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SDS: Engineers of Campus Chaos

A small but highly active band of college students, calling themselves Students for a Democratic Society, are doing everything they can to dispense with both democracy and society

BY EUGENE H. METHVIN

DURING the past year, college campuses across the United States from Columbia to Stanford exploded with violence, bloodshed and arson. In the thick of this disruption was an organization of self-proclaimed radicals called the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

This fall, as classes resume, educators and police who once shrugged off SDS as just another band of youthful rebels are bracing for more trouble. To see why, look at a sampling of SDS's recent record. At the University of Wisconsin last fall, 70 persons were injured after an SDS-organized riot against Dow Chemical Co. recruiters. At the University

of Georgia, SDS-led demonstrators occupied the administration building, demanding that women students be allowed to drink and stay out all night. At San Francisco State, they launched a rampage of looting, brawling and attempted arson of a campus bookstore, all in the name of defending four hoodlums who had beaten up the editor of the student newspaper. At the University of California in Berkeley, they deployed radio-directed students as shock troops, erected barricades and fought pitched battles with police in an assault on the Oakland Induction Center.

New York University philosophy professor Sidney Hook sums it up:

"By their lawless actions, the members of SDS threaten to become the true grave diggers of academic freedom in the United States."

Salable Line. SDS was activated in June 1962 by a gathering of 59 collegians at Port Huron, Mich. The organization's first manifesto was the "Port Huron Statement," a 30,000-word mildly Marxist economic critique of America. In it, the members were, in one SDSer's words, "naming the enemy and then saying how to get him."

This has proved a most salable line among the new collegiate generation. In just 14 years, America's college population has skyrocketed from 2,600,000 to seven million. Typically, at Cornell the biggest freshman and sophomore classes fell to green teaching assistants with an average age of 26; at Berkeley, 900 graduate assistants carried the instruction load in the first two years, and classes often bloated to 1500. Thousands of students arrived on campus expecting close and intellectually enriching contact with wise professors, and instead crashed up against the increasing impersonality, the anonymity and regimented demands of today's mass universities.

Some among them began looking for a scapegoat. Yale psychologist Kenneth Keniston calls the activists a tiny minority with a "protest-prone personality." Prof. Lewis Feuer, who quit Berkeley in disgust after campus totalitarians took over, found them "possessed by a terrible, com-

pulsive irrationality that corrupted their idealism." Another critic diagnosed this significant and talented minority as "super-idealists, unhappy because America fails to live up to its textbook image, upset because life is different from dreams."

Bored with the prospect of ordinary careers in the affluent "post-industrial" technocracy, many of these students began cranking SDS mimeographs, walking picket lines and attending SDS rallies. By mid-1968, SDS claimed to have 6300 dues-paying members with another 35,000 unregistered participants in 250 chapters, all under the direction of SDS headquarters in a shabby two-room flat on Chicago's West Madison Street.

Miniskirts and Manuals. The student who walks into an SDS meeting today hears Marxist rhetoric often virtually indistinguishable from Radio Moscow's worst Stalinist paranoia. SDS organizers denounce "oppressors," "exploiters," and the "Al Capones who run this country." The university is a "colony" of "the military-industrial complex." Members refer openly to themselves as "professional revolutionaries" whose careers are "committed to the destruction of imperialism and capitalism." SDS National Secretary Greg Calvert boasted to a New York *Times* reporter: "We're working to build a guerrilla force in an urban environment. We're actively organizing sedition."

Scores of those who have swallowed the SDS hook are attracted by

big issues such as slum poverty, civil rights and the Vietnam war. But SDS strategy also calls for pouncing on *any issue* that will excite students. At Princeton it was letting girls in the dormitories, at the University of Texas the presence of a Confederate flag, at San Francisco State a food-price protest and demand to take over the cafeteria and bookstore, at the University of Chicago a controversy over draft-deferment exams and class rankings.

"Every attempt should be made to connect campus issues with off-campus questions," advises former SDS Vice President Carl Davidson. "In the high schools, raise demands to wear long hair and miniskirts, and then politicalize them," prescribes a California SDSer. At Wisconsin, another reports, "We organized dormitory students around rules, and then it was easy to move them on such issues as the university's relation to Chase Manhattan Bank."

Specific suggestions for throwing monkey wrenches into the machinery of society include such tactics as: picking public fights with welfare workers; starting trash-can fires and pulling fire alarms in high schools as "forms of protest"; making appointments by the score with university deans and registrars—to "overuse the bureaucracy"; checking out an inordinate number of books to disrupt libraries and study programs; disrupting draft boards by registering under a false name so "federal agents will spend much time attempting to track down peo-

ple who do not exist." Such tactics are far more than youthful pranks. Their ultimate goal is nothing less than the destruction of society itself.

How Pink? Though the SDS has an image of independent radicalism, mounting evidence indicates it is not as much a "New Left" as it would have press and public believe. For instance:

- Communists have sat in on SDS meetings and coached organizers from the start. In turn, SDS leaders have been welcomed at secret communist conventions.

- The 1965 SDS convention repealed a constitutional stipulation barring communists from membership. Subsequently, Communist Party leaders quietly told members they "could work through SDS." Soon a Progressive Labor Party group sympathetic to the Red Chinese moved into SDS. Today the Maoist, Stalinist and Trotskyite Communist Parties abound at SDS conventions and control some SDS chapters.

- SDSers maintain contacts with communist nations through frequent foreign travels. Tom Hayden, an SDS founder and its tactical chieftain, visited Hanoi in 1965 with top U.S. Red strategist Herbert Aptheker. He has also sojourned in Moscow, Peking and Havana. In September 1967, ten SDSers journeyed to Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, for a week-long ultra-secret powwow with Vietcong and North Vietnamese representatives. Other leaders went to Havana for Castro's

International Cultural Congress last January.

• A strong communist flavor was vividly apparent at SDS's national convention in East Lansing, Mich., last June. Moved by the romantic image of Castro, delegates spouted the maxims of Che Guevara and paraded in khakis. Of the three national officers chosen, only one failed to proclaim himself a communist. Before her unanimous election as inter-organizational secretary, non-student Bernadine Dohrn, 26, was asked if she was a "socialist." Her reply: "I consider myself a revolutionary communist." At that, the audience of 500 rose in cheers.

The SDSers marched the red flag of communist revolution and the black flag of anarchy to the dais of their convention hall. Without a ripple of dissent, speaker after speaker espoused the dogma that American society must be destroyed by constant disruption now and revolutionary "armed struggle" when the time is ripe. "The ability to manipulate people through violence and mass media has never been greater, the potential for us as radicals never more exciting, than now," one speaker proclaimed. Behind the scenes, FBI intelligence has revealed, a secret workshop in "sabotage and explosives" dealt with what type of bomb best destroys communications and how to fire Molotov cocktails from shotguns.

Yet it would be a mistake simply to identify all SDS members as Moscow or Peking communists. Indeed,

many are actively anti-Kremlin and non-communist. Their common bond "is a passionate desire to destroy, to annihilate, to tear down," says FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. "To put it bluntly, they are a new type of subversive, and their danger is great."

To understand *how* dangerous, look at the SDS in action at the most explosive of the recent disorders—the upheaval at Columbia.

Revolt at Columbia. Late last year, 300 delegates to the SDS National Council at Bloomington, Ind., decided to launch a national campaign they dubbed "Ten days to shake the empire." Secret caucuses picked Columbia for a "beacon" demonstration whose flare would spark a nationwide conflagration.

Field general for the insurrection was junior Mark Rudd, who had been named Columbia SDS chapter chairman after returning from a January tour in Cuba. On March 27, he led a hundred followers into Low Library, Columbia's large-domed administrative center, and demanded that the university end its sponsorship of a defense research institute. Ordered to appear for disciplinary action, Rudd announced that a new march would be made into Low Library on April 23. Blocked by 200 anti-SDS students on that date, he and his followers stormed into Hamilton Hall, Columbia's main undergraduate classroom center. There they imprisoned Dean Henry Coleman and two aides for 25 hours and unveiled a list of "demands," rang-

ing from complete amnesty for Rudd and others to stopping construction on a nearby gym bordering Harlem. The next day, an SDS raiding party smashed into and occupied Low Library; later three other university buildings were seized. Raiders broke into the university president's office, filched his files, handed out copies of his personal correspondence. They set up a "war room" in one building and coordinated activity through a network of 40 walkie-talkies, telephones and runners.

Shut out of their classes, other students were outraged. They formed a "Majority Coalition," swiftly marshaled 2000 signatures demanding that the university president take "firm action." Said Coalition spokesman Paul Vilardi: "Students do have some reasonable complaints, but what SDS is doing to Columbia is like slitting your wife's throat because she eats crackers in bed."

But President Grayson Kirk vacillated. He suspended gym construction, and reportedly promised to end military research, even to tender his own resignation "for reasons of health." So 400 anti-protesters, wearing coats and ties as their own badge of protest, formed a human wall around Low Library offices to stop food and messengers. The radicals tried to storm through, swinging fists, but the blockaders held. Finally, with the radicals rumored to be arming themselves with pipes, staves and bricks, Kirk sent the Majority Coalition home and asked police to clear the buildings.

At Low Library, 500 students and faculty blocked the way; at Fayerweather Hall, another 125. They screamed "Police brutality!" into grinding television cameras as police formed a standard riot wedge and charged, bloodying noses and heads. Police arrested 707—26 percent not on Columbia student rolls.

"This cop violence is good!" said Rudd. "We're going to get a lot of help." Grabbing the police-intervention issue, SDSers inveigled many former critics into joining a campus-wide strike. The Columbia faculty gave in and canceled formal classes for the rest of the school year.

But that was not the end of the Columbia tragedy. Four weeks later Rudd and his followers marched into Hamilton again. Campus gates were barricaded, and, following a peaceful arrest, fires were set in Fayerweather, and bricks were hurled at police. Someone even broke into the office of a professor who had condemned extremism, and there burned his manuscript and notes representing ten years of research.

Time to Get Tough. The sad lesson of Columbia was stated by New York *Times* education writer Fred M. Hechinger: "Any society, academic or otherwise, that lacks the will to defend itself against illegitimate disruption and takeover is crippled and, as a free society, may be doomed."

Indeed, the lessons must now be clear to all:

1. Students and faculty must sup-

port prompt action to maintain campus peace. At Brooklyn College, when SDSers seized the registrar's office, other students condemned the disrupters as "today's version of Hitler's storm troopers," demanded "strict enforcement of the law"—and got it. College authorities summarily expelled the rebels, police carted them off, and peace returned to Brooklyn College.

2. College administrators must not appease or temporize with totalitarian minorities using coercion and anti-democratic tactics. Although the intervention of civic police was abhorrent to all, both students and administrators at Columbia admit that firm action taken against the first few hundred Hamilton Hall sit-ins would have avoided the escalation of protest to a university-wide strike. Before Columbia's troubles were over, 5000 students were involved, a serious clash with police had occurred, and the entire school had suffered an inestimable loss of prestige.

3. We must all support basic university reforms that *are* needed.

Inevitably, a "knowledge factory" atmosphere has developed from the campus population explosion, with accompanying depersonalization and frustration. Educators must pay far more attention to the individual student and to legitimate, orderly expression of grievances.

Talking to educators and students around the country, I find a hopeful, growing determination that responsible, forceful action by the democratic majority can demolish the SDS "imperialist conspiracy" syndrome. "Students are usually idealists and in fact come to college to seek a better world by getting the best possible education," Columbia junior Jonathan Edelstein said to me. "But if we let a dictatorial extremist minority who think they have already found all the answers rob us of that opportunity, we will lose the future."

THE NOVEMBER Reader's Digest will carry an article exploring some of the causes of student dissatisfaction today and the reasons why even nonradical students often lend their support to the current rebellion.

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