

SDS replies

Students for a Democratic Society

1969

Editors' Note: The following letter is a reply from the national officers of SDS to criticisms of their upcoming national action in Chicago made by this newspaper in our last edition ["Letter to SDS," FE #85, August 7-20, 1969].

Dear Comrades,

Your letter about the National Action has become an important item for discussion around here. Because of the way you posed certain problems, and because you have focused in on questions that are being raised around the country at this time, we felt it would be important to answer your open letter with an open response. There are a couple of major misconceptions made about the action. The notion that any part of the action is or could be "adventurist" is crazy. The terms of the fight against imperialism are being set by the colonized people of the world.

As a part of that struggle, we must fight as militantly as possible to end the rape and destruction of the world by the U.S. ruling class. It is arrogant for white mother-country revolutionaries to talk about holding back the struggle for a better day, while the Vietnamese and other Third World peoples are facing genocide daily. There has not been in recent years, nor can we imagine, a single instance of fighting too hard to destroy imperialism.

The notion of adventurism put forward in your article results from a cynicism that says that the people can't be reached through struggle. Our actions are a part of a strategy that understands that the people of the world, including white people of the mother-country, can be won to a fight against imperialism. We are not turning our backs on the people we must organize; we are providing a focus for organizing millions of people in struggle. Many radicals feel that people get "turned off" in militant situations. This is bullshit. The most militant struggles we've had (Columbia, Chicago, Oakland) are the ones that have turned-on masses of young people to politics, and they've been less militant than spontaneous struggles in the high schools all over the country. This is because struggle is an essential part of revolutionary politics.

People can't relate to abstract ideas, spoon-fed from well-read radicals; people can be won to a concrete fight against oppression that pushes seriousness and commitment. Militancy, showing a determination to fight and win, has been precisely what has been lacking from our politics, and precisely why we have failed so far to organize working class youth in this country.

"Bring the War Home" is a slogan that provides the essential context for this action. In a world-wide strategy to defeat the system of imperialism, we must understand our role in the mother-country. We can't support the Third World people simply by pushing them forward in the fight and cheering from the sidelines; we must join them and fight for the destruction of imperialism. Concretely, this means that we must begin class warfare in the streets and in the institutions of imperialism. We don't simply want to "Bring the Troops Home" so that they can be deployed to another oppressed nation; we must bring the troops home by fighting to destroy a system.

We are not fooling anyone as to the seriousness of this struggle and the seriousness of the Chicago action. We think people should be prepared to defend themselves in certain ways, like knowing how to move in the streets and learning first-aid to help each other. We don't believe people will need to know stuff much heavier than that

at this time, but being in good physical and mental condition is always important. Some liberals think we should play down the militancy and dangers of the action; we think people should be prepared and are willing to join in an action of this kind.

We are not looking for a confrontation with the pigs; we are building a militant, capable movement. The pigs may be looking for a confrontation. A militant, capable movement must be prepared at all times for pig attempts to destroy it.

We believe that young people are ready to act and are tired of simply the rhetoric of struggle. When action becomes real, many people who came into the movement in earlier days will react by looking for excuses to hold action back. We will lose some people who are currently in the movement as the struggle intensifies. They will say they represent the true mood of the people as they hold the people's struggle back. We can afford to lose those people; their excuses for inaction are in no one's interest but their own.

Your criticisms were based largely on a leaflet written by Motor City SDS. We feel that the Detroit leaflet is generally excellent and, having spoken recently with Detroit SDS people, we feel the leaflet is an important part of the work they're doing. The leaflet is geared toward white working-class youth in the city and is used primarily on beaches and in parks. The work being done in Detroit is a concrete attempt to build a revolutionary youth movement in the city; i.e., it is an attempt to move SDS from being primarily a student movement to becoming a movement of all working-class youth.

We see this as a transitional strategy for SDS, for we realize that building a fighting force among working class youth will be the most effective way to create a revolutionary movement of the whole working class. Detroit SDS is laying the groundwork for such a movement in a number of different areas; their leaflet, aimed at street kids, is geared toward doing this and is meeting, according to reports, with tremendous success.

The leaflet contains within it a couple of minor errors. The tactics that they outline as fact are still vague, and we are open to suggestions and change. We are not planning a march through the black and brown communities unless the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Organization decide to lead such a demonstration; it's also not an absolute fact, as implied in the leaflet, that all the revolutionary organizations and various street-gangs in Chicago are allied in their efforts against the Man.

But the general tone of the leaflet is one of militancy and struggle, and this is an important emphasis that must be supported as an integral part of our work. To emphasize the fact that we need to prepare for a military struggle and not just a political battle is important for the consciousness of all of us. To call our job the building of a "people's army" may be a slightly incorrect analogy, but the implications that we must at all times be preparing ourselves for the inevitable class war is right on.

Ever since we began to see the need to intensify the struggle against imperialism by fighting in the interests of the Third World, our movement has faced increasing repression. It's critically important at this time to demonstrate our intention of continuing the fight against imperialism and racism, and of meeting repression by fighting back, raising the issues that initially caused the repression to more and more people. This is largely why we want to come to Chicago—the symbol of a society held together by a pig force.

At the time of the Conspiracy 8 trial, we can't afford to be intimidated into silence or simply "courtroom tactics;" this is the reaction the pigs are most hoping for, because it would indicate fear and weakness and prove that the rulers' repressive tactics are a success. Repression is used to frighten people away from the movement, to "prove" to masses of people that only a few, isolated manipulative leaders cause all the discontent; our actions must prove them wrong on all counts.

This means that we must have a militant, anti-imperialist action in Chicago which shows the rulers, the people of the world and our own constituency our commitment to continue the struggle. The tactics that we choose for the action must flow concretely from this political understanding; the tactics, not just the slogans, must have a militant, anti-imperialist focus.

This is why we're calling for four days of actions around obvious institutions of imperialism: the pig station, the schools, the courts. Tentatively we plan to begin the four days with a rally in Lincoln Park Wednesday nite, commemorating the anniversary of the death of Che Guevara. On Thursday, we plan to move on the high schools, coordinating whatever action we take with Chicago Regional SDS. Friday, we plan to move on the federal court where the trial of the Conspiracy 8 will be in progress.

Saying that we will “tear up the fascist courts” is really no different than saying we intend to “Stop the Convention” or “Shut down the induction center,” which are slogans from past militant demonstrations. We don’t really believe we can stop the trial, but our intention to try and to make the rulers pay a price for holding such an event should be as clear now as it was in Chicago last summer or in Oakland in 1967. We also want to have a rock concert in Lincoln Park and an independent women’s action on one of the days.

On Saturday we intend to have a massive demonstration. We’re seeking permits from the city, but we’re not optimistic about their response. Saturday should be a “show of force,” for we should demonstrate our ability to bring masses of people together in the fight against imperialism. It’s important that people involved in the demonstration understand this fact ** would be to become defeatist and overestimate the strength of the enemy.

We’ve been working on the action now for a couple of months. We’ve produced lots of new literature explaining imperialism and how it fucks over the people of the world. We’re producing shotgun pamphlets on “occupation troops out,” Vietnam, Puerto Rico, political prisoners, women, and GIs. We’ve also travelled all over the country and are optimistic about the excitement that the action is generating. There’s still a couple of months’ hard work ahead for all of us, and we should get to it! We expect you will be working with us. See you in Chicago.

All Power to the People!

Mark Rudd, National Sec’y

Bill Ayers, Educational Sec’y

Jeff Jones, Interorganizational Sec’y



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