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**The Failure of the New Left in the US: The  
Case of SDS**

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## **Abstrakt**

Tato práce nazvaná *The Failure of the New Left in the US: The Case of SDS* analyzuje důvody a zdroje neúspěchu Nové Levice ve Spojených státech amerických. Levicově smýšlející studenti, kteří byli nespokojeni se společenským pořádkem a realitou své země se sjednotili pod hlavičkou participativní demokracie v organizaci zvané *Students for a Democratic Society*. Jejich hlavním cílem bylo změnit a vylepšit systém skrz působení univerzity jako zprostředkovatel společenské změny, čímž se výrazně lišili od Staré Levice. Dělník už nestál uprostřed společenského progresu, leč jeho pozici nahradil student. SDS se rychle vrhla do několika palčivých problémů tehdejší společnosti, jako například hnutí za občanská práva a podřadná pozice chudých a černých obyvatel. Válka ve Vietnamu a protiválečné hnutí rovněž představovaly jedno z velkých aktivit SDS. Jak se postupem času zvyšoval počet amerických vojáků ve Vietnamu, tak se zintenzivňovala míra studentského protestu. SDS tedy nevyhnutelně sáhla k násilným formám vyjadřování svého nesouhlasu a střetala se se silami establishmentu. Tato práce si klade za cíl zjistit, jaké důvody, události a skutečnosti vedly k přijmutí revolučního marxismu jako vlajkové ideologie. Brzy poté se organizace rozpadla a ztratila svůj velký vliv.

## **Abstract**

This thesis *The Failure of the New Left in the US: The Case of SDS* analyzes the causes and reasons of the failure of the New Left in the United States. The left-leaning students who were discontent with the social order and reality of the country gathered under the idea of participatory democracy in a group called *Students for a Democratic Society*. Their aim was to change and improve the system through universities being agents of

social change, thus making a clear difference with the Old Left. The worker no longer stood in the center of social progress, but the student did. SDS promptly plunged into several burning issues of the era, such as civil rights movement and inferior position of the blacks and poor in the society. The Vietnam War and antiwar protest movement have also been great issues in which SDSers directed their energy. As the Vietnam War escalated in terms of American soldiers being sent overseas, the intensity of student protests grew as well. Inevitably SDS resorted to usage of violent means of expressing dissent and clashed with the forces of the establishment. The thesis seeks to answer what reasons, events and realities led them to finally adopting revolutionary Marxism as their flag ideology. Soon after that SDS broke up and its once great influence waned away.

### **Klíčová slova**

Students for a Democratic Society, SDS, Nová Levice, šedesátá léta 20. století, USA

### **Keywords**

Students for a Democratic Society, SDS, New Left, 1960s, USA

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V Praze dne 3. 1. 2016

Tomáš Vítek

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<b>V čem se oproti původnímu zadání změnil cíl práce?</b>	<b>The aim of the thesis has undergone dramatic changes. Contrary to the original topic, this thesis will examine the cause of the failure of the New Left in the United States on the example of Students for a Democratic Society. The post-World War Two period has seen several crucial processes that heavily impacted domestic and world state of affairs which led to mobilization of students on the left. Influenced by the idea of participatory democracy in order to come up with an alternative to the Cold War social discourse, they strove to build a student power as a source of social progress.</b>
<b>Jaké změny nastaly v časovém, teritoriálním a věcném vymezení tématu?</b>	<b>The time frame of the paper ranges from the end of the Second World War, while 1962 being a starting line, which represented the formation of SDS. The final endnote of the movement can be seen on the turn of 60s and 70s, when a series of raging violent events of 1968 and consecutive inner tensions and farther radicalization led to an actual breakdown of SDS. The territorial boundaries are within the United States. Factual changes are obvious.</b>
<b>Jak se proměnila struktura práce (vyjádřete stručným obsahem)?</b>	<b>The World of 50s and 60s – the Roots of Rebellion From Port Huron to Clear lake – the Birth of SDS Radicalization – 1965 to 1968 The Breakdown Conclusion</b>
<b>Jakým vývojem prošla metodologická koncepce práce?</b>	<b>The thesis will be an analysis of primary documents available such as letters, speeches and official SDS statements, eventually excerpts from SDS weekly newspaper New Left Notes. Furthermore personal accounts of back then direct witnesses and actors as well as other secondary literature.</b>
<b>Které nové prameny a sekundární literatura byly zpracovány a jak tato skutečnost ovlivnila celek práce?</b>	<b>Sale, Kirkpatrick. SDS. The rise and development of the Students for a</b>

**Democratic Society. New York: Vintage Books, 1973.**  
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**Lieberman, Robbie. Prairie Power : Voices of 1960s Midwestern Student Protest. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004.**

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## **Introduction**

The United States is a country built on dissent, when in 1776 colonists refused to obey what they perceived as oppressive rule of the English crown. The right of dissent belongs to the most cherished freedoms that the citizens of the US enjoy and throughout its history various groups of dissenters, abolitionists, progressivists or unions served as a source of social progress. The social movement of the 1950s and especially the 1960s represents a special era of US history when concerned citizens loudly and firmly expressed their discontent with various aspects of establishment's policies within society and were able to articulate their demands within a broader social movement. The Student New Left occupies a special place within this era as it was the largest student upheaval in the history of the country.

In 1960, a student wing of League for Industrial Democracy named itself Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), introducing a fresh face to the American Left. The American Left was muted under the Cold War narrative and still haunted and largely dormant from the red-hunt era of McCarthyism dominated by pro-establishment strictly anti-communist organizations which still carried the archaic message of the 1930s. Mainstream social discourse during this time was shaped by mantra of consumption as unprecedented numbers of Americans were experiencing upward social movement. The postwar economic prosperity was reflected in baby boom and large scale urban development. The white middle class in America was on the rise and it seemed that the American way of life was sure to be triumphant over communism if everybody contributed. Social criticism was diminished and left for fringe academic scholars some of which later served as an intellectual ground for SDS and underground writers. The youth born into prosperity were thus confronted with somewhat uptight shallow environment and naturally searched for revolt. One of the escape routes from oppressive parental eyes seemed rock'n'roll culture embodied by Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando and James Dean. This bedrock of revolt fermented and when the baby boomers started to enter the world of universities in large numbers, their craving for socially critical theories had to be quenched. The intellectual arsenal of the New Left seemed to some as a perfect place to go.

The SDS was founded with a core value of participatory democracy and non-exclusionist nature as it aimed to eschew the ills of the Old Left that fell into the pit of factionalism and bickering. These core values were articulated in *Port Huron Statement*, a manifesto of the new student approach towards society. The statement identified and articulated contemporary social problems such as fear or nuclear annihilation, civil rights struggle, new complex challenges a student faces, social apathy and much needed university reform to combat apathy and inner alienation of American studentry.<sup>1</sup> *Port Huron* drew a starting line for a new movement that emerged with a goal no less grand than to change the nature of American democracy. It quickly adopted various current social struggles taking place in the country. SDS commenced cooperation with Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, a leading civil rights struggle group which later radicalized itself and in 1968 merged with Black Panther Party and became a vanguard of black radicalism and nationalism. Yet in 1962, the SDS and SNCC cooperated on number of issues as SDS copied the tactics of civil disobedience and community organizing in poor black neighborhoods. Another growing issue was American involvement in Vietnam and the growing antiwar movement. This quickly picked up speed in 1965 and SDS started to play a leading role in the movement scoring some victories, but failing to claim the leading position of the entire antiwar movement leader's position due to inner tensions and various interests of various group gathered under the SDS roof. This cause-shifting was a double-edged sword and very typical feature of SDS. The flexibility was hailed as a big plus allowing it to gather supporters into one camp, while on the other hand it diminished the group's impact as the central strategy was often changed or nonexistent.

The New Left embodied by the SDS gradually became more and more violent in its struggle for implementing its theories into the real world. From their experiences learned in the streets, they realized that the non-violent means of protest are to a large extent non-effective in reaching the goal or even swaying the public opinion into its favor. Protesters faced harsh police behavior, which was not not criticized in the mainstream media and eventually was upheld in the eyes of mainstream society as the

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<sup>1</sup> SDS, "The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society," 1962, accessed December 26, 2015, <http://www.sds-1960s.org/PortHuronStatement.pdf>.

aftermath of riots in Chicago in 1968 showed.<sup>2</sup> Government although later ordered investigation that proved that the police was largely to blame for the outbreak of violence.<sup>3</sup> SDS was thus prompted to take up more direct and violent means of spreading their message. Inner factionalism that started to affect SDS gave rise to ideological clashes within the group, despite having little effect on new members. By the tumultuous year of 1968 that shook society in the US and beyond, the SDS had abandoned or developed much of its *Port Huron* declarations and focused on creating the revolution inside the US, being in both ideological contact with European and Third World left-leaning movements. Had SDS fallen for the Marxist theoretical frame, it vastly departed from the initial goals and as was the national leadership much detached from the local chapters, it was mired in ideological disputes. The next year signified the betrayal of the SDS's core value of non-exclusionist nature, voted one of the competing factions out and effectively seized to exist within few months.

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions. What were the reasons that the largest and most influential student organization on the left split? Why did it split up so quickly and why had it lost its influence so quickly bearing in mind the large number of its members and sympathizers? What causes led SDS and the New Left in general to fail to gain broader support of mainstream public? What actions have the state taken up and how did the establishment contribute to the failure of SDS? In regard to these questions raised several key points will be examined. First, it will explore the inner structure and its dynamics that have changed significantly in the course of time of its existence. Second, the functioning of SDS in terms of larger dissident movement that affected American politics and society in the sixties era with key elements such as the Vietnam War, civil rights struggle and black liberation or women's emancipation struggle. Third, the response of the establishment, the state in particular and mainstream media as well. Fourth, the redefining of ideology as a response to rise of inner factionalism and violence in the nature of protest. For SDS founded itself on the premise of being different than the Old Left, yet gradually took up its vocabulary and finally surpassed it by taking up revolutionary Marxism to new heights, under the influence of

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<sup>2</sup> Linda Lyons, "The Gallup Brain: War and Peace Protests", *Gallup*, March 25, 2003, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/8053/gallup-brain-war-peace-protests.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> "Rights in Conflict. Convention Week in Chicago, August 25-29, 1968," A Report submitted by Daniel Walker, Director of the Chicago Study Team, to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of

Black Power, Third World liberation struggle and wished for alliance with the working class. The aspect of being white had a distinct self-flagellating effect of having white privilege in a perceived unjust oppressive society.

This thesis takes a chronological analytic approach as SDS grew in numbers and influence and consists of four chapters. The first chapter serves as background information on American society and the profound changes it underwent in the fifties under the influence of Second World War. The cultural and social fabric with its main features of consumption, approval of social order and status quo, Cold War reality and negligence of its shortcomings traded for economic prosperity is a crucial element for the youth being brought in such environment. The seemingly still era featuring all penetrating narrative of social affluence resonated much with the social deprived thirties and helped to nurture the generation gap between baby boomers and their parents. Public intellectuals were largely pro-establishment, however main precursors of the New Left, such as C. Wright Mills, were already active in the fifties.

The year of 1962 marked the birth of the SDS and the developments of early SDS are examined in the second chapter. SDS started as a small organization of few hundred students on a handful of college and university campuses with two key figures that were instrumental for its development. After defining its core values, it briskly plunged into the struggle of changing the society for the better. A community organizing program was established and inaugurated cooperation with black activist groups. However pristine and honest the effort to organize the poor was, it had little to zero actual success, although it served as a great experience for everyone involved and foreshadowed some future strategies of community organizing. SDS also immediately joined the antiwar movement and despite impressive results failed to take the leading role of the entire antiwar effort.

The generational exchange in the SDS cadre and gravitation of the power center from the East Coast towards so called “prairie power” meant profound changes in the inner dynamics of SDS and is largely a focus of chapter three. Furthermore the escalation of protest activities and adopting violent measures accelerated the whole movement and

led to the phase of active resistance. No longer was the goal to discuss, criticize and draw attention to, now the time of active fight against the establishment became a central pillar of SDS strategy.

The topic of chapter four focuses on this shift towards “actively fighting the establishment as a stepping stone to an open revolt and eventual revolution. The takeover of Columbia University campus by radical SDS and the riots in Chicago proved to be catalysts for total top-to-bottom radicalization of SDS. Both internal and external influences pushed the SDS into a revolutionary stage and eventually broke up by sacrificing its core values of participatory democracy and non-exclusionist nature.

The thesis is a case study based on a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources available. As the primary sources are concerned, several distinguished sources were examined. Firstly the actual documents that are available at a very helpful website <http://www.sds-1960s.org/documents.htm> which is a database of various SDS documents and material including *New Left Notes*, SDS self-released newspaper which was an indispensable channel of inner and outer communication and its nature changed according to the ideological changes of SDS, holding tremendous value for the researcher. Secondly a number newspaper articles of *New York Times* was analyzed to grasp the contemporary discourse in which the mainstream media viewed SDS as well as a number of alternative media outlets such as *Ramparts*. Finally, for the first chapter hard data, several government statistical databases were used.

Secondary sources used were either personal accounts direct participants in the SDS or monographies and books examining the issue. A typical example of a personal account is Todd Gitlin’s *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*<sup>4</sup> published in 1987, when Gitlin similarly to other direct participants were professor’s in sociology and political science departments of liberal universities. As a President of SDS in 1963 and 1964 he was a first-hand witness to most of the events described and in a somewhat literary vocabulary he describes the whole era from his perspective often delving into cultural aspects. Being directly at the center of action constitute both strength and weakness of his book, his first-hand insights are valuable in the sense of grasping the

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<sup>4</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

esprit and cultural underlying of the era, which would otherwise remain hidden to contemporary observer. On the other hand the human memory tend to forget certain experiences and some twenty years after is the memory of the events inevitably distorted.

Second indispensable source of information is Kirkpatrick Sale's, *SDS: The rise and development of the Students for a Democratic Society*<sup>5</sup> published in 1973 a lengthy information rich account of the whole SDS movement. The value of this book lies in the fact that Sale interviewed active participants from that time and amply resorts to this sort of information, while at the same time was easily able to analyze all the issues of *New Left Notes*. His book is often considered a bible of SDS research and every major author touching upon the issue uses Sale as source. The shortcoming lies in almost absent theoretical background of what influenced SDS members and sometimes resembles more of day-to-day journal than academic piece.

David Barber's *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why it Failed*<sup>6</sup> is a 2010 academic piece analyzing directly the causes of SDS failure of being successful in the goals set. Barber presents three main reasons, inability to recognize and define whiteness of SDS, its chauvinism and failure to successfully establish meaningful connections with the Black Nationalism movement. However, Barber provides some interesting and valuable insights on the connections between SDS and black struggle. He overestimates the power the black leaders and philosophy had in relation to establishment and does not see the futility of their revolutionary armed struggle against the law enforcement. Furthermore he blames the white leaders of being neglectful of black agenda setters and put much emphasis on their actual social impacts. Yet generally was Barber's book very conducive for defining the core lines of SDS's failure.

Two publications primarily focusing on the role of the state and FBI in particular on fighting the New Left were James Kirkpatrick Davis's *Assault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Movement*<sup>7</sup> and David Cunningham's, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence*<sup>8</sup>. Both books rely extensively on

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<sup>5</sup> Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS: The rise and development of the Students for a Democratic Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why it Failed* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> James Kirkpatrick Davis, *Assault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Movement* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004).

FBI internal memos and documents and provide thoughtful analysis of the information gathered. They both excellently show how the FBI failed to grasp what was going on in the New Left well into sixties, however sometimes underestimate the atmosphere of suspicion created which on the other hand hard to quantify. And lastly a book by Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield *An American Ordeal, The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era*<sup>9</sup> is a comprehensive piece on the whole antiwar movement in the US during the Vietnam War, which was crucially helpful in defining the role SDS played in the antiwar coalition.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal, The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990).



## 1 The world of 50s and 60s – The Roots of Rebellion

The United States was one of the main architects of the post-Second World War international order and as such was at the center of economic and political activity. The overall reconstruction of war devastated world led to an unprecedented period of prosperity in the United States. Between 1946 and 1973, the country experienced the longest sustained economic boom in its history as the standard of living for most American workers significantly improved throughout the fifties and early sixties. The average weekly earnings for manufacturing workers grew by 84 percent between 1950 and 1965.<sup>10</sup> The unemployment rate, the haunting memory of the dire straits of the thirties, hit the record low, sometimes oscillating on the verge on full employment. Between 1948 and 1973, the unemployment rate never exceeded 8 percent and half the time period was under 5 percent<sup>11</sup>. The presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson is marked by the lowest unemployment rate in the post-Second World War era, whilst Truman, Eisenhower and Nixon periods come second, third and fourth.<sup>12</sup> The word “affluence” became so much word of the fifties, with its connotation of fullness and flow. It was before John Kenneth Galbraith published his bestseller *The Affluent Society* in 1958 that the term got its recognition and was regarded as a national condition, not a personal standing.<sup>13</sup> It bore no negative connotations as the word “rich”, with its inevitable counterpart “poor”, thus playing out more into the idea of American dream, which knows only winners and no losers.

### 1.1 The Baby Boomers

Soon after the end of the war, the US found itself on the pinnacle of the world’s economic pyramid, running far ahead of both Axis and Allies countries. Inflation was negligible, natural resources were plentiful and their supply was stable. Until 1973, the economy grew by 3.8 percent a year, while real median household income surged 2.1 percent a year.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the memories of depression of the Thirties was replaced by material satisfaction of the fifties. This flush of prosperity and thrill of victory was

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<sup>10</sup> Sharon Smith, “Twilight of the American Dream,” *International Socialism Journal* 54 (1992), 3.

<sup>11</sup> “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey 1948-1973,” United States Department of Labor, accessed December 26, 2015, <http://www.bls.gov/data/>.

<sup>12</sup> “Unemployment Rates by President, 1948-2015,” David Coleman, History in Pieces, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://historyinpieces.com/research/us-unemployment-rates-president>.

<sup>13</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 20.

translated into a baby boom. More babies were born in 1948-53 than in previous thirty years.<sup>15</sup> The initial boom can be understood as a direct response to the depression and wartime deprivations, but the steady continuance well into the sixties requires further explanation. Such a sustained boom took place only in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, countries that were untouched by the war, with abundant land, strong sense of victorious national pride and relentless consumption. Couples were marrying earlier, while experiencing prosperity earlier and on a bigger scale. The baby boom was seen as an homage to the national glory and was a natural extension of the economic boom.<sup>16</sup>

Yet the boom was not without its contradictions and the overall higher and steadier income was not distributed equally throughout society, leaving entire groups, particularly Blacks, unaffected by the rising tide of social affluence. Prosperity grew alongside Jim Crow segregation in the South and crippling poverty in the ghettos of Northern cities. This staggering inequality of wealth distribution served as a hot bed for rising social demands of the marginalized groups, leading to the Civil rights movement. Galbraith in his best-selling piece argued that the affluence of private sector was crowding out the public goods, causing the impoverishment of the public sector, which lied neglected in the eyes of many including the mainstream media.

### ***1.2 Urban Changes and the TV***

The economic and demographic boom also triggered large scale urban developments. Not only were people migrating within the country, but also within developed urban areas. The contemporary trend was migration out of the city center into the new suburban areas. Whole new neighborhoods were built in a grid-like manner, emptying the centers and fully embracing the vast space possibilities, cultivating both intellectual and real borderlands of the American wilderness. The Puritan Utopia of “city upon a hill” was finally completed in the flatlands of the American suburb.<sup>17</sup> The new urban setting required better transportation possibilities, from every day commute to long

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<sup>14</sup> “Money Income of Households, Families and Persons in the United States: 1987,” United States Department of Commerce, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/popscan/p60-162.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation*, (New York: Ballantine, 1981), 20-23.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, *Great Expectations*, 26, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 21.

distance trips. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 authorized 25 billion USD for building of 41 000 miles of the Interstate Highway System, the largest public works project until that time<sup>18</sup>, offering Americans the feeling of their vast country coming into reach. The open road had long before been a symbol of freedom and the new legislation only fostered this notion. The car thus was the incarnation of personal power, freedom, leisure and convenience all wrapped in a single machine; both a symbol and a symptom of the American search for ways to liberate the self from social restraints.<sup>19</sup>

Another profoundly important symbol of prosperity of the era that penetrated almost every household in the US was the television. Between the years 1950 and 1959 the number of the TV sets grew almost seven times to 67 million.<sup>20</sup> Television attracted and affected the core social strata of the new America, the rising middle class, offering a sanitized and upbeat world of opportunity that reinforced the desires and aspirations of the viewers rendering the images of abundance very realistic. The TV was a strong ally to the idea of the American dream coming true to anybody no matter his or her background or social position. The joyous spirit of hope, growth and prosperity for everyone resonated strongly within the lonely and isolated crowds of TV watchers. Thus a large part of American society called itself middle class, meaning that they were at least on their way.<sup>21</sup> This newly acquired material abundance was gravely significant for the years to come, as the parent generation was scourged by the memories of the joyless Depression and their children of the aspiring middle class were raised to take the affluence for granted. The parents knew they had to work hard for all the TVs, cars and spacious suburban homes and since a large part of them painfully remembered the hardships of the Thirties and wartime sacrifices, they were extremely grateful for all they achieved in post-war America. Therefore they expected their children to feel the same and often raised them, telling stories of how hard life have been back then. This was a generational cleavage in the making.

### ***1.3 Intellectual Roots – What to Build upon***

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<sup>18</sup> Richard F. Weingroff, “Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956: Creating The Interstate System,” *Public Roads* 60 (1996), accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/96summer/p96su10.cfm>.

<sup>19</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> “Television Facts and Statistics - 1939 to 2000,” Television History - The First 75 Years, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.tvhistory.tv/facts-stats.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 23.

Popular social criticism partly contributed to the fifties Zeitgeist of material driven ideology permitting dissent within preset range of acceptability. Prominent intellectuals such as Seymour Martin Lipset or David Bell celebrated affluence and the “American way of life” that was viewed as the only way how to succeed. America was exceptional to European passions and dangers, and as a result was spared two ugly wars, fascism and now communism. “The American way of life” had attained a state in which ideology was defunct, social problems were discrete, isolated and manageable by clear-headed professionals.<sup>22</sup> The official establishment line was blunter. As attorney general Tom Clark in 1948 stated: “Those who do not believe in the ideology of the United States shall not be allowed to stay in the United States,”<sup>23</sup> paving the way for McCarthyism and heightened red-baiting. On the other hand, when the McCarthyism overreached its initial targets of communist spies and sympathizers within the country and started to scrutinize the United States Army, it quickly lost its appeal and was replaced by more stable consensus that aforementioned intellectuals helped to formulate. America was the model for the best society achievable, the economic growth would make the opportunity universal, domestic tensions would be overcome and communism could be contained by a combination of free enterprise and military might.

However, as much as the “consensus” intellectuals painted a bright picture, there were some dissident voices pointing out to the shallow consumerism and conformity, which served as the ideological foundation for the New Left. A groundbreaking book by David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, brought a striking study of American character. Riesman and his co-authors analyzed three cultural types and argued the contemporary middle class defined and identified itself through references to the other members of their community and inherently were restricted in their ability to know themselves, thus pointing to self-propelling conformism. Riesman’s friend C. Wright Mills proved to be even more influential on the future New Leftists. Not only he famously rode a motorbike, sported a black leather jacket suggesting to many a heroic outlaw figure akin to popular movie characters played by James Dean and Marlon Brando, but he also died aged 45, further reinforcing the image of rebellious young intellectual, which was the image of

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<sup>22</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1963).

<sup>23</sup> David Caute, *The Great Fear* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 15.

many young New Leftists in the sixties.<sup>24</sup> In “White Collar: *The American Middle Classes*, published in 1951, Mills described the emergence of a new class of white collar workers and social alienation in advanced capitalism. An aspect which the New Left, as proponents of participatory democracy, were sound critics of. The cities were dominated by a salesmanship mentality, which trumped the traditional social relationships through the pursuit of material enrichment. “Men are estranged from one another as each secretly tries to make an instrument of the other, and in time a full circle is made: one makes an instrument of himself and is estranged from it also.”<sup>25</sup> Five years later Mills published *The Power Elite*<sup>26</sup>, where he described the interwoven interests of military, political and corporate elements of the society and argued, that an individual citizen is relatively powerless against this manipulative machinery. This notion was not very far from Dwight D. Eisenhower’s farewell address delivered in 1961, where he warned before “the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.”<sup>27</sup> Finally, the most influential and inspirational document for the young students was the *Letter to the New Left* from 1960. The radical sociologist called the emerging student movement that “new generations of intellectuals around the world” could be “real live agencies of historic change,”<sup>28</sup> which gained a lot of attention in the progressive circles on college campuses. Mills was regarded as quintessentially American thinker, who would not stick only to the US environment, but also travelled to the Soviet bloc and to Cuba and Latin America to observe various materialization of Marxism theory in reality.<sup>29</sup> His outward looking position was an inspiration for late 1960s internationalism, cooperation and identification with Third World movements of the radical student left. His lines: “Who is it that is thinking and acting in radical ways? All over the world — in the bloc, outside the bloc and in between — the answer’s the same: it is the young intelligentsia,”<sup>30</sup> strongly resonated in the nascent student movement of the early 1960s.

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel Geary, “Becoming International Again: C. Wright Mills and the Emergence of a Global New Left, 1956 - 1962,” *The Journal of American History*, 95 (2008), 710.

<sup>25</sup> C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 187

<sup>26</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Farewell Address,” accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/dwightdeisenhowerfarewell.html>.

<sup>28</sup> C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” *New Left Review* 5 (1960), accessed December 25, 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/humanism/mills-c-wright/letter-new-left.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Geary, “Becoming International Again,” 711.

<sup>30</sup> Mills, “Letter to the New Left.”

In the beginning, the student New Left also took inspiration from foreign authors, especially French existentialists such as Albert Camus and his famous philosophical novel *The Stranger*<sup>31</sup> which aptly describes feelings of alienation and absurd loneliness. Another author who gained broad attention by young dissatisfied youths was German sociologist and political theorist, member of the Frankfurt School Herbert Marcuse. His book called *One Dimensional Man*<sup>32</sup> from 1964 received wide popularity for its critique of both contemporary capitalism of West and communism in the East, drawing parallels of social repression in both systems. Marcuse argued that “advanced industrial society” created false needs that integrate an individual into the system of production and more importantly consumption via mass media, industrial management and prefabricated modes of thought. This results in a “one dimensional” universe of thought and behaviour, which suppresses individuality and critical thought withers away.<sup>33</sup> Young intellectuals hungry for criticism of consumerism, dissatisfied with seemingly shallow and limited intellectual life of the nation, naturally welcomed Marcuse’s philosophy.

#### ***1.4 The Era of Fear***

The baby boomers that entered the universities and wanted to get involved in the building of democracy, sustaining peace, justice and personal freedom in their land and heeded the calls of Peace Corps or read the social critique of the fifties, were to a certain extent an extension of their parents middle-class creed. But their views regarding the meaning of affluence were divided by their individual experiences that could never be erased. Parents could never quite convey how they were haunted by the Depression and relieved by the arrival of affluence, while the young generation could never quite convey how tired they were of being reminded how bad things had once been, and therefore how fortunate and grateful they should feel to live in a normal America.<sup>34</sup> Higher education became a national priority, not only to feed the economy skilled labor, but more importantly to fight and eventually win the Cold War. The mood definitely changed after the national humiliation of Sputnik being sent onto the orbit by the Soviet Union in 1957.

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<sup>31</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (New York: Vintage, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man: studies in ideology of advanced industrial society* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>33</sup> Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man*, xi.

<sup>34</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 26.

Total spending on public institutions of higher education rose from 742.1 million USD in 1945 to 6.9 billion USD in 1965.<sup>35</sup>

Yet the fifties were not an era of complacent spending and consuming, as some suggest. There were hidden public fears and pressures, such as matter of national security, materializing in hunt on the reds both domestic and foreign and acknowledging the Soviet Union as the archenemy of the American way of life. The fear of the Bomb was real and the sense of total annihilation was fostered by air raid drills, famous Duck and Cover policy, failure of the East-West Summit in Paris due to the U-2 incident in 1960 or the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 after botched Bay of Pigs invasion the previous year. The Bomb also represented a fine line between the generations. Whereas the older generation perceived the Second World War as “The Good War” that brought prosperity and the atomic bomb saved countless American soldiers’ lives, who would otherwise have had to fight in a bloody conflict on the Japanese mainland. The post-war generation viewed the Bomb as a potential agent of atomic annihilation and the aforementioned series of events provided less assurance of safety than needed. Another thing which affected the future New Leftists was a vivid memory of the Holocaust. The first students forming SDS came disproportionately from Jewish intellectual families of the East Coast and build up a large chunk of SDS base. But Holocaust was not a haunting reality for Jews only, other SDS members made similar links between the Auschwitz tragedy and Vietnam napalm inferno. Famous quote which entered the public mind by an US Army official: “*It became necessary to destroy the village in order to save it,*”<sup>36</sup> commenting on the situation of bombing the Ben Tre, really made these students to consider the differences and similarities of Auschwitz images and contemporary US Army actions.

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<sup>35</sup> Cyril Levitt, *Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 31.

<sup>36</sup> “Major Describes Move,” New York Times, February 8, 1968.

## 2 From Port Huron to Clear Lake

### 2.1 Resurgence of the Student Left

In 1960, The American system came to the start of a disguised and somewhat unadmitted crisis that became exacerbated during the decade. Firstly, the economic situation did not look so bright, and despite a steady upturn of the economy that left many minorities almost totally out of the wealth shared, recurrent dollar crises forced the currency to devalue. Permanent military economy put a lot of power into the hands of weapon industry and contributed to a trend of minority control of ever growing part of economy through conglomerates, monopolies and investment funds. In addition, increasing consumption and dependence started to take its toll on the environment. The American family suffered a serious blow when the median duration of marriage was six years and divorce rate surged by 33 percent during the decade.<sup>37</sup> Alcoholism was on the rise doubling the figure of alcoholics in the decade to 9-15 million while drug consumption skyrocketed and was the highest in the world with one-third of the adult population using mind and mood altering substances.<sup>38</sup> Political life of the nation was seen as riddled with big government inefficiency and corruption with two stagnant parties and was characterized by voter's apathy and feelings of remoteness.<sup>39</sup> Some Americans were even willing to exchange some personal freedoms such as of speech or social mobility for government promises of material comfort and security. On the international stage, the Cold War was in full swing and prompted the nation to accept foreign interventionism and massive nuclear arms buildup. All in all, some young people were gravely concerned about the fate of the nation.<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, the crisis of the system was accompanied by a crisis of belief. In 1968, the National Committee for an Effective Congress, an independent liberal polling group, founded by Eleanor Roosevelt, issued a report that declared: "*At all levels of American life people show similar fears, insecurities, and gnawing doubts to such an intense degree*

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<sup>37</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Frank Newport, David W. Moore, and Lydia Saad, "Long-Term Gallup Poll Trends: A Portrait of American Public Opinion Through the Century," *Gallup*, December 20, 1999, accessed December 26, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/3400/longterm-gallup-poll-trends-portrait-american-public-opinion.aspx>.

<sup>40</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 10.



*that the country may in fact be suffering from a kind of national nervous breakdown.*"<sup>41</sup> The traditional authority of the establishment came into questioning, partly by media uncovering deceit of official institutions<sup>42</sup> and partly by universities that drew on traditional Western skepticism, even though they were linked to the establishment on a different level.<sup>43</sup> The youth then sometimes reacted with a sense of betrayal, moral outrage and finally protest. Lewis Feuer, an American sociologist, claimed that "*every student movement is the outcome of a de-authorization of the elder generation.*"<sup>44</sup>

Thirdly, the youths became a significant power in society for the first time in terms of demographic numbers. Not only were there more young people than ever before but they were now better educated better than at any other time in American history as by 1960 there was 20 percent of college-age population attending universities growing to nearly 50 in 1970.<sup>45</sup> More importantly, for the first time in history, there was a newly created youth market to supply with products defining them as a distinct social group. Adolescence, therefore, was defined socially, economically and culturally further nourishing the sense of separateness. Furthermore, it turned out to various psychologists, including the prominent Erik Erikson that the upbringing of the youth led them to be more prone to protest and become more anti-authoritarian or hyper-moralistic at the age of four or five. By the time that they reached college age, they were gathered at one place with likeminded individuals relatively separated from external influences in the comfort of their isolated campuses. In addition, this gathering came in unprecedented numbers. The decade began with 3,789,000 people in institutions of higher education and ended with 7,852,000 enrolled, which meant that there were more students than farmers and were far more important for running the country than people employed in low skilled labor.<sup>46</sup> The universities were of highest importance at this point in the history of the country and in the sixties proved their position as institutional agents of social change.

## ***2.2 The Birth of SDS***

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<sup>41</sup> Socialist Labor Party of America, "National Platform," (adopted by the Twenty-Seventh National Convention, Brooklyn, New York, May 5-7, 1968), accessed December 26, 2015. <http://www.slp.org/pdf/platforms/plat1968.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> For example in the Vietnam conflict.

<sup>43</sup> The links between the universities and weapon industry were one of the aspects which came under stark criticism by the New Left and in many cases was this cooperation shut down due to student pressure and protest.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations*, (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 528.

<sup>45</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 11.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

As the decade began, the Student League for Industrial Democracy, SLID, a student offshoot of League for Industrial Democracy, showed no sign of becoming the most important student organization in the history of the country. It had couple of hundred of members, at three chapters at Columbia, Yale and Michigan. League for Industrial Democracy was a liberal socialist organization founded before the First World War with a goal of addressing issues such as working conditions, child labor or poor housing in the thirties and during fifties declared strong anti-communism, yet for the most part stood dormant. Feeling that SLID was not the best name to convey their message, in January 1960, it changed its name to Students for Democratic Society, SDS. The name change was important only to a handful of people around its New York office, but it signaled a new attitude of the American studentry. Its first congress in May in Ann Arbor, Michigan was hugely influenced by February 1 Greensboro, North Carolina sit-in, when four blacks sat in a white only dinner counter and refused to leave. SDS quickly picked up the civil rights topic and that gave it initial cause and identification. The attendance on the congress was wide, stretching from civil rights leaders from Congress on Racial Equality or National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Young People's Socialist League or Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to new SDSers declaring non-exclusive nature of SDS which was one of its staples until the break up. Nothing grand was decided, but as the President was chosen Robert Alan Haber, who proved indispensable for the initial success, with his relentless work and strategic planning. He made SDS abandon old SLID model of creating own little chapters and pushed ahead making alliances with existing campus organizations and support their local activity and needs. Second, he suggested that SDS could play its most valuable role by coordinating such groups on a national scale, publishing newsletters, sending literature, organizing conferences and lectures and wholly serving as an umbrella organization. Third, SDS should move from educational work to direct social action, picketing, sit-ins, petitioning, boycotts, freedom marches and all sorts of other back then protest techniques. Finally, SDS should abandon the ideological line-drawing and work with any group genuinely interested in seeking social change.<sup>47</sup> There was where laid the initial success of SDS, it satisfied the search for ideology of young excited people who were undirected, it brought together number of disparate single-issue organizations, which led to a geographical expansion and also permitted cause-shifting from the bomb to civil rights to

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 14.

war on imperialism. In the first year, the number of SDS members did not exceed 250, but Haber's initial intention did not lie in gathering masses, but in quality and impact of the message spread.<sup>48</sup>

Haber immediately faced difficulties as his radical fervor was not welcomed by the bosses of LID, which adhered to a staunchly anti-communist line and having financial troubles of their own, threatened to stop the little money they supported its student wing with. Even though Haber was temporarily fired, he was rehired, secured the money and with restored enthusiasm he went to National Student Association, NSA, conference to advertise for SDS. NSA stood at that time right from twice unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson, but it was one of the few events which attracted nation-wide attention. As it later turned out, NSA was sponsored by CIA, thus creating not-too-liberal weapon of propaganda, one of the many state intrusions into the student life in the sixties.<sup>49</sup>

Second important figure of early SDS was Tom Hayden, student and editor of University of Michigan *Michigan Daily* newspaper, who became disenchanted with anti-radicalism of NSA and also Cold War liberalism. In summer of 1960, Hayden traveled to California where he became radicalized<sup>50</sup> by protests against hearings of House Un-American Activities Committee in San Francisco which ended up in police fire hosing student demonstrators from the steps of San Francisco City Hall, leaving some of them seriously injured.<sup>51</sup> For the upcoming Ann Arbor conference, which aim was to define the upcoming year for SDS, Hayden prepared a radical strategy for the group, but it failed to be implemented. After all strategies proposed failed to be implemented by a fear that rallying behind a single issue would repel militants from joining in. This was a typical SDS feature which was both a blessing and curse and which affected SDS for the whole time of its existence. According to Paul Booth, future SDS President, politically it was a disaster. "*We couldn't settle on a specific political notion through which everyone would be SDS as well as whatever else they were into.*"<sup>52</sup> Yet it was not a complete waste of

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<sup>48</sup> DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 44.

<sup>49</sup> Sol Stern, "A Short Account of International Student Politics & the Cold War with Particular Reference to the NSA, CIA, Etc." *Ramparts* 3 (1967), 29-39, accessed December 26, 2015, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/Ramparts-1967mar-00029>.

<sup>50</sup> "Biography of Tom Hayden," accessed December 26, 2015, <http://tomhayden.com/biography/>.

<sup>51</sup> Joe Allen, *Vietnam: The (Last) War the U.S. Lost*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 68.

<sup>52</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 23.

time, an organizational structure was agreed upon consisting of National Executive Committee, NEC, National Secretary, head of the National Office, NO, regional representatives and of course the President.

Hayden definitively became instrumental at the first national convention at Port Huron, Michigan where he conveyed manifesto *Port Huron Statement*, in which he outlined future tenets of SDS. Above mentioned thinkers and intellectuals alongside with left academic group around the journal *Studies on the Left* and *British New Left Review*, but also personal experiences from his travels to the South served Hayden as inspiration for the manifesto and the idea of participatory democracy. These ideas were seen more of a possibility that political institutions could be made of constituents' participation, having the Southern black struggle being able to actually change conditions.<sup>53</sup> "*We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit*"<sup>54</sup> reads the opening line of 25,700 words long document which the convention stitched together and embraced as an ideological base. Ideology in non-ideology could be said when thinking of all-inclusivity of SDS, thus drastically parting ways with the Old Left of the thirties plagued by faction fighting and bickering. Two main problems of modern society are outlined; "*human degradation, symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry*" and "*the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb uncomfortably to the world we inherit.*"<sup>55</sup> The document calls for universal nuclear disarmament instead of deterrence, reform of the Democratic Party to reach for the Southern black voters and a university reform in transforming into a public institution that is open participation of individuals of nearly any viewpoint.<sup>56</sup> The document, mostly a lengthy critical analysis of contemporary America written in complicated intelligentsia language does not mention revolution, class struggle or fight against imperialism, rather it sets principles for SDS to seek making its way through conventional politics and captures and shapes the fresh student spirit of the early sixties. From the strategical point view it perceives the universities as potential base and agency in the movement for social change, not the working class, streets or legislatures. New leftists have to be young, educated people who through open discussion

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<sup>53</sup> Francesca Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 128.

<sup>54</sup> "The Port Huron Statement."

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

and deliberation at universities plunge into social action guarded by reason starting controversy across the land, if national apathy is to be reversed.<sup>57</sup>

The Port Huron conference had a profound impact. First, it scarred the parent organization LID, which summoned NEC to a hearing. The generational rift came out even starker as the LID accused the SDS of being communist and pro-Soviet, which was against LID's ground principle. The SDS with Hayden in lead considered breaking up with LID completely, but practical reasons of finances, office space and equipment forced them to stay under the parent wings of LID. SDS managed to dismiss accusations of being communist and agreed on compromise with the LID elders. However, on one hand it no longer felt it could trust them and on the other, it felt a new sense of unity and power.<sup>58</sup> The Port Huron Statement line was thus defended and announced a new beginning for radical student movements and coming age of a new generation.

### ***2.3 America and the New Era***

The first year of the organization was marked by ongoing financial and technical difficulties. The SDS operating cycle began with the start of the new semester in the fall and continued until the spring semester ended, while during the summer its activities were somewhat diminished. As a sign of technical chaos was the fact that first issue of *SDS Bulletin*, irregular SDS newspaper, came out in December and letters sent to the mailing list of members and sympathizers were delayed by more than a month. Financial troubles hit the main office hard as well. The LID was mired in its own financial problems and only half of the estimated body of 1100 members paid their membership fee by the end of the school year.<sup>59</sup> Summer convention near Pine Hill, New York brought several significant shifts in the SDS gravitation. Firstly a document *America and the New Era*<sup>60</sup> designed by Haber, Hayden, Bob Ross and Paul Booth, was presented and quickly became to be known as "*The Son of Port Huron*." However it was narrower and less impressive than its predecessor. It addressed more concrete and tangible issues of American society, mainly domestic concerns. However, in 1963 it already identified

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 44.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 50-51.

<sup>60</sup> SDS, "America and the New Era," accessed December 27, 2015, <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/AmRad/americanewera.pdf>.

American entanglement in Vietnam as an example of irresponsible US foreign policy.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, two important moments can be distinguished in the document. First, “*the civil rights movement and other centers of independent insurgency*” were created outside of established power structures and university intellectuals can participate in the quest of bringing down the American consensus that provides possibility for students to be politically involved in the national life.<sup>62</sup> Second, “*the militant resolve of Negroes North and South, the urgency and dedication of middle class peace advocates, the deepening anxiety of industrial workers, and the spreading alienation of college students*” give new impetus for a search of new forms insurgent politics.<sup>63</sup> These two points led to two major changes. First, the SDS, under the sign of participatory democracy, decided to give more powers to local chapters by shortening the national leadership to one year based on a rotating scheme. In reality, this meant that every year the whole national machinery was changed and had to start from the scratch, which severely impeded their ability to take immediate action. Tom Hayden was replaced by Todd Gitlin, a Harvard student from New York, whose election was an attempt to reach outside the Ann Arbor group to the “Eastern intellectuals”. And however Gitlin’s conviction was to be first top officer to work for peace and not for civil rights, the situation at local chapters looked differently.<sup>64</sup>

#### **2.4 ERAP and PREP**

With mixture of jingo idealism, middle-class white guilt, asceticism, moralism and hard work, the SDS launched one of its most ambitious projects. Joining the nationwide movement, thousands of students turned from theory to action, from classrooms to slums and ghettos, and set off to do real community work. Students and college dropouts headed south to register voters in impoverished black communities and organized unemployed workers in decaying inner cities, running tutorial projects for black high-school students through the North, even joining government-approved VISTA projects, poverty-planning centers and cooperatives, or simply dropping out to work and live among the people.<sup>65</sup> Members of the Old Guard such as Tom Hayden and Carl Wittman proposed in fall of 1963 an Economic Research and Action Project, ERAP, an SDS community organizing project with an ambitious goal of building “*an interracial*

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<sup>61</sup> Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance, Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in Global Sixties*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 42.

<sup>62</sup> “America and the New Era.”

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 131.

*movement of the poor*”<sup>66</sup> to abolish poverty, end racial equality and extend democracy in America.<sup>67</sup> In reality ERAP members tried to bring communities together and rally them behind issues such as lack of garbage collection, street lights, lack of job opportunities, high rents or rats and roaches to pressure city hall to address these issues and at the same time force communities to be more self-reliant and engaged. ERAP was a self-conscious imitation of SNCC, the leading civil rights movement group, which was already organizing in the poor black neighborhoods. Long before the Black Power Movement, SNCC black activists argued that white activists should focus on organizing in white communities. In response, Gitlin and Hayden launched the group’s first project in impoverished white neighborhood in Chicago, but later kept sending white activists into black communities to match the rising influence of Malcom X in the civil rights movement and also to make up for the middle class white guilt which was pervasive and persistent for almost all of the SDS existence.<sup>68</sup> There was tension between white organizers with the idea of toppling oppressive system by interracial poor cooperation at one side and gradual rising black self-determination and nationalism which in the course of time more and more refused to accept help from whites.

In the broadest sense, Hayden and Wittman wanted to conduct a true “*war on poverty*,” arguing that President Johnson’s War on Poverty would not be won because it was “*not intended to redistribute power and wealth.*”<sup>69</sup> There were 36 million Americans, one-fifth of a nation living in poverty, from which a majority was white, but blacks were disproportionately represented.<sup>70</sup> ERAP launched in thirteen cities, mostly in the North. Even after the first year, it was clear that creation of black-white coalition of the poor will not come as fast as expected and one by one the projects were being abandoned in favor of other SDS activities or by simple fact that students had to go to school after summer was over. Direct experience from organizing poor whites showed that not only the poorest do not have the largest insurgency potential, but more

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<sup>65</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 64.

<sup>66</sup> Whole document available here: <http://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/antivietnamwar/items/show/37>, accessed December 27, 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Jennifer Frost, *Interracial Movement of the Poor: Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s*, (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>68</sup> David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why it Failed*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 21.

<sup>69</sup> Frost, *Interracial Movement of the Poor*, 28.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

importantly that they have never been agents of any social change as their own perception of their place in the society prevents them to be so.<sup>71</sup> The lack of focus in the SDS that prevented it from directing all of its energy on one issue, stemmed from its very nature of being a broad, multi-faceted organization. One of the longest ERAP projects was the Newark Community Union Project (NCUP) under Tom Hayden's leadership that lasted into 1968 and failed at every single goal set. After some five year of tedious continuous work, NCUP claimed contact with fifty to two-hundred community members, which seemed as a tragically low number.<sup>72</sup> Alienated youths would not listen the street organizers and if they would, they intellectual and real world was far detached from the world envisioned by SDSers. In the case of Chicago, SNCC Stokely Carmichael's slogan of Black Power further alienated black and white communities as the riot year of 1967 put a final nail into a coffin of "interracial movement of the poor". The riots exhausted the dreams of the early sixties, as Tom Hayden put it, and signaled it was time to go.<sup>73</sup> ERAP also failed because it was plagued by another typical SDS feature, women's inferiority to men and their sexual objectification. However, ERAP was perhaps the only SDS project where women could play leading roles by exploiting their "female" organizing skills as they could more easily reach out to the poor, especially welfare recipients.<sup>74</sup> Gender inequality has always plagued the SDS hierarchy as only a few exceptions rose to the highest ranks of SDS. Generally women were employed as desk receptionists, coffee makers or in the case of ERAP, as dishwashers or cooking maids. There was the contradiction of doing most of the concrete long-term organizing work and remaining invisible for women, which grew more pronounced as the decade progressed.<sup>75</sup>

Another aspect of SDS activity was a newly established project on the peace front. The Peace Research and Education Project was supposed to be leftist academic group or think-tank charged with the task of gathering and publishing research on peace, disarmament and foreign policy. The project was largely kept going by Dick Flacks who confined himself and the group to mostly academic research, avoiding direct action in contraposition to ERAP. Its main activities was both hosting lectures or seminars and

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<sup>71</sup> Kim Moody, *Organizing Poor Whites, 1964 or 1965*, accessed December 27, 2015, [http://www.sds-1960s.org/sds\\_wuo/erap\\_organizing\\_poor/](http://www.sds-1960s.org/sds_wuo/erap_organizing_poor/).

<sup>72</sup> Frost, *Interracial Movement of the Poor*, 150.

<sup>73</sup> Tom Hayden, *Reunion: a Memoir*, (New York: Collier Books, 1988), 161 cited in Frost, *Interracial Movement of the Poor*, 152.

<sup>74</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 112.

<sup>75</sup> Frost, *Interracial Movement of the Poor*, 153.



publishing its own research. Flacks managed to get out a series of *PREP Newsletters*<sup>76</sup>. Before leaving his position and taking up a job as an assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, he handed over PREP to Gitlin and Booth.<sup>77</sup> Gitlin discovered that certain US banks made loans to the government of South Africa after the Sharpsville massacre, where police shot almost 70 black protesters, were about to be renewed. Gitlin looked into the matter and soon found out how important these loans were for the South African regime and how US foreign investments were supporting oppressive regimes abroad. The revelation came as a surprise and the SDS decided to stage a massive sit-in two days before the Sharpsville anniversary in front of Chase Bank lower-Manhattan office—one of the prime investors. The sit-in was joined by SNCC and CORE and arrests were made. This was a first SDS act of civil disobedience.<sup>78</sup> As the Vietnam War began to be felt more and more by the American public, PREP was charged with preparing kit material on Viet Cong and academic background for the SDS to use. But this never materialized and only a short essay by David Arnold, *Vietnam, Symptom of World Malaise*<sup>79</sup> came out of the whole big plan for academic ammunition. PREP's suggestion to expand program against American corporations as having more long-range potential than the crisis response program on Vietnam was not shared with bulk of the Chase bank protesters and in the light of operation Rolling Thunder, which escalated American entanglement in Vietnam, peace research seemed somewhat ludicrous and PREP was left to collapse.<sup>80</sup>

## ***2.5 Times they are a Changing***

The year of 1964 meant big changes for the SDS. Although National Office was more or less dysfunctional for the most part of the first half<sup>81</sup>, proving once again idiosyncratic two-tier operating scheme, its base was thriving and new chapters were being created. Not only in traditional New Left East Coast milieu, but also in California, Mid-West, Texas or Oklahoma. In a conference in April, a new group within SDS ranks established its existence, the Progressive Labor Party, PL. The openly communist, Maoist group of radicals defied HUAC by focusing on organizing workers and fighting against

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<sup>76</sup> Very serious and very dull.

<sup>77</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 100.

<sup>78</sup> Chris Kromm, "From Selma to Soweto: Nelson Mandela and the Southern freedom struggle," *The Institute for Southern Studies*, December 6, 2013, accessed December 27, 2015, <http://www.southernstudies.org/2013/12/from-selma-to-soweto-nelson-mandela-and-the-southe.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Available here: <http://www.sds-1960s.org/documents.htm>.

<sup>80</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 121.

American imperialism, which in turn attracted students looking for ideological discipline and coherent view of the world. Its chairman, Russel Stetler, was a leading figure of the previous summer trip to Cuba. SDS honoring its non-exclusionist policy called its emergence strange and wonderful phenomenon.<sup>82</sup>

A new National Secretary, Clark Kissinger was elected and through his clerkish diligence and efficiency managed to reconcile the SDS with LID. He secured a thin yet steady influx of money plus incited others to search for financial opportunities within the community of rich old liberals. He also pushed ahead administrative reforms and favored university reform projects over ERAP, which led to an inevitable and inescapable question of that US had no Left. Was it the job of students to build that left, to abandon their student robes and go into the world, building allies where they can, taking their message to anyone who will listen before it all collapses; or, was it rather to build the student part of this left, assuming that somehow the remainder will get built by those elsewhere reacting to their own felt needs, to stay behind the ivy walls to coalesce those who are known instead of presuming to proselytize those who are distant?<sup>83</sup> This enormous problem that the SDS wrestled with was symptomatic over its whole existence and was never clearly answered until its breakdown.

In the fall of 1964, student rebellions entered a new stage with The First Battle of Berkeley as its inaugural skirmish. The University of California in Berkeley announced that it was forbidden to organize and solicit funds on campus for off-campus political action. This led to a three months long battle between the students and the administration ending in the university revoking the decree, a seeming victory for the students. The Freedom of Speech Movement (FSM) led by Mario Savio was established and thus began six long years of fighting between the student and radicals and the administration and state power. The first confrontation included every element of student protest that was to become a familiar picture of the decade: sit-ins, strikes, class boycott, TV cameras and media, police, non-students on the campus and rising violence; sympathetic faculty and heavy swinging administration with the board of trustees behind them; and shock of the general public when seeing a student standing atop a police car sending a message out

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<sup>81</sup> The technical and organizational chaos reached new heights.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 84.

who calls the shots now.<sup>84</sup> Ad hoc, FSM group was not just an organization to fight another of the university's numerous attempts of clamping down on campus activity. It was the epitome of impetus boiling amongst the youth of America. The demands of humanity and justice raised were of same nature as in the Greensboro restaurant, Alabama bus stations or Mississippi registration offices, and in the course of this fight it was discovered that adult society (police, press, university, public) did not live up to their expectations. It was the debacle of society in the eyes of the young men and women involved. However FSM won symbolically, in the longer run it led to election of Ronald Reagan as California governor<sup>85</sup>, which was a sign of general public being horrified by the images of chaos and havoc screened on TV, one of the most crucial moments of the failure of the New Left to win over American mainstream.

## 2.6 March on Washington

In *Port Huron and Statement* and even more in *America and the New Era*, SDS talked about how their “*hopes for the future have been corroded by the Bomb.*”<sup>86</sup> But beyond the rhetoric the New Left generally gave little serious attention to the nuclear issue and made little effort to sustain the thrust of pre-PTBT<sup>87</sup> nuclear disarmament movement, led by fifties organizations such as The Committee for SANE Nuclear Policy.<sup>88</sup> “*It's just a cliché*” was the succinct comment of one Harvard activist on the claim that the New Left's outlook was profoundly shaped by the looming shadow of the Bomb.<sup>89</sup> Before rising in SDS ranks, Todd Gitlin led a peace group, the Washington Project, with Peter Goldmark from TOCSIN, a Harvard-based anti-nuclear arms group, which brought five thousand to the capital to protest nuclear race, a small number of them conferred with Senators and even with National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, but a large majority of them picketed and waved placards outside as a sign of new tactics to

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<sup>84</sup> Jonah Raskin, “The Passions of Mario Savio,” *Dissent*, December 1, 2014, accessed December 28, 2015, [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/passion-mario-savio-berkeley-free-speech-movement](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/passion-mario-savio-berkeley-free-speech-movement).

<sup>85</sup> Jo Freeman, “The Berkeley Free Speech Movement,” in *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements*, ed. Immanuel Ness (Armonk, N.Y.: 2004), 1178-1182.

<sup>86</sup> SDS, “America and the New Era,” accessed December 27, 2015, <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/AmRad/americanewera.pdf>.

<sup>87</sup> PTBT – Partial Test Ban Treaty, a treaty prohibiting all nuclear detonations except for the underground signed by the US, the USSR and the UK in 1963.

<sup>88</sup> SANE had tens of thousands members ranging from Cold War liberals to various pacifists and world federalists, but was strictly anti-communist and operated in an old fashioned way which did not match SDS's radical direct social action. See: DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 34.

<sup>89</sup> Paul Boyer, “From Activism to Apathy: The American People and Nuclear Weapons, 1963-1980,” *The Journal of American History* 70 (1984): 838, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1899750>.

come.<sup>90</sup> Nuclear armament never became a central focal point of SDS for several reasons. First, the Vietnam War was becoming more of a pressing issue that could affect the real life of many youngsters by being sent overseas. Second, after the Cuban Crisis and 1963 PTBT, the New Leftist recognized that the technocratic managers in administration can be counted on to avoid nuclear war. Therefore SDS plunged into a campaign of subversive and disruptive actions against the “real great war” in Vietnam.<sup>91</sup>

The real beginning of antiwar period for SDS came with the escalation of the Vietnam conflict and landing of the first ground troops in February 1965. Immediately, all attention was drawn to the April peace march on Washington, which became a rally point of a broad left-liberal coalition ranging from A. J. Muste, liberal clergyman, Staughton Lynd and Howard Zinn, socialist historians, Mario Savio, Erich Fromm, Marxist psychiatrist to all sorts of peace organizations, SANE, Student Peace Union, War Resisters League, Women Strike for Peace to left-wing youth clubs and organizations, DuBois Club, YPSL and some liberal New York unions. SDS was in the lead of the whole project and this was a chance for it to shine. The New York Times for the first time and last time ran a respectful article on the SDS headlined: “*The New Student Left: Movement Represents Serious Activists in Drive for Changes.*”<sup>92</sup> Twenty thousand protesters showed up in a spectacular demonstration of antiwar determination across the ideological disputes. SDS President Paul Potter gave a speech to cheering crowd envisioning a movement “that makes possible the implementation of the values that would have prevented Vietnam, a movement based on the integrity of man,”<sup>93</sup> acknowledged the importance of civil rights movement for antiwar effort and was met with applause. However, what kind of a movement remained unclear as he continued with identification of Vietnamese National Liberation Front, not knowing of the massacres of Vietnamese Trotskyites ordered by Ho Chi Min, and simplified the SDS struggle into a statement: “*All our lives, our destinies, our very hopes to live, depend on our ability to overcome that system.*”<sup>94</sup> SDS thus abandoned the chance of becoming a leading organization of an antiwar movement, which was in its eyes old fashioned with its picketing, petitioning and committees and once again changes its strategy and tactics.

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<sup>90</sup> Boyer, “From Activism to Apathy,” 840.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 842.

<sup>92</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 35.

<sup>93</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 59.

After three years spent, talking, petitioning, reasoning and trying to reform the power structure through established channels, it radicalized itself and went to a stage of active resistance with all the consequences. The establishment would not listen to anything they said and so naturally the means of spreading its message became more vociferous and violent. The dispatch of 20,000 US troops to Dominican Republic to “restore order” only strengthen the feeling that the establishment had complete disregard for the voice of the youth.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 184.

<sup>95</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 61.

## 3 Resistance

### 3.1 *Vietnam is Rising*

Summer convention in 1965 was held in a remote place in Michigan and as a new President delegates elected Carl Oglesby from Akron, Ohio and Jeff Shero from the increasingly influential University of Texas in Austin as a Vice President.<sup>96</sup> The new leadership signaled new blood and a change of guard coming into SDS. No longer was the majority of members from the East Coast often Jewish middle class intelligentsia, or red-diaper babies of former communists. The new SDS breed hailed from the frontier areas of Midwest and Southwest and carried its own signature features. Being raised in working class families with often no history in political activism, they had long hair and moustaches, wore blue work shirts and cowboy boots and smoked marijuana, which the Old Guard was either afraid or curious about it. Jokingly, they stood for “*prairie power*”.<sup>97</sup> Many of them broke with their parents and often were labelled “*nigger lovers, liberals or communists*” for simply supporting civil rights. After bridges were burned, why would they settle with moderation?<sup>98</sup> An overall shift of gravitation was palpable. First of all, the convention hardly agreed on anything and the whole next year was the national leadership virtually motionless. On the other hand, the center of activity shifted towards campuses and local chapters dealing with local issues. One of the few things the convention agreed upon was a removal of anti-Communist clause from its constitution, partly because of pressure or rising PL faction, to further confirm its non-exclusionist nature which demonstrated even starker departure from the Old Left and inevitably led to severance of relationship with LID. Despite the clear aim to cleanse itself or LID’s red-baiting, some SDS members expressed their dissatisfaction with PL policies. “*If I’d wanted to work with Stalinists I’d have joined the DuBois Clubs,*” said one of them.<sup>99</sup> The National Office was completely swamped with paperwork, mailing duties and all sort of other technical work and on top of all faction and generation infighting began to dry a lot of energy. As another mark of switching generations, the National Office was moved from New York City to run-down neighborhood in Chicago. This all resulted in absence of communication between NO and local chapters, which severely impeded coordination, yet some who disagreed with top-down structure of SDS this situation felt alright.

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<sup>96</sup> Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 71.

<sup>97</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 184.

<sup>98</sup> Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, 161.

<sup>99</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 185.

Yet the SDS swelled in ranks, partly because of LBJ's orders to increase the number of US troops in Vietnam to 125,000 increase in the draft of young Americans into the military to 35,000 a month.<sup>100</sup> And partly because mainstream media ran articles on SDS the whole spring and summer, which to many alienated disaffected teenagers seemed as a place where to make change. A novel, typically New Left tactic was the so called teach-ins, firstly organized by students and faculty in Ann Arbor and then spreading all around the country. At these sessions, discussion on various, but primarily antiwar topics were held where anybody who was willing to speak could do so. A national teach-in in Berkeley in May was broadcasted by major media outlets and even the representatives of the government were present. Such activities were a stepping stones to free universities, another New Left specialty, later introduced that soon became a reality.<sup>101</sup> For the planned big October antiwar march called by other peace organization, the SDS prepared almost no strategy. Every proposal in the best SDS fashion was struck down for various reasons. Despite this lack of program, the media ran a campaign against SDS, accusing it of sabotaging the war effort by inciting American men to draft dodging. The affair got on the floor Congress, where SDS was labeled treacherous and single members would face judicial prosecution.<sup>102</sup> Interestingly enough SDS was innocent in this witch-hunt, but nobody cared. In addition the October march was a success with some 100,000 participants involved and SDS became famous overnight as new students began to pour in heaps. Carl Oglesby's speech saying that the US is able to send 200,000 men to Vietnam, but is unable to send 100 voter registrars to Mississippi gave clearer explanation of SDS understanding of US imperialism.<sup>103</sup> With no plan prepared, Paul Booth rushed in with a statement now known as "Build, not Burn" which called for people to become Conscientious Objectors through legal routes and offered young people to volunteer for democracy.<sup>104</sup> His speech was a semi success as the media and the establishment were reconciled for the moment, but fringe left organizations, such as 2<sup>nd</sup> May Movement, youth affiliate of PL, were furious and accused Booth of "liberal turn"

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<sup>100</sup> Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>101</sup> Klaus P. Fischer, *America in White, Black, and Gray: A History of the Stormy 1960s*, (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2007), 192.

<sup>102</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 150.

<sup>103</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 62.

<sup>104</sup> Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, 104.

and “selling out the radical movement and playing into cooptive hands of the establishment”. “Build Not, Burn” became a counter-cry of many SDS members.<sup>105</sup>

### 3.2 *Prairie Power*

The summer convention in Clear Lake, Iowa only confirmed the geographic and demographic shift of power, as the Clear Lake rhetoric had it from – “*politicos*” to “*anarchists*”, the “*prairie power*” leaders came into office.<sup>106</sup> One of the emerging leaders was Jane Adams who was voted in as an interim national secretary. Her political views were emblematic for the new cohort. The word “liberal” became a term of derision in political lingo. It represented the power the federal government had in sustaining the despised system. She stated, “I didn't even like Kennedy. I certainly didn't feel any relationship whatsoever. I mean, Washington was what we were trying to get rid of in important ways. It was the enemy.”<sup>107</sup> The generational change was visible by a mere fact that new leadership put less ideas on the paper than the Old Guard. Newly ambitious and fresh with energy, the SDS was more vulnerable to the sectarian mentality. Leninist factions made some inroads and Maoist PL saw it as a fertile ground for recruiting new members, but operating cozily under the name of SDS. Well-groomed and disciplined they stood in contraposition to the more hippyish “*prairie power*”, many of which disagreed with PL's line, but considered red-baiting a matter of the past. The Old Guard had lost its sway and the transition to “*prairie power*” was incomplete. Ambiguity began to grow in the minds of new-comers; “*prairie power*” put students at the heart of revolution possibility, where PL perceived them primarily as vanguards of the real working class revolution, exactly according to Mao's Red Book and soon started to organize Worker Student Alliance, WSA. This ideological rift was one of the future breaking points of the whole SDS.<sup>108</sup>

The Clear Lake convention also gave new spin to a concept of student power. Although it was already inherent in the 1960s and manifested itself in form of campus civil rights programs, free universities, university reform conferences or antiwar campus organization, Carl Davidson's *Toward a Student Syndicalist Movement, Or University*

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>106</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 188.

<sup>107</sup> Robbie Lieberman, *Prairie Power: Voices of 1960s Midwestern Student Protest*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 72.

<sup>108</sup> Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, 145.



*Reform Revisited* articulated directions for the new age. The document was non-typically SDS short, carefully organized free of complicated rhetoric with clear goals. A generally easy read, which enunciated thoughts of many SDS members they formulated the previous year. Davidson outlines the relation between university and corporate liberal society criticizing the universities as a factories of commodities for the capitalist economy as assembly lines churn out parts for a car, a person ignorant to social upheaval all around and. He stated that “*Our universities are already the chief agents for social change in the direction of 1984.*”<sup>109</sup> In a sense, this is a return to the *Port Huron Statement* with its demands for students to operate on a different levels on different campuses in the same concept as Al Haber in the early days conceived. The first generation had started out by seeking allies on the campus and then turned its attention towards ghettos and the war. Now the second generation was bringing back the original spirit. “*The main purpose of these activities is develop a radical consciousness among all the students, in the real struggle yet to come against the administration.*”<sup>110</sup> Despite criticism of PL for the lack of class analysis and of other SDSers that it is undesirable for students to control universities as they operate within the same corrupt system,<sup>111</sup> the time for student power was ripe. There was a considerable percentage of campus activist, best estimates range 5-15 percent of the nearly 6,5 million student body. SDS had at that time around 20,000 followers and counting.<sup>112</sup> The youth culture was nurtured by affluence and dissidence with sexual revolution in full swing and with their own fashion, drug attitude, art, food and philosophy for six years. Students in the fall semester of 1966 were exposed to the Vietnam conflict and general political foment.<sup>113</sup> Antiwar marches however violent or docile, large or small, or even televised brought no halt of the war; ERAP was a disastrous void of energy and black anger was sufficiently expressed in 1965 Watts riots; SNCC’s rejection of white support for civil rights was quite clear; working with labor unions was somehow old hat and not militant and working with middle class seemed as selling out. Raising local campus grievances such as dormitory hours targeting rigidity of the Establishment’s power or presence of ROTC<sup>114</sup> or Dow Chemical targeting

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<sup>109</sup> Carl Davidson, “Toward a Student Syndicalist Movement, Or University Reform Revisited,” (Position paper delivered at the August 1966 SDS Convention, Clear Lake, Iowa), accessed December 29, 2015, [http://www.sds-1960s.org/sds\\_wuo/sds\\_documents/student\\_syndicalism.html](http://www.sds-1960s.org/sds_wuo/sds_documents/student_syndicalism.html).

<sup>110</sup> Davidson, “Toward a Student Syndicalist Movement.”

<sup>111</sup> Earl Silbar, “Our Man on the Draft,” *New Left Notes*, 40,41 (1966), 5.

<sup>112</sup> Julian Foster and Durward Long, *Protest!: Student Activism in America*, (New York: William Morrow, 1970), 8.

<sup>113</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 195.

<sup>114</sup> Reserve Officers Training Corpse.

complicity of the university in the killing, was a clear answer of where to aim SDS's energy. Student power was a tool for individuals to become agents of social agents, as outlined in *Port Huron Statement*.

The first big confrontation between students and the university administration happened once again in Berkeley, over the issue of a sit-in around a Navy table in the student union hall followed by university calling the police. The SDS made its point with a five day strike which attracted fifteen-thousand students. The administration was not able to govern the campus without the police helping hand and cooperated with the agencies fighting the war and it denied its own students to voice their opinion.<sup>115</sup> An even more publicized incident happened that semester at Harvard as the John F. Kennedy Institute of Politics invited Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, a chief architect of the Vietnam War, to give a private lecture. The SDS demanded the university live up to freedom of speech and engage McNamara in a debate with editor of *Ramparts* Robert Scheer or face a public forum. Harvard refused and the SDS promised a confrontation, which ended up in McNamara being surrounded by hundreds of students being questioned about Vietnam. The police ordered the crowd to disperse, which it did and went home to watch themselves on TV. Once again SDS proved its point. Harvard valued high-hand over high-mind, depended on police and apologized for one of the war-hawks.<sup>116</sup>

### **3.3 Burn the Draft-Card**

Draft resisting emerged as one of the most visible forms of demonstration of an antiwar spirit and most serious as refusing to be drafted or burning one's Selective Service System document (e.g. draft card) could be punishable by 10,000 USD fine and up to 5 years of imprisonment according to a law passed in August 1965. This was a field where SDS collaborated with other peace-oriented organizations including the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam and religious groups and/or persons such as the Quakers or William Sloan Coffin Jr., known for their objection to war on religious ground. During a December convention in Berkeley, Carl Davidson came up with a plan for SDS anti-draft program, which was after typically long deliberations and endless voting adopted. Document spoke of direct organizing unions of draft resisters

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<sup>115</sup> Frederick Schmitt et. Al, "Student Power," *New Left Notes*, 48 (1966), 1.

<sup>116</sup> *New Left Notes* 49 (1966) cited in Sale, SDS, 203.

reaching out to colleges and high schools and communities; direct actions included petitioning, signing “*We Won’t Go*” pledges, education about draft resisting, demonstrations centering recruiting stations and encouraging already drafted men in military to oppose the war. SDS hence advanced from rhetoric to direct action and only confirmed its radicalizing nature.<sup>117</sup>

It was mostly SDS who was responsible for the biggest mass draft-card burning action that spring. On April 15, 1966, the largest antiwar march day occurred in the country. 400,000 people of all age, occupation marched from Central Park to the UN Building in New York to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with Johnson’s Vietnam policy. Various Antiwar and civil rights movements showed their unity that day as both, Dr. Benjamin Spock, a popular liberal children psychiatrist, and Martin Luther King delivered speeches. A new group called Resistance was formed to coordinate draft dodgers and several hundred draftees put themselves in the line of political and judicial fire as they burned their cards in open defiance of the law.<sup>118</sup> As one of the draft-card burners expressed: “*not to have burned a draft card on April 15 would have been tantamount to living in Boston in 1773 and not to have dropped tea in Boston harbor.*”<sup>119</sup> A series of sit-ins, arrests, student strikes, demonstrations and open acts of defiance of state or administration power that spring exploded across American campuses. A lot of mainly technical student-power issues like parietal rules or curriculum complaints quickly turned into a political struggle and the SDS was igniting this struggle at every occasion they saw it fit, according to a new line established at Berkeley convention. By far the greatest number of protests was sparked over the issue of university complicity. ROTC offices and recruitment centers were targets of sit-ins and protests and later even bombed and burned down. Secret collaboration program between fifty universities and Department of Defense worth 20 million USD on research for overseas “defense missions” was disclosed through the diligence of local activists. Universities often collaborated with FBI either disclosing private student records to the agency (Berkeley), allowing FBI to recruit students to spy on professor, which were deemed too liberal and were later fired (Brigham Young University) or compiling information on students

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<sup>117</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 210.

<sup>118</sup> Allen, *Vietnam*, 117.

<sup>119</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 216.

political views and social habits and reporting to the FBI (Duke University).<sup>120</sup> The counter action local SDS chapters undertook were mostly responses to national troubles on the local level and coordination with NO was facilitated through *New Left Notes* and regional travelers. A shocking news struck the whole SDS body when *Ramparts* reported on NSA being financed by CIA as some of the SDS heavies were somehow in contact with NSA. Furthermore this meant collapse of moderate student left, which the NSA wanted to put together alongside other student groups to match radical SDS. This plan as well as NSA laid now in shambles.

In the hindsight, the summer of 1967 can be viewed as a prequel to 1968. Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll was the motto of the day as the hippie Summer of Love counterculture fully spread its wings over the youth of America. Ghettos burning and Vietnam burning painfully reminded everyone interested of ongoing issues that never went away despite all work done. Many of older members of the SDS felt too old for campus organizing and SDS in general streamed off the campuses and entered private careers or looked elsewhere to work at. ERAPs idea of “interracial movement of the poor” was not materializing itself as the nationalism of the blacks and popularity of George Wallace among the whites. A post-SDS organization of alumni was to be created but lacked support once student activist looking after their own business often starting families. The Old Guard did not realize its moment had passed.<sup>121</sup> The SDS was now moving on as colorful group rolling forward under influences of “prairie power”, Maoist PL and various leftists of all kinds. Approximately 30,000 students adhered to SDS<sup>122</sup>, which made it at that time the largest, best-known and most influential student group in the country. And not only that, together with alumni and collegiate members was the biggest transmitter of left ideas in the society and was a source of information about government corruption, Selective Service manipulations and hidden university research. The convention took an egalitarian turn and elected only twenty years old Mike Spiegel to be President. Yet it faced several difficulties that later proved catastrophic. First, the distance between NO and local chapters began to widen, as National Secretary Greg Calvert and Vice-president Carl Davidson were theorizing about “revolutionary conscience”, small local chapter in the south wondered how to answer to conservatives

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>121</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 222.

<sup>122</sup> Jack A. Smith, “SDS sets out on radical path,” *National Guardian* 41 (1967).

red-baiting. Second, the elitism and male chauvinism emerged to be an overwhelming problem. Heavies on various levels tended to become elite and leaders, a word much despised in SDS. And since most of the leaders were men, women either duplicated their behaviour or later started to recognize the sexism and gender inequality despite grand statements involved. The summer convention meant a radical breakaway with the past and women's liberation in the SDS and the New Left in general began to emerge. While seeking "liberation of women" comparing their status to the Third World and being "in a colonial relationship to men", the resolution passed spoke only of practical steps including birth control and abortion rights, shared communal childcare if "*liberation of women*" requires it and equal share of housework. Perhaps the most striking demand that "our brothers recognize that they must deal with their own problem of male chauvinism" meaning that SDS leaders should self-consciously cultivate female leadership was agreed on as well as one of the few resolution passed.<sup>123</sup> The summer convention also showed once again the peculiar system of internal functioning. Like in 1965, 1967 summer failed to pass any official SDS line, which on a national level led to a grave consequences, on the other hand local chapters were thriving and capitalizing on local victories and general student dissent. The pure disciplined line of PL repeatedly emphasized the working class as an agent of social change and isolation from working considered greatest student liability.<sup>124</sup> However, its program of WSA work-ins, sending students through summer to labor in factories and at other manual jobs that intended to help build a bond with workers and build a revolutionary movement together utterly failed.

### ***3.4 Fires Burning in and out***

The fall semester of 1967 saw a dramatic escalation of the antiwar actions SDS employed. University complicity was another case for a large scale demonstration aimed this time at University of Madison-Wisconsin, a traditionally restive school. On October 17, some two hundred students were picketing against the presence of Dow Chemical Company on campus, which was a manufacturer of napalm and other means of chemical warfare used in Vietnam. Their placards read "*Hey, Hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?*" and "*Dow Shalt Not Kill*", but just couple of hundred supporters showed up. The next day a sit-in was called to the company's office and after unsuccessful appeal of administration to disperse, police and two thousand other curious students appeared on

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<sup>123</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 115.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

the scene. The tensions ran high and suddenly the police cleared the building with tear gas and swinging with batons, quickly covering the floors with blood everywhere as students poured out of the building. Stunned with sheer brutality of merciless police attack, students regrouped and for the first time replied with offensive force throwing rocks. The fight ended with several dozen being treated by medics including policemen, one student being permanently blinded.<sup>125</sup> Now in an increasingly militant mood, a student strike was called for and some 5000 students and 200 faculty members including right-wing campus party solidified the united student front. The resistance phase reached new heights.

Campus violence quickly spread around the country with university complicity being the biggest thorn in the sides of students, especially army and CIA recruiters, Dow and other war-related business offices on campus and often nefarious connections between university and government exposed by *New Left Notes* or through other channels. Because of experience gained that being peaceful in face of police violence would not bring any response, the logical step was fight fire with fire and let the other side also feel the pain. A major event of the fall was the October March on Pentagon. The SDS was only one among a broad range of antiwar groups who organized the march, but it was its radical contingent alongside with Youth International Part, Yippies, a theatrical and anti-authoritarian group led by Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, who broke through the police lines and easily found itself on the Pentagon steps. Within minutes five to ten thousand people were occupying the lawns of Pentagon ready to battle the paratroopers of 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and federal marshals ready to defend the very heart of American war imperialism. Although the tensions ran high, marijuana was smoked in abundance. Yippies proceeded to their announced ritual of making Pentagon levitate and girls were explaining to bayonet ready soldiers the advantages of love over war. Despite 700 arrests made with occasional violent or NLF flag flying on the Pentagon mast facing the offices, major clashes were avoided. The government was forced to use army troops against its own white middle class children, but in an aftermath poll three quarters of Americans regarded March of Pentagon as “an act of treason to the boys in Vietnam.”<sup>126</sup> The movement and SDS especially felt it moved up to the brink of insurrection and hailed the

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<sup>125</sup> David Maraniss, *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America, October 1967*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 71.

<sup>126</sup> DeBenedetti a Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 199.

whole action as a major success. Carl Davidson called for “*the disruption, dislocation and destruction of the military's access to the manpower, intelligence, or resources of our universities*”<sup>127</sup> so as to produce two complementary goals. First, the weakening of the resisted dominant institution and second, developing a consciousness of power among those resisting the dominant institution. Such major success had profound ramifications for the whole SDS philosophy as Davidson alongside with ever growing part of the national leadership abandoned the theories that emerged in the spring speaking of student based radicalism and once again fell for the idea of revolution of the masses. “*We organize students against the draft when the Army is made up of young men who are poor, black, Spanish-American, hillbillies, or working class. Everyone except students. How can we be so stupid when we plan our strategies? Students are oppressed. Bullshit. We are being trained to be the oppressors and the underlings of oppressors,*” argued Davidson in *New Left Notes*.<sup>128</sup> In such time of immediate action needed under constant attacks from PL, SDS members did not have time to either come up with new theories or rework the old often ad hoc ones, but looked for an all-encompassing framework, which would provide the comprehensive answers needed. Soon a framework that was a traditional standby was found, Marxism. People in the NO were very much in close every day contact, slept together, worked together, ate together, shared drug experiences together and through police harassment or office raids started to feel as a besieged bastion.<sup>129</sup> This condition was a stepping stone to future complete loss of sense of reality and detachment from campus actions which was one of the reasons of the SDS breakup.

In the meantime, the Progressive Labor Party was gaining ground. In opposition to resistance now proclaimed as the top priority of SDS, it started a process called “*base building*” because without it, in the word of longtime leader Milt Rosen, “*the party would die*”.<sup>130</sup> These tactics would isolate student radicals in their struggle and from workers. Hence when local SDS chapters deliberated methods of next protest, PL members very often spoke against usage of violent means that echoed among liberals and moderates. Above all, the WSA was underway to be launched at full throttle. An internally disciplined PL caucus giving consistent answers started to sway more students to their

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<sup>127</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 260.

<sup>128</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein and Paul Starr, *The University Crisis Reader-Second Volume*, (New York: Random House, 1971), 121.

<sup>129</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 264.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 267.

side when debating over an issue. National leadership was fully aware of this, but PL could not be outmaneuvered or even overthrown because that would not be in line with non-exclusionist policy. The PL was always strong in the East, especially in the cities of Boston and New York being its bastions and Chicago as well. Soon through organizational ways it managed to overtake the New York regional office and at the national convention in Bloomington, Indiana, the moderate and resistance factions clashed for the first time. The issue was a planned student strike in spring of 1968. National leadership supported a proposal by Calvert and Davidson titled the "*Ten Days to Shake the Empire*", whose basic premise was: "*The struggles of Third World movements abroad and black America at home have marked the beginning of the end of U.S. corporate capitalism ... The conclusion we must draw is that the primary task for the radical student movement at this time is to develop a political strategy of anti-imperialism.*"<sup>131</sup> Clearly the leadership wanted to fight the very hazy idea of American imperialism, whereas the PL intended to build up student-blue collar worker relations. Finally a moderate proposal giving local chapters power to develop tactics according to their analysis and local needs was approved.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Greg Calvert and Carl Davidson, "Ten Days to Shake the Empire," *New Left Notes*, 47 (1967).

<sup>132</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 269.



## 4 The Breakup

### 4.1 1968 – *The Climax*

The spring of 1968 promised to be a tumultuous year not only for the SDS, but for the whole nation as well. The surprise Tet offensive that resulted in a several days occupation American embassy in Saigon alongside pictures of American soldiers fleeing Vietcong created severe problems for the victorious war narrative. At a New York regional SDS meeting, Bernardine Dohrn, a Lawyers Guild worker, which provided lawyer services to indicted leftists, was voted a leader and penetrated the SDS leadership, a crucial event for the future events. The meeting was supposed to create an action plan for April “*Ten Days*”, a series of events which culminated in a nationwide one-day strike which drew more 1 million students on more than a thousand schools.<sup>133</sup> The deliberations as always represented a range of colorful opinions, yet this time it seemed that this variety plagued the SDS. There were voices to work through the third-party way in the upcoming Presidential elections, there were supporters of outright takeover of universities by the students, there was PL and its worker-student coalition, as well as cultural radicals and street-actionist with theatrical aspects suggesting collaborating with other collective such as anarchists Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers,<sup>134</sup> and others. Also the meeting marked the first head-on confrontation between resistance warriors and class warriors of the PL, resulting in PL taking over the New York chapter by placing its people into decisive positions of power within the organization. NO retaliated in New Left Notes and public war of words was ignited. This signaled that the cherished spirit of consensus and compromise in SDS was drawing its breath.<sup>135</sup>

“*Ten Days*” facilitated the largest student strike in the nation’s history, which was partly overshadowed by confrontation at the Columbia University in New York. Mark Rudd, the 20 year-old President of the Columbia chapter was a proponent of confrontation and was competing with base-building faction inside the chapter. However, the “*Ten Days*” served him as a perfect opportunity to act alongside black activists to seize the university buildings and occupy them. Columbia represented a perfect example

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<sup>133</sup> James Kirkpatrick Davis, *Assault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Movement*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 41

<sup>134</sup> The name was taken from the usual greeting police used on longhairs and blacks in the inner city when stopping them on the street. It was also used by LeRoi Jones (later Imamu Amiri Baraka).

<sup>135</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 277.

of SDS's rationale according to which they acted. It seized upon a minor issue that represented a larger social malady. The initial trigger for the occupation was the university's intention to build a gym on the Harlem grounds, seemingly usurping the land from the poor blacks living there. In addition, the University's close involvement with the Institute for Defense Analyses, which provides information for Department of Defense, was a sign of complicity and imperialism. Finally, arbitrary and unilateral rulings of the administration regarding student demonstrations were seen as authoritarianism. These issues were similar on many campuses and were both pertinent and irrelevant at the same time. They spoke to the major social ills, however, only a few of them could expose the true nature of the system and even if university would give in every demand the students had, the strikes would erupt anyway.<sup>136</sup> The occupation lasted for eight days and featured Mark Rudd smoking a cigar in the President's Kirk office under a sign: "*Liberated Area. Be Free To Join Us*" as the subsequent police raid that cleared the premises with a level of brutality now being an omnipresent aspect of the time.<sup>137</sup> The Columbia events sped up the process of SDS radicalization to rebellion through personal experiences of the participants, partly functioning cooperation with black civil rights and real life living the SDS theories. On the hand, it alienated much of the general population. Although by that point in the minds of SDS theorists and opinion makers was the idea of teaming up with general public (workers, liberals, poors) distorted to the extent they lost the perception of what interests of these sectors of society really were and replaced them by their own images.

Between April and November of that year, the ranks of the SDS swelled to unprecedented numbers from 35,000 to approximately 80,000. The Columbia effect was reflected in the slogan "*One Columbia, two Columbias, many Columbias!*" promising a surge of rebellious actions.<sup>138</sup> This demand for action pronounced itself in Chicago Democratic National Convention protests, a turning point in US history. The Envisioned Festival of Life was quickly turned into massive police and protesters urban battles with the SDS leading the charge. After five days of street fighting that left both the police battered and bruised, but on a larger scale the protesters beaten, arrested, injured and exhausted, the American public was shocked by images on TV of police wagons

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<sup>136</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 294.

<sup>137</sup> Davis, *Assault on the Left*, 39.

<sup>138</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 145.

furnished with barbed wire funneling the youth of America and police batons cracking heads everybody who was at the place. The violent actions of the Chicago police were abhorred even within the halls of the Convention Center as Senator Abraham Ribicoff condemned Mayor Richard Daley's orders as Gestapo tactics. Eventually TV streaming images of chaos and Democratic Party internal disruptions led to Richard Nixon's victory.<sup>139</sup>

The December SDS National Council convention in Ann Arbor saw a fierce battle between PL, who tried to bid for power and the rest of SDS. PL's disciplined clean-shaved Mao indoctrinated cadre rarefied any discussion by raising political questions to any issue discussed and came to push through its centerpiece "Fight Racism; Build a Worker-Student Alliance; Smash Imperialism" bringing the Old Left lingo and notion of race being subordinate to class. Similarly they viewed women's liberation, which they supported on paper, yet placed it under class as well. The Black Panther Party was also an enemy, because by nationalizing, it diverted blacks from their real enemy, capitalist ruling class and prevented them to build alliances with white workers. Finally, they had open disdain for North Vietnam as it received support from treacherous Soviet Union and denounced "*Washington-Moscow-Hanoi Axis*."<sup>140</sup> Jeopardizing the coalition with the Panthers and being a profoundly conservative, old-fashioned group, the mainstream of SDS had to form a coherent vision to counter the PL's growing strength and be open to black movement. Revolutionary Youth Politics, RYM, thus appeared as a result of this need. Containing SDSers from three geographical and ideological regions, Chicago NO with Bernardine Dohrn and National Secretary Mike Klonsky, Midwestern actionists around Bill Ayers and New York faction around Mark Rudd. The fierce discussion about radicalism, racism and youth role in the revolution, which was to happen often took absurd turns like one faction accusing the other for not being Marxist enough or RYM attacking PL's monopoly on "class" language. The underlying clash was the same as in the past. What means shall be employed in reaching the revolution and how shall the SDS stand on black empowerment? Eventually two contradicting resolutions about fighting and defending Black Nationalism were passed, which left this issue burning until next convention.

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<sup>139</sup> Bruce A. Ragsdale, "The Chicago Seven: 1960s Radicalism in the Federal Courts," Federal Judicial Center: Federal Judicial History Office, 2008, 3, <http://www.fjc.gov/history/docs/chicago7.pdf>, accessed December 31, 2015.

## 4.2 Chicago 1969 – *The Point of no Return*

Factionalism and infighting as well as pressures from the PL alongside a growing gap between the national leadership and chapters were instrumental in the failure of boycotting the Presidential elections and SDS effort came by largely unnoticed by the public. The SDS was becoming more and more mired in crippling internal problems that had a negative effect on its functioning. At local levels, universities often retracted strong-arm policies and through melioration and adoption of radicals into the power structures kept things calm. Stepped up government surveillance created an atmosphere of suspicion and fear together with mounting arrests that drained both the chapter's human and financial resources, which started to take its toll. However, the biggest problem the SDS faced was its inner ideological war between the PL and RYM, which was to be decided at summer national convention in Chicago.

The RYM faction split into RYM I and RYM II during the spring. While both inherently Marxist with the vision of revolution possible when looking over to France or watching the Prague Spring, they differed on the issue of black struggle. While RYM I formed around Dohrn, Rudd and Bill Ayers, now better known as Weatherman, a name stemming out of the pamphlet issued "You Don't Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows," a name borrowed from a Bob Dylan's song, supported the idea of blacks being a Third World colony inside *Amerika* (how they derogatorily spelled) and assigned itself vanguard status of the black national struggle.<sup>141</sup> RYM II led by Mike Klonsky took far more traditional Marxist reading of the revolution and put special emphasis on industrial proletariat. The working class in the US in the fight against US imperialism should link up with the struggle of the oppressed people and embrace the slogan of self-determination.<sup>142</sup> Since the convention began, it was clear that the SDS stood at a historic point as for the first time journalists and reporters were not allowed to enter the convention and thorough security checks were to prevent undercover agents to spy on the meeting. Recurring issues proved to be the cornerstone of the debate once again. PL's proposed WSA found little hearing by RYM factions, but held significant sway by regular non-affiliated SDSers. Women's liberation took radical swing when

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<sup>140</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 147.

<sup>141</sup> "You Don't Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows," [http://www.sds-1960s.org/sds\\_wuo/weather/weatherman\\_document.txt](http://www.sds-1960s.org/sds_wuo/weather/weatherman_document.txt).

Black Panther Party speaker spoke of “pussy power” of women and identified them as inferior to men in the struggle. He was met with PLers shouting “*Fight Male Chauvinism!*” expressing their disapproval and the RYM strategy lay shattered as the Panthers humiliated them in front of the convention.<sup>143</sup> Dohrn, the core of Weatherman mystique who gave in on feminism for The Revolution, once she became a leading figure, stepped up to the microphone and in grandiose fiery speech slammed PL for being objectively racist, reactionary and anti-communist and proposed voting on excluding PL from the SDS which passed. The next day there were two SDSs, The Old Left-style sects and factions stayed with PL-SDS where they could debate tradition sectarian Marxism using the vocabulary of their predecessors and regular SDS including RYM I and II, Yippies, Panthers and regulars. Some, such as anarchists mocked the whole split and left for the last bastion of true anarchism Industrial Workers of the World, IWW. At this point, the SDS gave up one of its core values, non-exclusionism, and things started to fall into disarray.

The Weatherman proceeded to launch the revolutionary theory into practice and under the motto of “*Bring the war home!*”<sup>144</sup> started to commit violent attacks on national institutions. Several raids on blue collar high schools where radicals took teachers hostages and preached about revolution and fighting “the pigs in Amerika” to the high schoolers resulting in anti-Weatherman marches organized by the very same high schoolers. “Days of Rage” in October were to replicate the events of Chicago riots of 1968 and fanatical crowd of few hundred radicals battled the police resulting in six of them being shot and 250 arrested with 2.3 million USD worth of bail bonds and no evidence of mass support. Rudd, Dohrn and the others promised 25,000 white radicals, yet roughly 700-800 people showed up, which only hardened their conviction of being the only white “*vanguard of revolution in America*”.<sup>145</sup> The radicals completely lost touch with reality and through revolutionary Marxism of peculiar mixture of Maoism, Leninism, Che Guevara’s “foco” theory and Third World struggle talked themselves into victory.<sup>146</sup> RYM’s II leader Mike Klonsky soon resigned as a National Secretary, criticized Weatherman’s tactics, broke off with it before “Days of Rage” and complained

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<sup>142</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 162.

<sup>143</sup> Sale, *SDS*, 394.

<sup>144</sup> “Take The War To The People And Bring It Home,” *New Left Notes* (1969) 22.

<sup>145</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 183.

<sup>146</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 379.

that the movement would not success “without the working class as its main component.” RYM II separated itself from the national staff and intended to create its own parallel structures, yet failed.<sup>147</sup>

After the winter of 1969 Weatherman convention, the organization went underground and the SDS collapsed as a mass movement. Support on campuses was seemingly nonexistent for Weather Underground and quickly waned for both RYM II and PL. The lack of unifying national organization led to no newspapers, no regional travelers, no roof theory, no directions, no identity which the press could focus on and nothing that would lure fresh blood in. SDS which had around 80,000 members in more than 300 campuses a year earlier faded away from national spotlight. Interestingly, the campus activism was on the rise peaking in May 1970 mainly because of US bombing of Cambodia and killing of four students at Kent State. Over a half of campuses saw form of a protest with at least 350 cases of student strikes, more than 500 school closings and more than thirty bombings of ROTCs buildings. However without a national organization to connect these issues, most acts remained localized.<sup>148</sup>

### ***4.3 The Empire Strikes back***

By 1962 J. Edgar Hoover had been in his office for thirty eight years and it was not until 1968 when the official authorization of counterintelligence operation against New Left would be issued, but his agency has been informed about Port Huron convention. The FBI earlier monitored civil rights activists in the South and also White Hate groups, but the SDS fell into their crosshairs for the first time when organizing teach-ins and Hoover testified before the House Appropriations Committee of powerful communist movement in the US. Within days after this testimony, Eastern college professor studying McCartyism came under FBI surveillance because he contacted the American Institute of Marxist Studies.<sup>149</sup> After the successful antiwar march in April 1965, the FBI engaged in a traditional method of intimidation, large scale interviewing with as many SDSers as possible. By the end of 1965, Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach “warned that there were Communists in SDS” and a Senate Internal Subcommittee report said that anti-Vietnam war movement was largely “under

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<sup>147</sup> Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 182.

<sup>148</sup> David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004), 65.

Communist control.”<sup>150</sup> It seems that the government did not evolve much from the Red Scare parlance. In 1966, it launched a program on student-agents infiltrating the SDS chapters on campuses and when the students of Wesleyan College protested the presence of FBI informants on campus, Hoover in a letter replied that their notion of FBI being extremely hostile to academic freedoms in “utterly false”.<sup>151</sup> At every major antiwar march or event, the FBI was watching people and gathering information. As the antiwar movement gained momentum, the FBI increased surveillance constantly, expanding the coverage of universities whose administrations cooperated with the agency, only fueling anger of the radicals and fostering their notion of one big establishment scam fitting into puzzle of American imperialism. The Tet offensive was not only a surprise eye-opener for the US military, but also to the home front as the war seemed real in the streets of US cities. In the first half of 1968, an astonishing 3,463 occasions of campus protest were reported and student rebellion was spreading faster than the authorities were able to prevent or intercept.<sup>152</sup> The real change came with the confrontation on Columbia University.

The bloody fights at Columbia University were symbolic as they occurred at school older than the Republic itself meant a dramatic change both in the student conscience and law enforcement response. At the time, the FBI had 8,700 special agents employed nationwide.<sup>153</sup> In an internal memorandum in January, Hoover ordered increased pressure on antiwar movement. As a consequence of this policy, five prominent people, the so called Boston Five, of antiwar movement were indicted. Marcus Raskin, director of Institute for Policy Studies, Mitchell Goodman, Yale Chaplin, William Sloan Coffin, Dr. Benjamin Spock and Harvard graduate Michael Ferber, were all indicted for conspiring to “counsel young men to violate the draft laws.”<sup>154</sup> After the Columbia events, which surprised the agency, the FBI launched COINTELPRO on the New Left. Counter intelligence program was designed to infiltrate, discredit and disrupt domestic political organizations. Quickly it commenced a program to disintegrate SDS from the inside through a mailing campaign that besmirched Mark Rudd and SDS. These anonymous letters were mailed either to alumni and conservative trustees of the

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<sup>149</sup> Davis, *Assault on the Left*, 30.

<sup>150</sup> Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?: American Protest Against the War in Vietnam 1963-1975*, (New York: Horizon Book Promotions, 1989), 59-60.

<sup>151</sup> Davis, *Assault on the Left*, 33.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

universities demanding to ban SDS on campus or to parents of arrested students to show the “real” face of SDS. Another tactic was to insinuate that key figures, such as Tom Hayden, are objects of counterintelligence plot to identify them as government informants, which would discredit them in the eyes of the movement as government finks.<sup>155</sup> Various sorts of other Bureau’s propaganda materials were disseminated all around the campus world as well as outside of it to paint a picture of the SDS being rude, ape-like bunch of despicable beings whose goals were either selfish or destruction of American way of life.<sup>156</sup> The crucial and influential event of the year was a demonstration at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and it did not take an undercover investigative for FBI to recognize, that this is going to be a major one.<sup>157</sup> The Bureau rushed with preparations and also ordered the IRS to look into the financial situation of key SDS figures. In cooperation with Chicago police, which mustered 11,900 police officers and almost 6,000 National Guardsmen at Mayor Richard J. Daley disposal, 200 FBI agents were prepared to launch a counter demonstration operation that later became known as *Siege of Chicago*.<sup>158</sup> Although the bloodshed and merciless police brutality crushing the wild crowds of demonstrators ended in almost one thousand injured<sup>159</sup> were televised and caused a shockwave rushing through the nation. According to polls conducted shortly after the riots, more than half of respondents claimed that the police used adequate force. The dreams of Yuppies to show the fascist nature of America failed to reach the general public and diverted public support towards the establishment.<sup>160</sup>

The results of COINTELPRO were less tangible than the agency expected. The FBI never sufficiently understood the ideological base of SDS or why privileged middle-class white students would revolt. In contrast, the SDS offered complex well-developed anti-establishment theories that warned of potential impact of FBI repression. What was more harmful was the arrests made by standard police forces and ensuing judicial consequences, either bails or jail time. COINTELPRO was helpful in this context as it

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<sup>154</sup> Fred P. Graham, „Spock and Graham Indicted for Activity against Draft,“ *New York Times*, January 6, 1968.

<sup>155</sup> Davis, *Assault on the Left*, 47-50.

<sup>156</sup> David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here*, 133-147.

<sup>157</sup> Davis, *Assault on the Left*, 66.

<sup>158</sup> A book by Norman Mailer depicting the bloody demonstrations and police state-like behaviour of the law enforcement on the literal battlefield in the streets of Chicago.

<sup>159</sup> Alan Brinkley, “1968 and the Unraveling of Liberal America,” v *1968: The World Transformed*, ed. Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert a Detlef Junker (Washington: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 232.



supplied repressive apparatus and helped to create repressive atmosphere which made SDS and such alike be pushed out of the viable dissent. Agents were not able to grasp the way SDSers were thinking and their attempts to blend in turned disastrously with a few exceptions. On the side, SDS had already in 1968 Steering Committee Against Repression that passed a resolution how to fight repression, which proved to be very effective. The general attitude of knowing that they are being watched and their phones wire-tapped made the investigations more difficult with the fact of nearly chaotic state of being playing into the hands of SDS. When SDS went partly underground, the nature of surveillance completely changed and any attempts to penetrate the ranks were futile.<sup>161</sup> In this respect, the FBI failed to be the main force that led to disintegration of SDS, but played its part in creating the world with an “*agent behind every mailbox*” that profoundly affected the Weatherman psyche.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Mark Kurlansky, *1968: Rok, který otřásl světem*, (Praha: Slovart, 2007), 310.

<sup>161</sup> There was an exception of informant Larry Gratwohl, who managed to contact Weatherman in Cincinnati, passed their two-day acid trip test, that he is not a pig and later was instrumental in a clamp down on this cell.

<sup>162</sup> David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here*, 167-180.

## Conclusion

The post Second World War economic, demographic and political boom of the United States had serious consequences for the social structure of the nation. Delivered from the social hardships of the 1930s, American society was generally getting richer and more affluent than ever before as more and more families were reaching out for middle-class status. The rise of economic wellbeing was however prohibited to certain parts of population, especially ethnic minorities, which alongside with unfavorable judicial situation in the South, via Jim Crow laws, had led to civil rights movement, which in turn influenced the Students for a Democratic Society. The 1950s marked an era of satisfaction of material needs while mainstream culture sustained the narrative of consumption being the best way and only American way to succeed. Only isolated islands of cultural and intellectual dissent of either socially critical scholars such as David Riesman or C. Wright Mills and underground writers, for example, the Beatniks. Traditional left-wing groups and labor unions that culminated in the post-Depression thirties lost their sway, accepted the Cold War narrative and were strictly anti-communist and anti-Soviet. With more and more people entering high schools and universities, this uncritical social and political setup the society accepted was to be soon challenged.

In 1960 two key figures on the New Left emerged, Al Haber and Tom Hayden, who were the founding fathers of Students for a Democratic Society. Haber became the director of student offshoot of League of Industrial Democracy, renamed it to SDS and started to travel around American campuses mainly along the East Coast. Hayden was an Ann Arbor, Michigan graduate who was radicalized during his summer travels to California and the South, ultimately becoming the main architect of SDS manifesto *The Port Huron Statement*. The statement defined the ideological positions of the new organization, fight against nuclear arms race, abolition of segregationist policies and reform of universities, seeing them as potential agents of social change, which theory was later developed and became one of the cornerstones of SDS. In opposition to the Old Left of the 1930s, the New Left was non-exclusionist, so it accepted every dedicated group on the left ranging from liberals to communists, denied re-baiting, but also was critical of Soviet Union and intended to search for a third way in the bi-polar world. The core value was participatory democracy calling for direct social participation of citizens involved, which was reflected in its deliberations and intellectual disputes, often serving as an

impediment to adopting policies and strategies. In reality, participatory democracy translated into support for civil right movement, forming an antiwar coalition with other pacifist organizations or community organizing and effort to build democracy from the bottom. At universities, the SDS was supposed to be an umbrella organization for student discontent, dissent and connect various local issues into a larger frame. This strategy proved to be successful while more students were becoming to be involved and with the escalation of Vietnam War, the SDS rose to be the most influential student organization on the left with a potential of becoming the leader of a broad coalition of antiwar organizations. However the loose, flexible and non-specific structure which should prevent concentration of power into the hands of few led SDS to abandon the antiwar issue as its main goal and focused on fabrication of student power, a perceived agent of social change.

Gradually, as protests on and off campuses grew in numbers, a different sort of folk came to hold the reins power inside SDS. The early East Coast, predominately Jewish intelligentsia, was replaced and outnumbered by less intellectual Midwest and Southwest students more prone to action. On their annual national meetings where SDS every year elected new leadership and set the course for the next year, a Maoist Progressive labor Party, the PL, started to gather popularity, which only contributed to the fact of radicalization of SDS in its rhetoric, methods and tactics. Protesting varying social issues and maladies, the establishment response was either violent or ignorant. This meant that dissenters acknowledged that non-violent means of protest, taken from the civil rights movement were not sufficient in achieving the goal set. Hence, as the police brutality was used when dispersing the crowd of protesters grew, the violent response of the protesters grew as well, which sped up the political radicalization process of SDS and at the same time discouraged the general public in trusting and supporting SDS. The SDS danced in between several issues and was not able to choose one as its flagship concern, which was an appealing aspect for people who wanted to directly involve themselves in social action, yet drained away a lot of energy and resources without achieving the desired goals. At the same time a peculiar system of functioning developed as the SDS operated on two levels, national and local, which were sometimes not in agreement or at least on the same line of communication resulting on greater or lesser autonomy of local chapters and regional power centers depending on the character of national leadership.

The tumultuous year of 1968 foreshadowed grave changes in SDS structure as well as its driving philosophy. The Columbia University occupation by the SDS and the Democratic National Convention riots in Chicago, where SDS stood in the heart of the protest crowd ending up in bloody confrontations. Collectively, these two events put forward the issue of revolution on the United States and Marxism being inevitable intellectual frame for SDS, which therefore meant that SDS partially fell into the trappings of the Old Left with all its features of factionalism and parlance. The issue of how to achieve revolution was concluded at the summer Chicago convention in 1969. Two main factions stood against each other, hardcore Maoist PL reiterating the issue of worker-student alliance and women liberation while opposing Black Nationalism versus Revolutionary Youth Movement faction favoring direct violent action against the establishment arguing that blacks are the inner colony of the US and positioning itself as a vanguard of the revolution. The PL was voted out of the SDS, which meant a breakaway with the core value of non-exclusionism and split up into two SDSs. The campus support for both quickly waned, although some 80,000 students claimed membership and youth revolt was generally on the rise in the country. RYM-SDS split into Weatherman faction which went soon underground and transformed itself into a revolutionary guerrilla similar to RAF in Germany with total disdain for popular support.

At the end it seems that SDS partly circumscribed back to the Old Left with factionalism being the one of the main reasons of its downfall. The pressure from the establishment represented by police or FBI COINTELPRO served as a radicalization element as their stonewall like attitude of increasing brutality only fostered radical elements within the SDS, yet was not appalling to the mainstream public. Issues of Black power and Black Nationalism were also instrumental in the breakup of SDS. The white activists were not welcomed in the fight for black liberation pointing out to a larger SDS problem, middle class white guilt. The affluent middle class students have almost always fought fights of someone else, the blacks, the poor, the alienated, the Third World, the Vietnamese. The issue of women liberation, was another breaking point as the inherently male dominated group never recognized its own chauvinism beyond heated rhetoric. Yet to claim that SDS's existence was pointless would be short-sighted. The caldron of ideas and energy raised some issues which are relevant even nowadays and represents the largest youth movement with a vision on the left in the history of the United States.

## Souhrn

Druhá světová válka nastartovala ve Spojených státech amerických dlouhé období ekonomického a demografického rozkvětu. Padesátá léta se vyznačovala zdánlivě poklidným společenským vývojem, který byl orientovaný na materiální spotřebu a přijal za svou realitu studené války ve svém striktním antikomunismu. Leč, na počátku nové dekády začali nově narozené děti dospívat a chodit na univerzity, kde si začali uvědomovat sociální a rasovou nespravedlivost amerického systému. Inspiraci často nacházeli v kritických myšlenkách Nové Levice a s ideou participativní demokracie a boje proti slepému antikomunismu se utvořila zastřešující organizace Students for a Democratic Society. SDS nahlížela na univerzitu jako na motor společenského vývoje, čímž se lišila od Staré Levice, která upřednostňovala dělníky. Aktivisté z SDS se velice rychle zapojili do řešení komplexních problémů začátku 60. let jako boj za občanská práva černochů, organizování v chudinských komunitách velkoměst a rovněž se angažovali ve stále rostoucím protiválečném hnutí. Válka ve Vietnamu se postupně dostala do středu společenského zájmu a diskuse a SDS byla jednou z hlavních sil aktivního protestu vůči americkému působení ve Vietnamu. S rostoucí eskalací války, ale také intenzity protestů a okázalým nezájmem establishmentu, rostl počet členů SDS na kampusech po celé zemi. V momentě, kdy SDS seznala, že upozorňování na nešvary systému nenásilnou cestou je zbytečné, začala sahat ve stále větší míře k násilí, po vzoru radikalizujících se černošských nacionalistů. Pro ideologickou, ale i praktickou inspiraci čím dál více sahala k osvoboditelským hnutím Třetího světa, zejména k vietnamské Národní frontě osvobození Jižního Vietnamu. Díky složité vnitřní dynamice s několika mocenskými centry v rámci decentralizované organizace se do čela dostali radikální Marxisté a Maoisté a SDS se propadla do spárů vnitřního ideologického boje. Ten vyústil na sjezdu v roce 1969 ve vyloučení jedné z frakcí z řad SDS a tímto rozštěpením ztratila SDS svou jednotící funkci a během několika měsíců se rozpadla úplně.

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