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FLEDGLING REVOLT: USA

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STUDENT ESSAY

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(Essay)

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ABSTRACT

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This essay attempts to outline the major aspects of the historical development and international involvement of the Students for a Democratic Society and the various peace mobilization groups involved in the anti-war protest movement in the United States during the past decade. Specific time is devoted to the anti-military activities of these organizations and their discernible effects upon the United States military.

The disintegration of the Students for a Democratic Society and diminished activity on the part of peace mobilization groups is not viewed as evidence that the roots of revolution have completely expired. Recommendations pertaining to dissemination of information by mass media, particularly as it relates to protest organizers, is discussed.

Additionally, the requirements for better implementation of presently existing laws against violence, sedition and conspiracy is the subject of comment.

INTRODUCTION

During the past decade the United States has experienced a significant rise in dissidence, civil disorder and violence which unabated could be the forerunners of future insurgency action.^{1/} This situation has arisen in large measure due to an alienation from and disdain for American institutions and mores by a substantial number of young people. To date the new radical mood has been most prevalent on the college campuses and in sections of the civil rights movement.

A bonding element among the various radical groups has been an attitude of ". . .unconsidered emnity toward something vaguely called the establishment."^{2/} In England the term "establishment" was used to describe a group of intellectuals educated at Oxford who ostensibly set the cultural standards there and in London. In the United States the term "establishment" is more of an all purpose putdown rather than a definable body politic.

¹"New Pattern of Violence," U. S. News & World Report, 4 January 1971, pp. 23-25.

²Irving Howe, et al., Beyond the New Left (1970), p. ix.

The primary catalysts which set student activism in motion during the decade were civil rights and the Vietnam War.

There is nothing new about protest in the United States. Since the War of Independence major eras of protest have occurred; however, the protests of the 1960's have certain characteristics which set them apart from earlier periods:

- (1) The protest occurred in a period of prolonged prosperity.
- (2) The tone and direction of the protest was set essentially by the younger generation.
- (3) The protest has been principally activist in its orientation.
- (4) There emerged from the protest a national black organization which excluded white membership.

As has been historically true, the protest of the 1960's engendered varied reactions. In the beginning the response to the civil rights movement was generally positive with national legislation as one of its more meaningful achievements. As protests became more

militant, reaction became more negative, to the extent that a major issue of the 1968 presidential election was that of law and order. As civil rights causes subsided as major campus issues about mid-point through the decade, the escalation of American military involvement in Vietnam became the immediate and urgent issue of the New Left.

SCOPE

No attempt has been made in this essay to examine the civil rights protest or the development of the Black Panther Party and its interrelation with the student New Left. Principal attention has been directed toward an organization known as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the peace mobilization groups, their histories, activities and threat to our national security interests.

STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

"Now in the Post-World War II period with America embroiled in the problems of war and peace, civil rights, alienation, and cybernation an undefined new left is emerging whose

veins cannot be catalogued and whose potentials are not yet certain. . ."3/

Who constitutes the New Left? Staughton Lynd, formerly an Assistant Professor of History at Yale and one time member of the Youth Party of the CPUSA,^{4/} in an article appearing in the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science^{5/} described the New Left in the United States as a movement largely of young people associated with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Lynd further characterized the prime moving element of the New Left as a commitment to action, in the knowledge that the consequence of action can never be fully predicted.^{6/}

The SDS was a radical group that split (in 1960) from the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) a Fabian organization closely linked to the Socialist Party. It was the view of the SDS members that LID

³Sidney Lens, Radicalism in America (1969), p.

⁴US Cong., Manipulation of Vietnam Week, p. 31.

⁵Staughton Lynd, "The New Left," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, March 1969, p. 64.

⁶Ibid., p. 65.

had come to be dominated by aging trade unionist whose anti-communism outweighed their commitment to socialism. In the beginning, SDS was a loose affiliation of other campus organizations, such as Harvard's "Peace Club" and the University of Michigan's "Voice."^{7/} At its peak in 1969 the SDS had a membership estimated as high as 70,000 persons consisting of approximately 500 branches.^{8/}

In the early 1960's Communist Party organizations were quick to sense the pulse of campus unrest and members of its various youth organizations, including the W. E. B. Dubois Clubs, Youth Against War and Fascism and others, participated in SDS activities. It was not until the SDS Convention held in June of 1965 that the exclusionary clause against Communist membership which had been in the organization's constitution since its inception was removed.^{9/}

⁷US Congress, House, Committee on Internal Security, Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement: "Students for a Democratic Society, Report (1970), p. 24 (hereafter referred to as "US Cong., Anatomy SDS").

⁸US News and World Report, Inc., Communism and the New Left (1970), p. 18.

⁹US Congress, House, Committee on Un-American Activities, Subversive Involvement in Disruption of 1968 Democratic Party National Convention, Hearings (1968), Part 1, p. 2254.

From its inception, the SDS opposed the U.S. involvement in NATO and Vietnam. In 1964 the SDS sponsored a Peace Research and Education Project (PREP) which called for an end to U.S. intervention in Vietnam and an abolition of the draft.^{10/}

In April of 1965, the Berkeley Vietnam Day Committee was organized largely through the efforts of the SDS members to conduct a massive teach-in on campus. Following its success, it organized other protests such as demonstrating in front of troop trains and attempted to picket the Army Terminal and distributed leaflets entitled "Attention All Military Personnel" at induction centers and bases. The leaflets appealed to the serviceman as follows:

You may be sent to Vietnam. . . Many people will tell you to just follow orders and leave the thinking to others. . . But you have the right to know about this war. . . After all, it's you--not your Congressman-- who might get killed. . . as a soldier you have been trained to obey orders, but as a human being you must take the responsibility for your own acts. . . A growing number of GI's have already refused to fight in Vietnam and have been court-martialled. They have shown

¹⁰US Cong., Anatomy of SDS, p. 19.

great courage. . . There may be other things you can do; . . . Take every chance you get to talk to your fellow soldiers about the war. . ."^{11/}

Late in the year 1964 the SDS council proposed a "March on Washington to End the War in Vietnam" to be held April 17, 1965. Approximately 25,000 persons attended the Easter holiday march in Washington and heard SDS President Paul Potter proclaim:

". . . we will build a movement that will find ways to support the increasing numbers of young men who are unwilling to and will not tolerate the escalation or prolongation of this war but will, if necessary, respond to the administration war effort with massive civil disobedience all over the country. . ."^{12/}

By 1966 the SDS national headquarters was located at a Chicago office building owned by a former official of CPUSA. The same building also housed the Chicago Peace Council and the Veterans for Peace in Vietnam, both of which organizations were CPUSA controlled front groups.^{13/}

The composition of the SDS by 1966 was described by Carl Davidson, an SDS vice president at the time,

¹¹Peter Buckman, The Limits of Protest (1970), pp. 35-37.

¹²US Cong., Anatomy of SDS, p. 27.

¹³US Cong., Investigation of SDS, Part 7A, p. 2382.

as

"different varieties of Communists, socialists, social democrats, humanist liberals, former libertarian laisses-faire capitalists, and hippie types."^{14/}

It soon became apparent that the SDS leadership had come under at least indirect Communist control.

The deathknell was sounded for the SDS as an effective national organization at its June 1969 convention when a schism which developed between the Progress Labor Party (PLP) and the SDS leadership.^{15/} By fall of the year the PLP had formed its own headquarters and what remained of the original SDS organization had divided into the Revolutionary Youth Movement I (RYM-I) headed by Mark Rudd, more commonly known as the Weatherman group, and a Revolutionary Youth Movement II (RYM-II) faction.

The so-called Weatherman Faction which controlled the SDS national headquarters following the June 1969 convention in Chicago spoke of its goal in global terms:

"Destruction of the United States imperialism and achievement of a classless world: World Communism."^{16/}

¹⁴US Cong., Anatomy of SDS, p. 41.

¹⁵US Cong., Investigation of SDS, Part 7B, p. 2465.

¹⁶US Cong., Anatomy of SDS, p. 114.

SDS planned so-called National Action for the City of Chicago on October 8 through 11, 1969. During this period the Weatherman controlled national organization and its supporters engaged in several violent confrontations with the Chicago police. Violence reached a climax on the final day of the SDS National Action when several hundred demonstrators marching in downtown Chicago went on a rampage, breaking store and automobile windows along the parade route and attacking police officers. Approximately 600 youths were involved in the demonstration rather than the tens of thousands who were predicted for an appearance in Chicago.^{17/} To many observers the National Action signaled a turn of the SDS faction from resistance to provocation tactics.

Following this violence, the membership in the Weatherman Faction fell below 400 and those remaining in the faction went underground in 1970.^{18/}

INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

As early as 1965 there is evidence of travel by SDS members and sympathizers to foreign countries. (t

¹⁷US Cong., Anatomy SDS, p. 126.

¹⁸US Cong., Anatomy SDS, p. 129.

should be noted that unlike the more established old line Communist groups in the United States which for years have maintained clear ties with international revolutionary movements, there is no clear evidence that the SDS was directly linked with any foreign government.^{19/}

In December of 1965, SDS leader Thomas Hayden accompanied Herbert Aptheker and Yale Professor Staughton Lynd on a purported fact-finding mission to Hanoi. During the course of testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in December 1968, Hayden also admitted traveling to North Vietnam again in October of 1967.

Douglas Hegdahl, a United States petty officer and former prisoner of war in North Vietnam, testified that Nicholas Egleson, SDS National President, along with David Dellinger of the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam had visited the prison camp in Hanoi where Hegdahl was held in 1967.^{20/}

Rennard Davis left the United States in July of 1969 en route to Hanoi for the purpose of taking custody

¹⁹US Cong., Anatomy SDS, p. 69.

²⁰Ibid., p. 62.

of three U.S. servicemen being held prisoners by the North Vietnamese. Instead of just escorting the prisoners on their return back to the United States, Davis and other members of the SDS who accompanied him on the trip were given an 18-day tour of North Vietnam. A brother of SDS officer Rennie Davis, John Willard Davis, himself an SDS leader at Marietta College in Ohio, was a member of a delegation from the United States who attended a conference in Budapest, Hungary, in September 1969 to confer with representatives of North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Following the conference, John Davis traveled to Stockholm, Sweden, where he visited with American deserters and from there went on to West Germany for discussions with Danny Cohn-Bendit, better known as Danny the Red, leader of the radical French student ^{21/} movement.

Cuba was a place visited frequently by SDS representatives in 1968 at the invitation of the Cuban government. The SDS sponsored the travel of a group of twenty students, of which Mark Rudd was a member,

²¹US Cong., Anatomy SDS, pp. 66-67.

to Cuba. A short time after his return to the United States, Rudd led the uprising which closed Columbia University and caused property damage in excess of one-half million dollars. This was the first major incident in the United States of violence by the SDS to accomplish its objective...^{22/}

NEW MOBILIZATION COMMITTEE

Large scale peace marches in major United States cities in the late 1960's had considerable effect on public opinion. The SDS participated in these movements but the idea to form mobilization committees to end the war in Vietnam was developed at a meeting of the University Circle Teach-In Committee, a Cleveland anti-war group. The chairman of this group was a Professor Sidney M. Peck, a former member of the Wisconsin State Committee of CPUSA.

The first committee was designated as the November 8th Mobilization Committee (MOBE). In November of 1966 the November 8th Mobilization Committee held another conference in Cleveland at which time it resolved to

²²US Cong., Anatomy SDS, p. 64.

reconstitute itself as the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam and to organize mass protests against the Vietnam war on April 15, 1967.

From their inception, the various mobilization committees operated with significant domestic and international Communist support. Throughout all of the MOBE activities, there was a coalition of organizations, both Communist and non-Communist. The principle of non-exclusion became a basic doctrine of MOBE practice notwithstanding occasional bitter fights within the coalition.^{23/}

In addition to the Spring MOBE group itself, the key organizer for the April 1967 anti-Vietnam war activities was the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. The Student MOBE has collaborated with Spring, National and New Mobilization Committees in every mass anti-Vietnam war demonstration to date.

²³U. S. Congress. House. Committee on Internal Security. Subversive Involvement in the Origin, Leadership, and Activities of the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam and its Predecessor Organizations. Staff Study, 91st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1970. (Hereafter referred to as US Cong., MOBE Staff Study).

It is probably the most active and potent national organization in the coalition which made up the new MOBE. An estimated 100,000 to 125,000 people participated in the New York rally on April 15, 1967. Chairmen of the rally were Dave Dellinger and Dr. Benjamin Spock. The San Francisco rally was attended by approximately 40,000 to 50,000 people.^{24/}

Following the Spring Mobilization marches, the Committee held a National Anti-War Conference in Washington, D. C., at which time a massive march on Washington was scheduled for October 21, 1967. Subsequent to the spring rally, the Spring Mobilization Committee became known as the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam.

In September of 1968, twenty-eight American anti-war activists attended a meeting in Budapest, Hungary, with representatives of North Vietnam. Participation of the United States delegates had been organized by National MOBE Chairman Dave Dellinger. Former SDS Vice President Vernon Grizzard, who was in attendance at the meeting, indicated discussions had taken place

²⁴US Cong., MOBE Staff Study, p. 6.

concerning mobilization of students in universities as well as plans to encourage draft resistance and to agitate among servicemen. The North Vietnamese were informed at this meeting of American plans to hold a GI Week in an attempt to propagandize servicemen in coffee houses near Army bases. GI Week was set for November 1-5, 1968 and activities actually took place at some twenty-five Army bases around the country.^{25/}

In the spring of 1969 a group of twenty-seven anti-war leaders, who for the most part had been MOBE connected in the past, called a national anti-war conference in Cleveland, Ohio, for July 4, 1969. The so-called New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam was established at this meeting. The conference proposed a program known as the Fall Offensive designed to assist groups in organizing a series of anti-war activities to be culminated in mass rallies and marches in Washington and San Francisco on November 15, 1969.^{26/} The demonstrations in Washington and San Francisco on November 15 drew a large number of persons from across

²⁵US Cong., MOBE Staff Study, p. 17.

²⁶Ibid., p. 21.

the country. An estimated 250,000 people participated in Washington while an additional 100,000 were involved in San Francisco. Speakers in Washington included, among others, Dr. Benjamin Spock and Dave Dellinger.

ANTI-WAR ACTIVITIES EFFECT
ON THE MILITARY

The total effect, directly or indirectly, of the anti-war protests of the past decade on the military forces of the United States cannot yet be fully measured. The Selective Service System has been amended. This, in fact, may be one of the few benefits of the protest movement. On the other hand, the protests have been of sufficient magnitude as to actually compel political decisions which have limited the utilization of weapons and tactics of our Armed Forces in Vietnam, such as curtailing the use of defoliants and denial of the use of troops so as to permit the enemy sanctuaries and supply bases in Cambodia and Laos.

A primary source of young officers for the military, other than the service academies, has been through the college Reserve Officer Training Programs (ROTC). Protest movements have forced the removal of many ROTC units from campuses and certainly discouraged

a number of qualified young men from enrollment in the programs. Protesters have established coffee houses outside of military bases for the avowed purpose of substituting military personnel. There have been obvious exploitations of already difficult race relations and attempts at unionization of enlisted members of the Armed Forces.

Today in far-flung parts of the world our military forces are experiencing increased incidents of insubordination, major racial strife and serious breaches of military discipline. To attribute all of these problems to the anti-war activities would be as grave an error as it would be to dismiss such activities as a major contributing cause.

CONCLUSIONS

In ten short years embryonic organizations of students reached out and channeled the exploding idealism of youth into an effective instrument of activism. The penetration of the SDS by Communists and other radical extremists quickly changed the directives and objectives of the organization--moving from dissent on behalf of reform to violence and virtual anarchy.

The fact that the SDS as a vital organization is a thing of the past does not mean that other similar, if not more powerful, organizations will emerge in America. The Fledgling Revolt spawned by the student radicalism lends awesome credence to the warning of the longshoreman turned philosopher, Eric Hoffer, who wrote in comment upon the past: violence "When freedom destroys order, the yearning for order will destroy freedom."

The strength of the nation lies in its willingness to accept vigorous dissent. This cannot be construed as a license for citizens to engage in violence or revolt. To implement some of the lessons learned from the protests of the last decade, the author offers the following two general recommendations:

1. The right to dissent cannot be abridged; nevertheless it is incumbent upon duly constituted government to timely and vigorously enforce existing laws against violence, sedition and conspiracy.

2. The public has a right to be informed. The findings of the House Committee on Internal Security, or other fact finding bodies, although available are not generally known by the public. Mass media must be

assisted to reach a stage of maturation where
forthright factual information can be timely pre-
sented to the public.

Paul A. O'Brien

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