

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
Fakulta sociálních věd
Institut mezinárodních studií

PROTOKOL O HODNOCENÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE
(Posudek vedoucího)

Práci předložil(a) student(ka): Tomáš Vitek

Název práce: The Failure of the New Left in the US: The Case of the SDS

Vedoucí práce (u externích vedoucích uveďte též adresu a funkci v rámci instituce):
Dejan Kralj, Ph.D.

1. OBSAH A CÍL PRÁCE (stručná informace o práci, formulace cíle):

In his thesis, author Tomáš Vitek analyzes the rise and ultimate fall of the New Left movement in the United States by focusing in particular on the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) organization. He examines the trajectory of the organizations foundation in the early 1960s up until its untimely and rather unexpected demise in the early 1970s. Vitak argues that several crucial processes heavily impacted by domestic and the state of world affairs led to mobilization of students on the left in the post-World War II period. He maintains that the SDS was primarily influenced and motivated by the concept of participatory democracy, which they employed as a means of attaining social progress and in search for an alternative to the antiquated political and social discourse of the Cold War.

The author addresses the following questions, issues and hypotheses regarding the SDS and its place in the history of the New Left in American History:

- “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?”

Vitek begins his effort by exploring the internal structure and group dynamics of the SDS from its foundation in 1962. He then moves on to examine in greater detail the role of SDS within the context of the larger dissident and civil rights movements that rallied around such issues as the Vietnam War, the struggle for civil rights in the African American community, the Black Power and Liberation movement and women’s struggle for equality. The third part of his thesis, Mr. Vitek highlights the role of the state and traditional media’s impact and manipulation of the SDS and its various “brother and sister” organizations. Finally, he traces how inner factionalism with the SDS and the increasing use of violence throughout the community of disparate student protest, civil rights and liberation movements and organizations forced the redefinition of their founding ideological principals of the group. Ultimately, he concludes that despite the fact that the SDS was founded on the premise on the premise of being different than the Old Left, yet overtime embraced its foundational predecessor by co-opting its ideology, rhetoric and place in American History.

2. VĚCNÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ

The thesis employs a chronological analytical framework examining the formation of the SDS as it grew from a small local organization to a large national movement embraced by ever increasing numbers of students and protestors. In his first chapter, Vitek establishes the foundation for his work as he examines the Post-WWII era in America and how the profound changes the nation experienced in the 1950s set the stage for tumultuous era of the 1960s. He highlights how the zeitgeist of the era focused on a new culture of consumption, social acceptance, conformity and the maintenance of the status quo. He argues that outside of the new “normalcy of the era” that the realities of the Cold War and societies acquiescence of these new norms created a perfect storm that contributed to the growing generational disparities of the Baby Boomer youth that came of age in the 1950s and 1960s. The predominate narrative of social affluence contributed to the growing distance between these youth and the society of hardships that their parents experienced during the Great Depression and World War II.

Vitek shows how the group, founded in 1962, quickly transitioned from a “small organization of a few hundred students” disperse across a few college and university campuses to one of the most visible, vocal and dominant voices of the 1960s anti-establishment/anti-war/pro-equality movements within the country. Their initial foray allowed for them to successfully cross racial and class divides. Despite this fact, however, they were never able to translate their notoriety into a true position of leadership within the various movements.

In addition, the movement suffered from a changing demographic, both generationally and geographically within the SDS that strained the group’s initial structure and internal leadership to the point of breaking. Vitek also shows how the “escalation of protest activities and adopting violent measures accelerated the whole movement and led to the phase of active resistance” and how the shift within the group to “actively fighting the establishment as a stepping stone to an open revolt and eventual revolution” served as the “catalysts for total top-to-bottom radicalization of SDS.” Ultimately, internal and external influences forced the SDS into a new “revolutionary stage and eventually broke up by sacrificing its core values of participatory democracy and non-exclusionist nature.”

3. FORMÁLNÍ A JAZYKOVÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (jazykový projev, správnost citace a odkazů na literaturu, grafická úprava, formální náležitosti práce apod.):

The thesis is very well written and researched. The presentation, understanding and writing of English are excellent and are at a high level of academic writing. There are no issues with any of the formal forming aspects of Mr. Vitek’s work in regards to the use of quote materials, footnotes, and bibliography. The author’s work fulfill all academic requirements in this regard.

4. STRUČNÝ KOMENTÁŘ HODNOTITELE (celkový dojem z bakalářské práce, silné a slabé stránky, originalita myšlenek, naplnění cíle apod.):

Tomáš Vitek has presented an extremely well written, extensively researched and original scholarly work. The author presents a very clear and logically organized text that is easy and engaging to read. The thesis addresses an often overlooked and neglected aspect of contemporary American History by examining the failure of Leftist politics and activists during the countercultural tumult of the 1960s. Throughout the work, Tomáš addresses and successfully answers the research questions and goals that he has outlined from the onset.

5. SPOLUPRÁCE S VEDOUCÍM PRÁCE

The author consulted with me on his work regularly.

6. OTÁZKY A PŘIPOMÍNKY DOPORUČENÉ K BLIŽŠÍMU VYSVĚTLENÍ PŘI OBHAJOBĚ (jedna až tři):

- What other external factors contributed to the collapse of the SDS and prevented the rise of a similar student organization in the subsequent decades?
- What legacy/long-term impact did the New Left and the SDS in particular on politics and social movements today?
- What were the long-term consequences of the New Left's failure in contemporary American society?

7. DOPORUČENÍ / NEDOPORUČENÍ K OBHAJOBĚ A NAVRHOVANÁ ZNÁMKA (výborně, velmi dobře, dobře, nevyhověl):

This thesis successfully fulfills the requirements for the Masters Thesis and is recommended for defense. I propose a grade of **Excellent to Very Good** depending on the performance at the state exam.

Datum: 26 January 2016

Podpis: Dejan Kralj, Ph.D.

Pozn.: Hodnocení píše k jednotlivým bodům, pokud nepíšete v textovém editoru, použijte při nedostatku místa zadní stranu nebo přiložený list. V hodnocení práce se pokuste oddělit ty její nedostatky, které jsou, podle vašeho mínění, obhajobou neodstranitelné (např. chybí kritické zhodnocení pramenů a literatury), od těch věcí, které student může dobrou obhajobou napravit; poměr těchto dvou položek berte prosím v úvahu při stanovení konečné známky.