

# REP RAPS

## COMMUNICATION TO THE MOVEMENT

by the REP collective

Many movement people have been confused by the 1969 SDS national convention and subsequent events within the organization. It is time to begin clearing up this confusion so that we can continue building a mass movement against US imperialism. In order to do this we must evaluate what has happened in SDS during the past year. Most importantly, we must sharpen our understanding of the political principles which are at the base of the struggles within SDS. It will then be possible to distinguish between legitimate criticism and criticism which is based on ignorance, opportunism, or mere anti-communism. Likewise we must distinguish between revolutionary and revisionist evaluations of the current struggle.

### PART I: HISTORY

The past year of struggle has produced great changes in SDS. No longer an organization loosely composed of liberals, anarchists, and radicals of all persuasions, SDS has moved to define itself as a revolutionary socialist movement of young people. In the process of this self-definition, the Progressive Labor Party has been expelled from SDS, with RYM II and Weatherman emerging as the two most prominent factions. We must understand the development of these two positions in their own right and in the context of the struggle to defeat PL. What are now different political analyses and strategies were at one point a unified, explicit set of ideas differing sharply from PL.

By pushing a particular class analysis in SDS more clearly than other individuals and groups had done before, PL challenged SDS to develop a class conscious, anti-imperialist position. By organizing the Worker-Student Alliance caucus within SDS, PL pushed the non-WSA part of SDS to realize the value of collective discipline in political work. (See the "Critique of PL" by the Old Mole, published by REP, for a summary of PL-WSA politics.) Under the demands of the growing radical movement and the objective conditions in the US, SDS would probably have adopted a class analysis and a tighter form of organization at some future time, but undoubtedly the response of SDS to PL helped speed this process.

The passage of the original Revolutionary Youth Movement resolution at the December 1968 National Council indicated increasing disagreement with PLP's program. Although PL emphasized working class organizing, its theory and practice were inadequate. PL had already run into opposition when, in October, the National Council meeting at Boulder, Colorado voted down the PL-sponsored resolution "Toward a Worker-Student Alliance". The December RYM proposal was an attempt to defeat and discredit PL by providing an analytically-sound alternative to PL's program. It was presented by a group centered in Chicago including Mike Klonsky (then National Secretary of SDS) and Les Coleman (from Chicago Region SDS).

The passage of the resolution came after long and serious debate. During the debate, a unified faction emerged whose support for the RYM resolution rested on the principles of struggle for international proletarian unity and for a broad anti-imperialist youth movement. This constituted a challenge to Worker-Student Alliance politics which did not admit any legitimacy to the notion of youth as a critical force in making revolution.

From December until the March 1969 National Council meeting in Austin, Texas, the cleavage deepened between the unified RYM faction and PL-WSA, especially on the questions of blacks and women. A PL-sponsored resolution on racism passed at the December NC was reversed with the passage of a resolution that recognized revolutionary (socialist) nationalism as a progressive force in the black liberation movement. This was accomplished over PL's protest that "all nationalism is reactionary". Although no women's resolution was debated at the Austin NC

workshops demonstrated that PL-WSA did not recognize that women are subject to any oppression and exploitation beyond that of the working class as a whole.

At the same time, as the struggle with PL heightened, differences within the group which had favored the RYM resolution began to emerge. Divisions were developing over questions of the role of the schools and the more general question of the role of the white proletariat in the US. In Austin, people who had been united in December in support of "Revolutionary Youth Movement" found themselves on opposite sides in regard to two proposals: one by Les Coleman, "The Schools Must Serve the People", and one by Marilyn Katz, "Mayday" (which called for mass working class actions). The authors of the RYM resolutions supported both of these proposals, but many who had allied with them in the fight with PL now opposed these documents.

By the time of the National Convention in June, differences within RYM were expressed on a theoretical level as well as on the level of tactical proposals. Jim Mellen's article, "More on the Youth Movement", was published in May, and Coleman's reply, "Notes on Class Analysis: Some Implications for the RYM", appeared at the National Convention in Chicago. Two other basic documents circulated at that meeting were: "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows" and "RYM II". Although it was clear that these papers had basically different political thrusts, the people who supported both papers came together once again in the struggle with PL.

At the convention many people recognized the necessity of expelling PL in order for SDS to do organizing outside a solely student constituency. In addition, so long as PL was part of SDS, constructive relations with the black liberation movement would not be possible. (Important black groups, such as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the Black Panther Party, had been repeatedly attacked by PL. PL branded black proletarian organizing as "racist", and in several campus struggles it had undermined the work of black groups by organizing against open admissions demands and black studies programs.) Another consideration was that during the previous year PL's practice had proven that its members did not operate within SDS on the "unity-criticism-unity" model, described later in this paper. Instead, PL pursued the course of all criticism and no unity. It deliberately worked to prevent the exchange of ideas which is necessary to maintain a strong and principled political organization. It can be said that PL was, in a sense, responsible for the formation of the two main tendencies in SDS now, for both RYM II and Weatherman developed out of opposition to PL. At the same time, the struggle with PL kept those (and other) tendencies from becoming distinct forces in their own right. This latter reason is why people who had opposed one another in March could unite in June, with little political discussion, to expel PL from the organization.

Expelling PL from SDS was consistent with "unity-criticism-unity". For unity, in this sense, does not mean simply "joining" two groups together; it does not mean an emphasis on organizational unity. It does require a basic understanding of different political tendencies, criticism of different positions, the formation of new positions, and the winning of the people to these new positions. It is possible to begin a meaningful stage of criticism now that political differences are emerging and can be clarified. This was not possible while PL was in the organization. On the other hand, expelling PL from SDS did not mean reading PL out of the Left. PL will be around for years, and we will have to criticize and deal politically with PL as we would with any other group on the Left.

In a sense, the expulsion of PL was done in an unprincipled manner. An alliance was formed of those who opposed PL, but different groups had different reasons for wanting PL out. Thus, RYM II and Weatherman each opposed PL, but also differed from each other. Due to the pressures of the struggle at the convention there was not adequate discussion of the principal disagreements between the two, nor of the potential for a principled alliance. Much of the debate that did take place centered on PL's practice, and people seemed to steer away from political discussion which would raise the tensions within the non-PL alliance. The lack of such discussion was probably deliberate. Supporters of the "Weatherman" proposal were strong at the convention, but needed some temporary allies in the fight against PL. Thus, they were willing to work with supporters of "RYM II" for a short while, but were not willing to debate the differences between Weatherman and RYM II. Supporters of RYM II also allowed this to happen by withdrawing the five principles of unity which they had proposed (as reasons for expelling PL), rather than spending time debating them in the group.

Weatherman has been elected to control of the National Office of SDS. After PL was expelled, Weatherman ran candidates for all the national offices and made little attempt (at that point) to gloss over their differences with RYM II. In the months since the convention Weatherman has attempted to consolidate its position in the organization.

### PART II: POLITICS

Before suggesting the main principles surrounding the new struggle in SDS, it is important to mention the progressive aspects of the original unity that later branched into the Weatherman and RYM II positions. The progressive aspects are present in both the Weatherman and the RYM II proposals and in papers circulated before and after these two main proposals appeared. They include: the desire to concretize politics through practice and to develop cadre; a recognition of the potential role of youth as a "critical force" in the revolutionary process; internationalist perspective of support for wars of national liberation against US imperialism; the realization that women's oppression derives from superstructure (male supremacy) as well as from direct economic oppression; and a willingness to engage in organizing in the community rather than confining organizing to the point of production. All these positions were important advances beyond both the eclectic politics of earlier days of SDS and the dogmatic errors of PL.

In recognizing these advances we should also reject opportunist criticism which various individuals and groups have levelled against, particularly the Weatherman tendency, although most critics ignorantly lump all SDS tendencies together. All criticism of tactics which neglects the political thinking behind tactics, all criticism of militancy per se, all criticism which feeds anti-communist reflexes by making accusations of "Stalinism" without precisely defining the word, all such unprincipled criticism must be rejected and attacked. The formation of organizational alliances on the basis of such thinking must be discouraged.

What then are the political principles behind the new debate within SDS following the split with PLP? The struggle has developed over a few basic and weighty questions. What is the US proletariat? What intermediate classes exist between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and what are their importance? What is the role of the US proletariat in the socialist revolution in this country? What is the relationship between the black and brown section of the proletariat (subject to colonial oppression as well as purely economic exploitation) and white workers? What is the relationship between the struggle of the US proletariat and that of the proletariat of oppressed nations under imperialism—that is, what is the significance of nationalism and of wars of national liberation for the proletariat of the oppressor nation? What is the nature of women's oppression and how does this relate, in practice, to colonial and class oppression? What is the character of the class struggle within the oppressor nation under imperialism—that is, can other classes in the US be brought into a united front under proletarian leadership against US imperialism? Is the US in a revolutionary or a pre-revolutionary stage at this time? These are questions to bear in mind while thinking about the debate in SDS. In addition, we should ask what class line is articulated by each faction.

We will not outline here the different ways Weatherman and RYM II answer these questions. However to make clear our perspective we shall briefly outline the REP collective's position and what we believe to be the main issues surrounding this new struggle.

We believe that if socialism is to be built in the US, it will be the result of a proletarian revolution. We understand that the proletariat includes those who work for wages in production, transportation, service, and communication industry. It specifically does not include students qua students, though some students are members of this class. We do not believe youth is a class; we do believe that the special oppression of youth of all classes makes possible their role as a critical force in the revolutionary process. As with the black and brown, and the women's movements, it is vital also for the youth movement to follow proletarian leadership. We recognize the oppression of blacks and browns in our country as a dual oppression encompassing exploitation as workers at the point of production and colonial oppression as nations. We support the right of self-determination for the black and brown nations, recognizing also the crucial position of their national liberation struggles in the overall struggle to liberate the entire working class and build socialism in the US. We understand that the socialist revolution in this country must proceed under proletarian leadership, and that in order for united proletarian leadership to develop, the treacherous nature of white-skin privilege must be recognized and repudiated by the white section of the proletariat. We believe that women are oppressed through their role in the family in addition to the exploitation faced by working women. Their oppression comes not only from the economic base which oppresses all the proletariat (black and brown women especially), but also from the superstructure, from male supremacy. Women must be organized to fight against their own oppression, and this



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at times will mean the existence of separate women's organizations. The struggle for women's liberation is part of the struggle against imperialism, and one which must have proletarian leadership. We understand that the structure of the US imperialist involvement in the world demands that proletarian internationalism be developed within the US working class. Specifically, this means that the US working class must be brought to a position of support for the applied internationalism of wars of national liberation against US imperialism. Following from a class analysis which recognizes more than two classes in US society and which perceives that, as a class, it is mainly the ruling bourgeoisie which profits from imperialism, we understand that classes other than the proletariat must be brought into a united front under proletarian leadership against US imperialism. Finally, we understand that the US is at present in a pre-revolutionary stage. We find the best expression of our politics in the RYM and RYM II documents, which we support.

The debate between RYM II and the Weatherman has at its base some of the most crucial problems facing the movement. We should not, however, allow this struggle to blind us to other important political questions being tested through struggle both within SDS and in other sectors of the movement. Neither should we let the intensity of this struggle become the basis for cynicism toward political struggle and blind us to its importance in the growth of the movement.

"We advocate an active ideological struggle, because it is the weapon for achieving solidarity within the Party

and the revolutionary organizations and making them fit to fight. Every Communist and revolutionary should take up this weapon." (Mao Tse-tung, *Combat Liberalism*, 1937)

The context for ideological struggle must be understood. Our movement needs to develop in practice a way of handling inter-movement differences. We at REP believe an excellent formulation for the proper context of such struggle has been put forward in the "unity-criticism-unity" model. We believe it is necessary to strive for a new unity on a new basis. This is not easy, but it must be a guiding principle:

"In 1942 we worked out the formula 'unity-criticism-unity' to describe this democratic method of resolving contradictions among the people. To elaborate, this means to start off with a desire for unity and resolve contradictions through criticism or struggle so as to achieve a new unity on a new basis. Our experience shows that this is a proper method of resolving contradictions among the people. In 1942 we used this method to resolve contradictions inside the Communist Party, namely contradictions between the doctrinaires and the rank-and-file membership, between doctrinairism and Marxism. At one time in waging inner-Party struggle, the 'left' doctrinaires used the method of 'ruthless struggle and merciless blows'. This method was wrong. In place of it, in criticizing 'left' doctrinairism, we used a new one: to start from a desire for unity, and thrash out questions of right and wrong through criticism or argument, and so achieve a new unity on a new basis. This was the method used in the 'rectification campaign' of 1942. A few years later in 1945 when the Chinese Communist Party held its Seventh National Congress, unity was thus achieved throughout the Party and the great victory of the people's revolution

was assured. The essential thing is to start with a desire for unity. Without this subjective desire for unity, once the struggle starts it is liable to get out of hand. Wouldn't this then be the same as 'ruthless struggle and merciless blows'? Would there be any Party unity left to speak of? It was this experience that led us to the formula: 'unity-criticism-unity'."

Practice within SDS—particularly Weatherman practice—often errs by mistaking "contradictions among the people" for "contradictions with the enemy". Errors have also been made by depending upon coercion or force in the mistaken belief that this is proper struggle. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China represented one of the most intense struggles (on several levels) anywhere in the history of the socialist movement. We should bear in mind their view on how the struggle should take place:

"Correctly Handle Contradictions Among the People"

"A strict distinction must be made between the two different types of contradictions: those among the people and those between ourselves and the enemy. Contradictions among the people must not be made into contradictions between ourselves and the enemy; nor must contradictions between ourselves and the enemy be regarded as contradictions among the people.

"It is normal for the masses to hold different views. Contention between different views is unavoidable, necessary, and beneficial. In the course of normal and full debate, the masses will affirm what is right, correct what is wrong, and gradually reach unanimity.

"The method to be used in debates is to present the facts, reason things out, and persuade through reasoning.

Any method of forcing a minority holding different views to submit is impermissible. The minority should be protected, because sometimes the truth is with the minority. Even if the minority is wrong, they should still be allowed to argue their case and reserve their views.

"When there is a debate, it should be conducted by reasoning, not by coercion or force.

"In the course of debate, every revolutionary should be good at thinking things out for himself and should develop the communist spirit of daring to think, daring to speak, and daring to act. On the premise that they have the same general orientation, revolutionary comrades should, for the sake of strengthening unity, avoid endless debate over side issues."

(Point 6, Decision of the Central Committee, CPC, Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, 8 August 1966)

Ideological struggle within SDS during the past year has often erred in regard to such principles. Debate at the June Convention and the previous National Council meetings often did not "present the facts, reason things out, and persuade through reasoning". Often it did. However, the trend of the past year has been toward the form of "ruthless struggle and merciless blows". PL's adoption of these practices made it impossible (among other reasons) to work with them in the same organization. Weatherman's similar errors present similar problems. From the perspective of the REP collective, RYM II's errors in this direction are necessary topics for self-criticism.

The Chinese people, in conducting their Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, were hardly anti-struggle. They adopted the policy of "unity-criticism-unity" for handling contradictions among the people, and "criticism - struggle - transformation" for dealing with class enemies. We at REP do not believe the struggle within the movement is a struggle with class enemies (although bourgeois views and practices are reflected in certain positions). We do not believe it appropriate to use the methods of "ruthless struggle and merciless blows" (to "kick ass" in Weatherman parlance) in dealing with such differences. We will "kick ass" when dealing with class enemies. We will struggle to achieve a new unity on a new basis when dealing with differences (and they are deep) within the movement.

DRAW CONCLUSIONS ON THE WALL