

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

BWB-5
West Germany's SDS--
Utopian Democrats (II)

Im Rosental 96
53 Bonn
West Germany
12 November 1968

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The piquant interlude of tomato tossing at the September delegates' conference of West Germany's radical Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Students) led into stimulating, but non-conclusive, discussion of the proposed campaigns for 1967/68, and a critical examination of the SDS organization.

Within the coming months the SDS plans to intensify its campaign against the Army of the Federal Republic, partially on ideological grounds (because the military is the most obvious control mechanism of the ruling class) and partially in self-defense. The students are especially wary since the passage of West Germany's emergency laws, which enable the state to call out Army troops to put down civil, or student, disorders. "The Army can now be used as an instrument in civil war," retiring president K. D. Wolff reminded the delegates in Frankfurt. "We've seen it happen in France, and the same thing can happen here. We must develop a radical democratic, anti-imperialistic socialist opinion, but we can't turn this campaign on and off like the Springer campaign (against German press lord Axel Springer). We need long-term plans, we need to work within the Army, and without, among the potential draftees."

Some SDS chapters' attempts at politicizing the German soldier have been frustrated by stiff sentences, Wolff reported, such as three or four weeks behind bars for passing out pamphlets against the emergency laws. He cautioned against dividing anti-Army strength as groups in the American anti-war campaign have done. "We must try to prevent a split between the groups who encourage deserters and those who want to work within the Army against the Army."

In West Berlin, where West German soldiers are allowed only as visitors because of the city's special status under the Four-Power Agreement, SDS-ers plan to institute a test case to determine whether a West German soldier who deserts to West Berlin can be extradited to face charges in the Federal Republic.

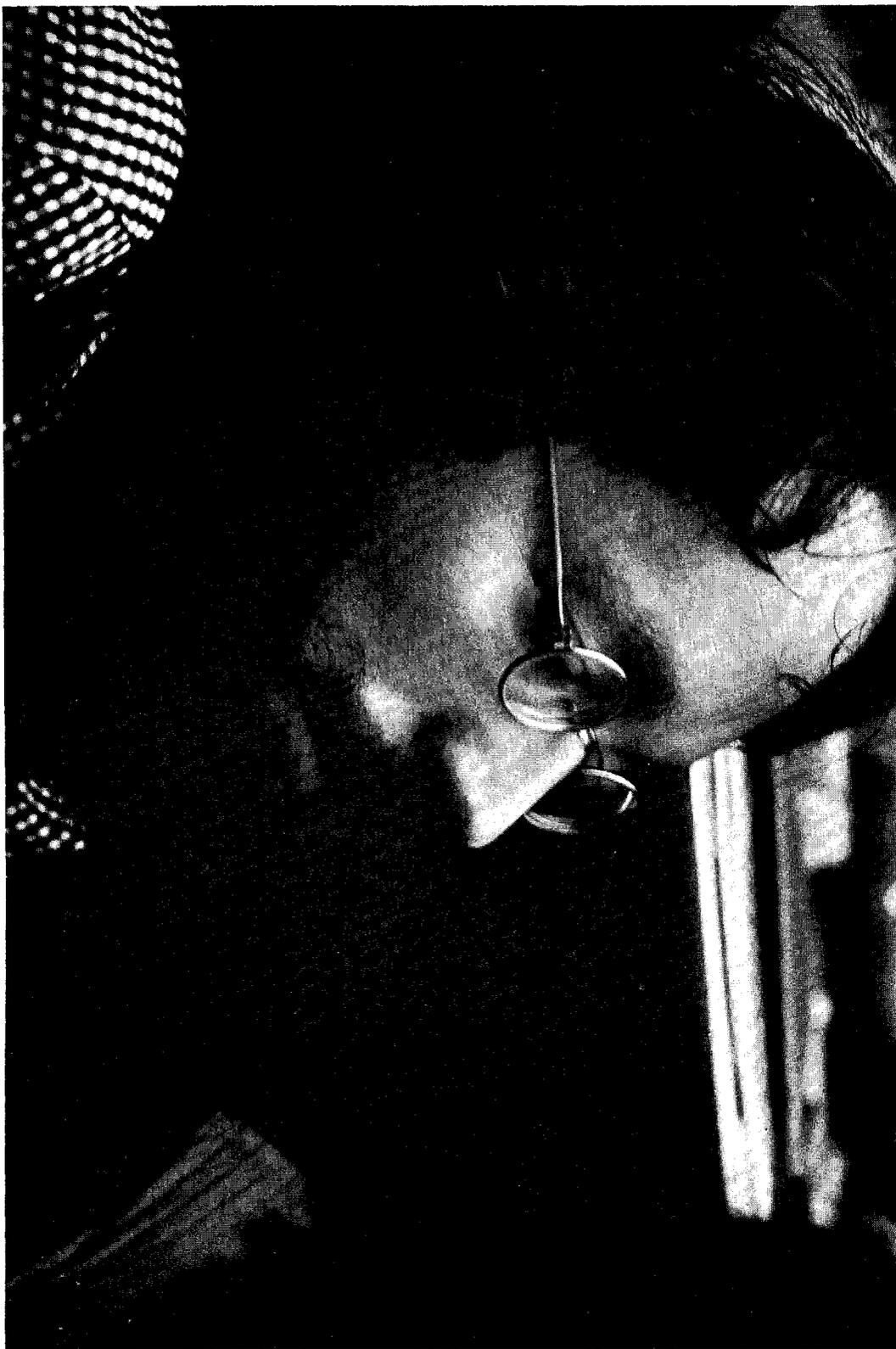
"We need to create storms within the Federal Army to lessen the danger for us," Berlin SDS-ler Peter Gäng explained to me later in the seven-room communal apartment he shares with six other SDS members. "We want to build a small left faction within the Army. We can expect the Army to be set upon us when our political movement comes to radical action. So we have to have enough people who will spontaneously and immediately desert, but who will, until that moment, work politically against the Army while in uniform."

If the Bundeswehr campaign could be called the SDS version of preventive medicine, the justice campaign is emergency surgery to purge the wounds of the Easter riots. With almost 2,000 cases now in the courts or pending against SDS members and their fellow students as a result of the riots following the attempted assassination of Rudi Dutschke, the SDS considers its justice campaign an attempt to confront their fellow citizens with the injustice of West Germany's legal processes, and to save themselves from extended jail sentences. At the September conference, former SDS-ler Fritz Teufel, founder of Berlin's much-publicized Kommune I, and a "yippie" or revolutionary of the absurd in American terminology, delivered a few tips to the comrades on how to undermine the dignity of the court, frustrate the judges' authority, and, hopefully, shorten the sentence.

"The first instance is the street, the second is the courtroom," explained bearded, granny-bespectacled Teufel. "The street must be brought into the courtroom." The accused should not be impressed by the "sacred atmosphere of the courtroom," but should assume an offensive position, not answering questions but posing them himself--about Vietnam, about the judges' Nazi past. "Not everyone has to defecate in the courtroom (as a Berlin commune member did recently)...the girls could kiss the judge and tell him how sexy he is. We need aggressive political arguments. It's natural to argue defensively, natural to have fear, but the accused must try to burst through the secrecy of the legal processes, and make the trial public. Make something happen so the press will come...if Der Spiegel is there, the judge will be more careful."

Gäng addressed the question of courtroom justice more soberly. "We can't expect to be protected from the penalties for our actions by the current laws," he cautioned. He proposes that the court be made a tribunal not for political, but for anti-authoritarian confrontations, with students storming the courtroom not only for their own cases, but for those of petty thieves or juvenile delinquents. Such actions, he said, would demonstrate that socialist sympathy is with the accused and help to clarify that it is not the individual's own crime but society's crime against the individual which brings criminality in its wake.

In Germany's larger cities, such as Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt and Berlin, the SDS sees the justice campaign as an opportunity to "develop the political consciousness of the Rockers," and through them, the young workers. "We'll use our old methods," Wolfgang Lefevre told me recently in Berlin, "organizing demonstrations that will be discussed by the public



Fritz Teufel, former SDS-ler and a German 'Yippie'
(Calle Hesslefors photo)

and in the newspapers. None of the young workers believes everything he reads in the newspapers, and he'll begin to ask questions. We expect to find more resonance now with young workers. The right starting points are there already--the youth who take on a job no longer accept the adult generation unquestioningly, and from their own working rules and conditions they can be shown the social situation. But most important is our demonstration of solidarity with the young workers."

Leftist solidarity with the Rockers was first put to the street test last week in West Berlin, and the result may have been disastrous for both groups. In a demonstration early Monday morning (at 8 a.m., when Germany's New Left is normally still sleeping), some thousand Rockers and students battled 400 police with paving stones, injuring 130 policemen and dozens of innocent passersby in the bloodiest riot in post-war Germany.

Protesting the proposed disbaring of leftist lawyer Horst Mahler (who is the chief SDS defense lawyer), the demonstration planners, a Berlin student told me, did not foresee the use of Gewalt gegen Personen (violence against persons). Until last week the New Left had generally acknowledged the futility of this tactic, and demonstration strategy had involved only Gewalt gegen Sachen (violence against things). The flaw in the arguments, which the students themselves recognize, is that a paving stone thrown against a water cannon can easily strike and injure a person. In the wave of criticism following last week's action, Cologne University sociologist Dr. Erwin Scheuch advances the theory that leftist students, protesting against a society that condones within its culture an ever broadening spectrum of shock events, such as urinating on the stage, brutality in films, pornography in literature, turn to violence as a last attempt to get public attention. But Dr. Scheuch also suggests that leftist intellectuals such as Peter Weiss and Hans Magnus Enzensberger have only jumped on the student bandwagon because students are "selling" now--his thesis of revolution as an "applied art;" it seems to me, demeans the sincerity and genuine humane optimism of the leftist students I know.

The students themselves are not sure who threw the first stone last week, or why, but West Berlin's Rockers, newly "politicized" within the past six months by an SDS cell, and militant elements of the New Left were jubilant about their Paris-style demonstration. In a victory celebration at Berlin's Technical University that evening, the students called that morning's violence the first evidence of "action unity" with Berlin's working class. Tilman Fichte, a militant radical who was virtually the only prominent SDS-ler either publicly condoning or participating in the violent action, told the cheering crowd that "we should throw a stone for every page in Marx' Das Kapital, and read a page for every stone we throw." (Two days later, when another student repeated Fichte's appeal and described it as "an excellent combination of theory and practice," a German journalist quipped: "Back to the Stone Age of Marx.")

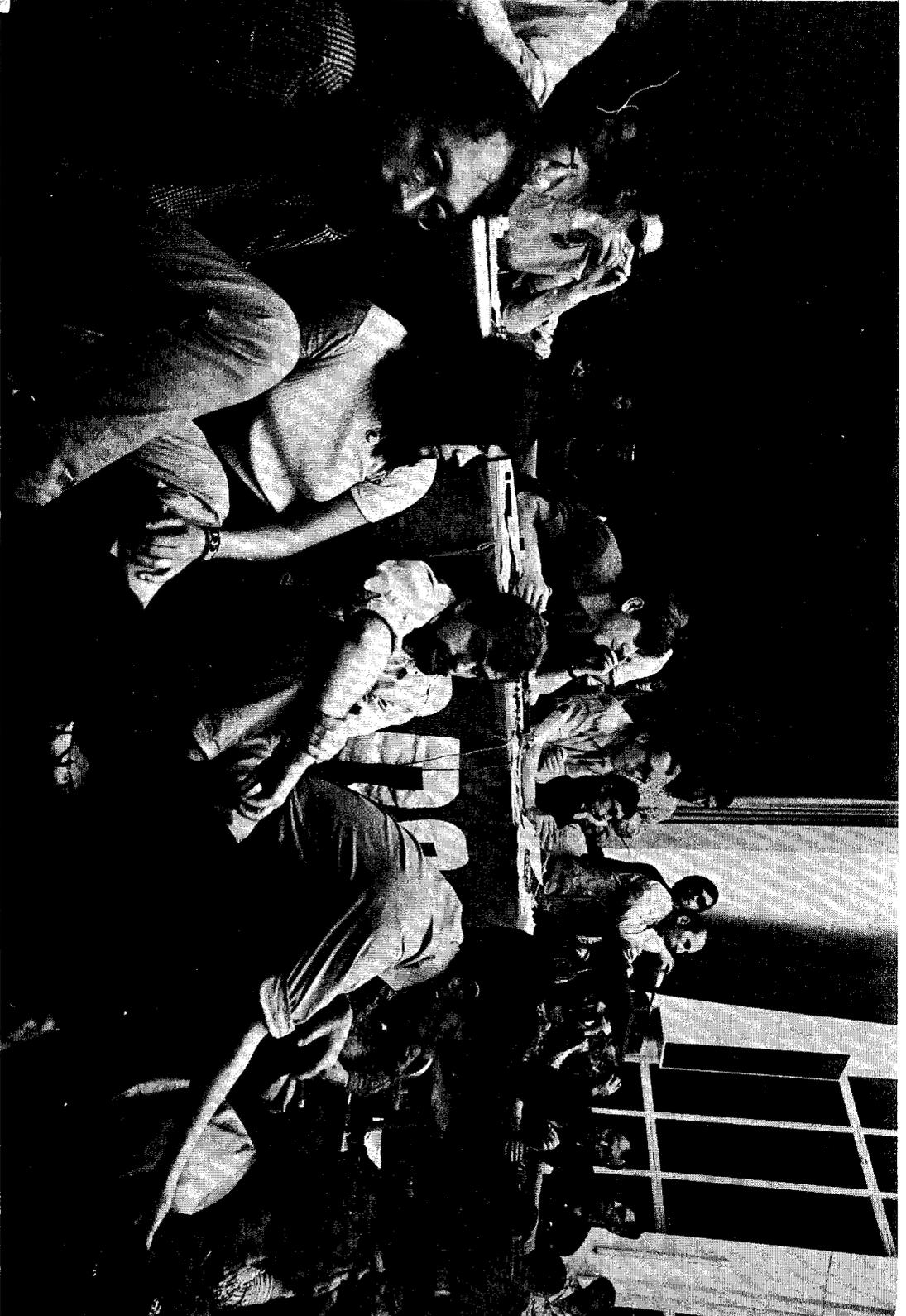
After last week's riot, the question of violence for tactical purposes (does it solidify the leftists? or does it strengthen opposition in the establishment?) will surely figure in the discussion at the

reconvened SDS delegates' conference from 16 to 20 November. SDS theoreticians are seeking more effective methods of political confrontations. "Both the justice and Bundeswehr campaigns," said Gäng, "were pushed on us by our enemies." But the massive court actions already pending have convinced some SDS leaders, Gäng among them, that "we must change our actions so that the individuals won't be prosecuted. Instead of throwing rocks against the Springer House in Berlin, for example, it would have been better to sabotage the printing presses. The rocks only hurt us, the broken windows didn't hurt Springer."

Theologian Helmut Gollwitzer, a Free University professor who has supported most New Left actions, warned FU students after last week's violence that "whoever wants to destroy this movement from the outside and split it from the inside should continue to take part in such actions as Monday's. They are an infallible method for winning no mass support and losing the support already won among the student population."

Whichever course the SDS chooses to pursue this year, a retreat to non-violence or increased militance, its position of leadership among the New Left may be determined by whether the radical students can steer their own cultural revolution into productive channels. The organization problems are evident--"After the Easter campaigns, when the people were there, we didn't know what to do with them," admitted Gäng in a Marxist-style self-criticism at the September conference. "We didn't take over with an educational strategy, so the various SDS groups went their own way and now there's a plea for restructure. There are organizational elements to develop from every rebellion. In the SDS our organization should anticipate the utopian society. We need to make the groups anti-authoritarian, egalitarian, but extremely disciplined. We must get rid of the tension between the anti-authoritarians and the political achievement. We must replace the present formalism of leaders with an informal formalism."

"Anti-authoritarianism" and "extreme discipline" would seem to be a contradiction in terms, but Gäng suggests the new SDS organization should be revamped on a "syndicalist" basis. His Berlin comrade Wolfgang Lefevre favors changing the national executive committee into a secretariat. "The SDS is too anti-authoritarian now to accept a strong national executive committee which would dictate the proposed actions for various SDS chapters," said Lefevre. He recommends an organization that is a mixture of centralized and de-centralized power. For each ad hoc campaign on a national level, a committee of advisers could be set up and later dissolved; for continuing SDS campaigns, such as university reform, the SDS chapter which is most successful in coordinating its own university reform program could advise other national chapters. "Under the present executive committee, one or two persons were appointed to handle all the work in university reform," complained Lefevre. "They were overwhelmed with projects, so they handled one or two cases, and let the others lay."

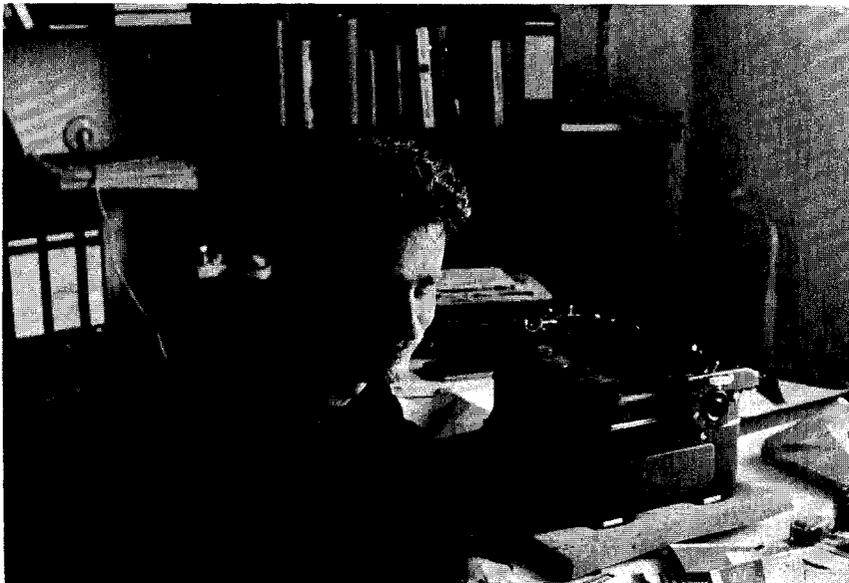


Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund in conference: former SDS-ler
Fritz Teufel at left

(Calle Hesslefors photo)

If the SDS can accomplish the near miracle of implementing socialist goals through non-manipulated individual actions, they will be one step closer to their utopian society. The broader ideology expounded by the SDS, however, cannot be compared to any socialist society now extant. "We don't accept any nation as a model," said Gäng, "not the Soviet Union, or Czechoslovakia, or Yugoslavia, or Cuba or China--but there are elements of our program in them all which have not been adequately expanded. We're for a communist society and a democracy of soviets which combines the demands of communism and a minimum organ of bureaucracy. Small soviets (which can be compared to the American town meeting idea) will perform the executive function for factories and universities. We call these executive groups 'soviets' because that word signifies that those elected to the soviet have an imperative mandate, as in the Paris Commune, to do what they have promised. If they are not serving to the satisfaction of their electorate, they can be deposed. The soviets will not just be on a state-bureaucratic level, but will be self-governing organs for men and women at their places of work. Private ownership will be out, the soviets will plan the production."

"Those are the minimal economic conditions," Gäng explained, "which will make possible men who reflect and think. People talk glibly now about educating a thinking society, but reflective men are not useful in a capitalistic society, on the assembly line. In a society where not the man but the product is important, a machine can be twice as expensive as a man and the man will no longer be considered. But automation in a rational and judicious society that is operated and directed by thinking men can be used to relieve man of work."



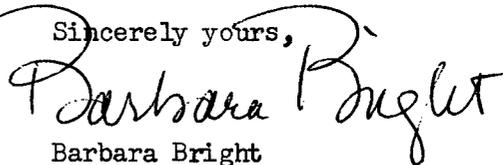
Peter Gäng, Free University philosophy student,
SDS ideologue

Gäng disputes those SDS critics who say the leftists are romantics revolting against modern technology and modern efficiency. He insists their society will humanize the technological revolution. "Our goal is a society where man has the opportunity to be happy, but we're Marxist enough to know that man must have the possibility to direct his own development."

Utopian, yes...and critics of the SDS insist the fault within the West German New Left movement lies with their lack of a political program for achieving their goals. SDS-ers retort that, in Gäng's words, "we don't want to rule. We want the people to govern themselves, to work out their own program, and in order to prepare the way we must destroy the ruling Establishment."

I believe the leftist students' ends are worthy, but I've a nagging fear that militant-radical means could distort the final goals, come the Revolution.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Bright". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Barbara Bright

Received in New York November 19, 1968.