

## TOWARD A REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH MOVEMENT

by Mike Klonsky, a resolution passed at the December, 1968, National Council - SDS

"...How should we judge whether a youth is revolutionary? If today he integrates himself with the masses ... then today he is a revolutionary? if tomorrow he ceases to do so or turns around to oppress the common people, then he becomes a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary."

-- Mao Tse-Tung

At this point in history, SDS is faced with its most crucial ideological decision, that of determining its direction with regards to the working class. At this time there must be a realization on the part of many in our movement that students alone cannot and will not be able to bring about the downfall of capitalism, the system which is at the root of man's oppression. Many of us are going to have to go through important changes, personally. As students, we have been indoctrinated with many racist and anti-working-class notions that in turn have produced racism and class-chauvinism in SDS and were responsible largely for the student-power focus which our movement has had for many years. Student power at this stage of our movement has to be seen as economism: that is, organizing people around a narrow definition of self-interest as opposed to class-interest. We are moving beyond this now, but that movement must be planned carefully and understood by all.

The fact that we saw ourselves as students as well as radicals, and accepted that classification of ourselves and many of the false privileges that went along with it (2-S deferment, promise of the "good life" upon graduation, etc.) was primarily responsible for the reactionary tendencies in SDS.

### MAIN TASK

The main task now is to begin moving beyond the limitations of struggle placed upon a student movement. We must realize our potential to reach out to new constituencies both on and off campus and build SDS into a youth movement that is revolutionary.

The notion that we must remain simply "an anti-imperialist student organization" is no longer viable. The nature of our struggle is such that it necessitates an organization that is made up of youth and not just students, and that these youth become class conscious. This means that our struggles must be integrated into the struggles of working people.

One thing should be clear. This perspective doesn't see youth as a class or say that youth will make the revolution by itself. Neither does it say that youth are necessarily more oppressed than older people, simply that they are oppressed in different ways. There are contradictions that touch youth specifically. To understand why there is a need for a youth movement, first we must come to see how youth are oppressed.

### OPPRESSION OF YOUTH

Youth around the world have the potential to become a critical force. A youth movement raises the issues about a society in which it will be forced to live. It takes issues to the working class. They do this because, in America, there exists an enormous contradiction around the integration of youth into the system. The period of pre-employment has been greatly extended due to the affluence of this highly-industrialized society and the lack of jobs.

Institutions like the schools, the military, the courts and the police all act to oppress youth in specific ways, as does the work place. The propaganda and socialization processes focused at youth act to channel young people into desired areas of the labor market as well as to socialize them to accept without rebellion the miserable quality of life in America both on and off the job.

The ruling class recognizes the critical potential of young people. This is why they developed so many organizational forms to contain them. Many young people have rejected the integration process that the schools are supposed to serve and have broken with and begun to struggle against the "establishment". This phenomenon has taken many forms, ranging from youth dropping out as a response to a dying capitalist culture, to young workers being forced out by industry that no longer has any room for the untrained, unskilled, and unorganized. Both the drop-out and the forced-out youth face the repressive nature of America's police, courts, and military, which act to physically and materially oppress them. The response from various strata of youth has been rebellion, from the buildings at Columbia to the movement in the streets of Chicago to Haight-Ashbury to the Watts uprising.

### REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH

We must also understand what role a youth movement would have in the context of building a revolution. An organized class conscious youth movement would serve basically four functions in building revolutionary struggle:

1) An organized revolutionary youth movement is itself a powerful force for revolutionary struggle. In other words, our struggle is the class struggle, as is the Vietnamese and the black liberation struggle. To call youth or even the student movement a section of the bourgeoisie which must simply support any struggle fought by working people is economism. The struggle of youth is as much a part of the class struggle as a union strike. We ally with workers by waging struggle against a common enemy, not by subjugating our movement patronizingly to every trade union battle. We also ally with the liberation struggle of those fighting against imperialism, recognizing that this is the true expression of the working class at its most conscious level.

2) Youth is a critical force which -- through struggle -- can expose war, racism, the exploitation of labor and the oppression of youth. We do this by putting forth our class analysis of capitalist institutions via propaganda and sharp actions. Exemplary actions of the youth movement lead to higher consciousness and struggle among other people.

3) Because we can organize -- as a student movement -- around those contradictions which affect youth specifically, we can organize young working people into our class-conscious anti-capitalist movement. These young workers will (a) strengthen the anti-capitalist movement among the work-force, (b) provide an organic link between the student movement and the movement of working people, and (c) add to the effect that we will have as a critical force on older working people today.

4) The expansion of the base of the youth movement to include young working people changes the character of our movement importantly: because it fights the tendency of our student movement to define itself in terms of "student interest" rather than class interest.

Because we see a revolutionary youth movement as an important part of building a full revolutionary working class movement we must shape our own strategy self-consciously now with a view to that youth movement. This means that, in addition to expanding our base to include more young working people, we must insure the class consciousness of our movement now, and we must attack the class nature of the schools we are organizing against.

### RACISM

Building a class-conscious youth movement means fighting racism. SDS must see this fight as a primary task. Racism is a central contradiction in American society, since racism is an inherent part of capitalism and a primary tool used to exploit all working people. In order to fight racism, we must recognize that there is a struggle being fought right now for black liberation in America with which we must ally. This fight for black liberation is at once an anti-colonial struggle against racism and the racist imperialist power structure, as well as being part of the class struggle because black workers are among the most oppressed. It is through racism and its development into colonial oppression that black people are maintained as the most oppressed sector of the working class. Racism (white supremacy) ties white people to the state by splitting them from the most aggressive class struggle.

We must also fight racism within our own movement and among youth in general and make our loyalty to the black liberation struggle more solid. While recognizing that "black capitalism" is not a solution to the problem of racism, we must be careful not to dismiss the anti-colonial nature of the black liberation struggle by simply calling it bourgeois nationalism.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation part of this proposal should not be seen as a national program of action but rather as some suggested actions as well as some necessary actions to be taken if such a youth movement is to be built.

#### I. BUILD CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH MOVEMENT.

a. SDS organizers should direct the focus of their energies to organizing on campuses of working-class colleges, community schools, trade schools and technical schools as well as high schools and junior colleges.

b. Attacks should also focus on the UNIVERSITY AS AN ARM OF THE CORPORATIONS that exploit and oppress workers. Corporations that exploit workers should be fought on campus. (Aside from producing napalm, Dow Chemical Co. has plants in 27 countries of the Third World and is among the largest international corporations.)

c. SDS should move towards the building of alliances with non-academic employees on the campus based on struggle against the common enemy, the university. SDS should view the university as a corporation that directly oppresses the working class.

d. SDS should move to "destudentize" other students by attacking the false privileges of the university -- e.g. the 2-S deferment should be attacked on that basis.

e. Some of us should move into factories and shops as well as into working-class communities, to better understand the material oppression of industrial workers, as well as to eradicate prejudices against workers.

f. We should move into the liberation struggle now being fought inside the armed forces and take an active part. Up until now, we have paid only lip service to that struggle of mostly working-class youth.

g. Youth should be made to see their own struggle and the struggle of the Vietnamese against imperialism as the same struggle. The war must continue to be an important focus for SDS organizing.

h. We must join the fight against the class and racist nature of the public school system.

i. Drop-out and forced-out youth both should be encouraged to join our movement.

## 2. ATTACK ON INSTITUTIONAL RACISM.

We must view the university as a racist and imperialist institution which acts to oppress the working class and is the brain center of repression against the liberation struggles at home and around the world. Programs should be developed which aggressively attack it as such and attempt to stop it from functioning in that manner. Targets should include:

a. Police institutes on the campus.

b. The real estate establishment. (The University of Chicago is among the largest slumlords in the city.)

c. Centers for counter-insurgency (both domestic and foreign) including research and planning centers and sociology and education schools which teach people racism so that they can help defeat the struggles of the blacks.

d. Racism in the classroom, especially in high schools where students are forced by law to sit and listen to racist and class prejudiced distortions of history.

e. A fight should be waged for the admission of black students and brown students to help wage the fight against racism on the campus. Blacks are carrying on the most militant fights both on and off the campus, and more black admissions means a more militant campus movement. We must also expose the racist and class nature of admissions systems and the high school track system and demand that the schools be opened up to the community so that they too can struggle to stop its oppression.