

## Report on Southeastern SDS Conference October 18-19, 1969

By Doug Jenness

On October 18-19 a Southeastern SDS conference was held at Florida State University in Tallahassee. Dennis E. and myself attended as observers for the Trotskyist movement.

The conference was apparently initiated by the Worker-Student Alliance people in Tallahassee in collaboration with the Boston SDS national office. In the letter of invitation there is no mention of WSA or the Boston national office. Mamie Carter who signed the letter is now a Spartacist.

Of the 50 people in attendance at the conference there were 6 Spartacists, 5 or 6 members of the Progressive Labor Party, 5 or 6 WSA people who did not appear to be in PL, and 1 RYM-II person. The other 30 or so people were not affiliated with any faction, although most of them considered themselves members of SDS.

The Spartacists in attendance included: Dave Cunningham from their national office in New York, Leon Day and another person from New Orleans, a girl from Austin, and 2 people from Tallahassee (one of whom had recently been sent there). The Progressive Labor Party people included: John Pennington, national chairman of the Boston SDS, and Ed Clark and 2 or 3 others from New Orleans. There were strong WSA people from Tallahassee, Austin, and New Orleans. The RYM-II person is not a hard line RYMer and is quite friendly to us. He is from St. Petersburg.

In addition to these organized groups there were 4 independent people from Jacksonville, Fla., 1 from Nashville, Tenn., 1 from Jackson, Miss., 1 from St. Petersburg, Fla., and 2 or 3 from New Orleans. All the rest of the people present were from the FSU SDS chapter in Tallahassee.

The major issue at the conference was whether SDS chapters in the South should be urged to align themselves with the Boston SDS office. On Saturday two resolutions were passed which supported alignment with Boston. One was presented by Ed Clark, the main PL person in the South, and was amended to exclude sections calling RYM-II "police agents" and to blunt the criticisms of the Black Panther Party. The other was passed by a vote of 38 to 9. Both the Spartacists and PL supported alignment with Boston.

During the course of the discussion on these motions, the Austin Spartacists presented an "Open Letter to the Austin WSA Caucus" which stimulated considerable factional wrangling and name-calling between the Spartacists and the PL-WSA people. The Spartacists demanded a united front with the WSA caucus in Austin. "Now comrades," the open letter states, "how about some class solidarity? Together in a principled united front, we can intervene in the radical milieu of the University of Texas and organize the masses around revolutionary working class politics. As a vehicle for the struggle, we must build a Boston-affiliated SDS. This can be accomplished by polarization of the present 'SDS': the working class tendencies

will join us, and our class enemies will not." The major argument given in defense of this view was that the policy of neutrality on the part of the Austin SDS had facilitated recruitment to the YSA rather than to the Spartacists or WSA.

The PLers at the conference rejected a "united front" with the Spartacists. On the question of alignment with Boston the PLers favored a general resolution endorsing alignment, but explained that situations in individual chapters may not make it possible to do so without losing support from a lot of new SDSers. PL was very careful to explain that it wants to build SDS as a non-exclusion organization along the lines it was before the June split.

On Sunday, many of the independent people took the floor and expressed strong dissatisfaction with the factionalism of both PL and the Spartacists and accused them of attempting to take over the SDS NO for their own purposes. A motion which had in advance received the endorsement of over a dozen people was introduced by Joe Egan of the FSU SDS, a relatively unsophisticated but sincere independent, which stated, "The Southeastern Regional Conference of SDS chapters supports a policy of non-alignment with either Chicago or Boston." Both PL and the Spartacists strongly argued against this motion, but when the vote was taken, the motion carried 30-16. It was clear that the majority of people at the conference had changed their mind from the previous day--primarily as a result of the factionalism. At the party on Saturday night, Dennis and I talked to a number of people who were dissatisfied with the conference and hadn't expected it to be simply a factional fight.

Despite the severe factionalism at the conference, there was no chanting, take-overs of the platform, or physical attacks. Dennis and I had amicable conversations with a number of people at the conference including the PLers and Spartacists, and there was absolutely no attempt or even suggestion of barring us from the gathering.

We sold \$6.10 of literature, 1 Militant - YS sub, and obtained a number of names of contacts.