications of the war. The total effect of the action, we feel, will lead to the defeat of a perspective we share, cynicism on the part of the people we hope to reach, and a demoralization of our brothers and sisters.

We feel it is not too late to change these things which we are concerned about. Our criticism should be seen as a constructive attempt to transform a potentially disastrous situation into a valuable and meaningful step in the making of our revolution.

Venceremos,  
THE FIFTH ESTATE

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See letter response, FE #86, August 21-September 3, 1969.



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