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University Crisis--Epilogue

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53 Bonn
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Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The events of last week and the increasingly reactionary attitude of the West German government toward the turmoil in its universities disturbed me so much that I had to put some comment about the current situation on paper first. But a report on the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund's second attempt at a national delegates' conference is overdue, and a look at the shifting emphasis there will add some background to the present conflict between the activist minority of students and the university and government authorities.

The SDS DK (delegates' conference) gathered in mid-November in the cafeteria of the Hanover Technical University. The conference began in the afternoon on a Saturday and discussion centered for the first evening and night on the "Monday demonstration" in Berlin a fortnight before in which students and "rockers" had, for the first time, themselves initiated violence by throwing paving stones at the police. I arrived on Sunday, and it was clear at first glance that the bourgeois press, television and radio commentators were there in full force, ready to chronicle what many hoped would be the death agonies of the SDS.

The first two days of erratic, aimless talking illustrated clearly that the anti-authoritarian faction was in charge. Some groups--particularly a student commune from Marburg who had decked themselves out in pink shirts, flowered pants and crimson ties of heavy wool--seemed totally oblivious of the discussion and made no attempt to participate; the Marburg commune spent most of the time dandling their children on their knees.

But other anti-authoritarians from SDS chapters in Bochum, Hamburg, Giessen, Kiel, Bremen, Mainz, Mannheim and Freiburg cheered on the attempts of Heidelberg SDS-ler Joscha Schmierer to steer the re-organization discussion toward stronger regional decisions, less centralized power in the national executive committee. Schmierer, the most vocal member of the temporary executive committee named in Frankfurt two months earlier, was a favorite subject for press photographers. Indeed he looked quite dashing in an apricot knitted scarf, about two yards long and slung around his neck, and a green snap-brim hat, which he wore in George Raft style, tilted forward over his eyes so far that he had to strain his neck backward in order to see the audience. (A note in passing: the Sueddeutsche Zeitung noted only half in jest some months ago that the foot soldiers of the Revolution tend more toward eccentric clothing,

while the "authorities," who can command respect through their theoretical expertise, wear ordinary casual clothes--levis and sweaters, or trousers and shirts open at the neck. The observation seemed justified at Hanover.)

But SDS "authorities" seemed deliberately to stay in the background at the Hanover meeting. Perhaps it was wise--whenever a comrade from Berlin or Frankfurt made a contribution he was cruelly ragged and ridiculed by the anti-authoritarian crowd. Bernd Rabehl of Berlin was there on Saturday but left early on Sunday; Peter Gäng didn't come at all (but his girlfriend was there). But Wolfgang LeFevre of Berlin and Hans Jürgen Krahl of Frankfurt were present to subtly focus the discussion and lead the talk out of blind alleys when the going got rough.

In Frankfurt for the first DK, the outgoing SDS executive committee had prepared a list of topics for discussion and allotted time on a proposed program. In Hanover there was little overt attempt to organize the talk, but the students seemed to direct themselves subconsciously through the discussion on violence, to reports from Monday afternoon work-groups (on the justice campaign, factory groups, university politics, international and third world campaigns), to the crucial election of a national executive committee.

Some five to six hundred SDS-ers took part in the first two days of the conference, but by Monday evening, when delegates voted by a show of hands for national executive committee members, the crowd had dwindled to an estimated three hundred. Although scheduled until Wednesday, the conference broke up after the Monday election, and only some twenty SDS loyalists, a few press stalwarts and the newly-elected executive "collective" were on hand for the final meeting Tuesday.

Back to the discussion--Berlin SDS-ler Christian Semler, one of the few militants who had organized the Berlin "Monday demonstration," tried to explain the virtues of violence to a generally unconvinced audience of small-town SDS-ers, who expressed a fear that their local programs would suffer through a backlash against such militant actions. Semler argued that the militance was not to be seen in throwing rocks, but in the "spontaneous en masse" regrouping of the demonstrators against the police attacks. "We must assume that violence will be used against us," said Semler, "and this (the Monday demonstration) shows that we can develop a variety of demonstration forms in retaliation. We can pass over the theory of individual terror, but as a general strategy we must make clear the anonymous terror of the system of justice."

"Did you have difficulties in legitimatizing the violence after the Monday demonstration?" asked Frankfurt SDS-ler Krahl. "No, that wasn't the problem," said Semler. "But we made a mistake in explaining what happened--in the press reports it looked as if the militance was planned, as if rock-throwing was what we were striving for." The violence on the part of students and "rockers," he emphasized, was not programmed but spontaneous.

"We're letting ourselves drift into discussing violence only as a

method," warned Reinhard Wolff, another Berlin SDS-ler and the older brother of former national committee members K. D. and Frank Wolff. "We must discuss it as a consequent theory of opposition, in a political discussion, not as a moral identification. We must discuss how to tie stone-throwing together with politics. If we fail to show the middle-class press the relationship between rock-throwing and the repressions in the system of justice and the ruling society, we can't make any progress."

Shortly after Wolff's comments I left the main meeting room to seek out a covey of about thirty female SDS-lers who had retired to a basement room to plan a new onslaught in their emancipation campaign. The discussion was already underway, and I sat down behind some other late arrivals on the steps to listen to their complaints. "We were naive enough to think the tomatoes that were thrown at the last delegates' conference would lead to a discussion on emancipation," said one attractive, Garbo-hatted feminist. "But we see now that we're not in a position to discuss politics with them on their level. We don't have enough self-confidence, so we must build up our arguments and our self-assurance among ourselves first. We want to make politics, not political happenings."

At this point a blonde SDS-ler whom I had met briefly at Peter Gäng's apartment in Berlin spotted me and asked if I were "Press." I tried to explain that I wasn't covering the conference for Newsweek alone, and offered my promise not to report publicly about their discussion. But in these circles, anyone of the press can be anathema, and she told me in no uncertain terms to get out. "This is a closed meeting, and no outsiders are allowed," she said obstinately.

Suitably rebuffed, I went back upstairs and talked to the Dutch student leader I'd met in Sofia and at the Frankfurt DK, Martin Abeln, asking him how he thought this conference was progressing. "It seems as if they're not accomplishing anything, just talking in circles," I said disappointedly. "No," he replied, "the re-organization will come. The organization problem and the campaign problems are going along at the same rate."

"What do you think of the discussion on violence?" I asked. His answer was quiet and considered. "Violence is not the only means, but it should be considered as one of several. You have to remember that the lower class workers understand only violence--it's a way of communication to them."

About an hour after I'd been kicked out, the female SDS-lers rejoined their male comrades and passed out a mimeographed flyer. It amounted to another happening, but this time it touched off some discussion on emancipation. Titled "Accountant's Report of the Female Council of the Frankfurt Group," the flyer showed six male sex organs--numbered and mounted on plaques like trophies of the hunt, above an emaciated and exhausted naked female, with corresponding numbered names of prominent SDS leaders at the bottom of the page.

On the back of the flyer, in bawdy but explicit language, the girls "spit out" their anger at the male repression: "We won't open our mouths!"

When we do, nothing comes out! When we leave them open, they are crammed full of ... socialistic children, love, socialistic jetsam, bombast, socialistic promiscuity, socialistic intellectual pathos, sexual-rational arguments...When we're sick of it and bitch, then come: socialistic shoulder-pats, fatherly officiousness; then we're taken seriously, then we are wonderful, astonishing, we are praised, then we can sit at the table, then we are identical; then we type, pass out flyers, paint wall posters, lick stamps: we're used as a theoretical playground! We'll spit it out publicly: are we penis-envious, frustrated, hysterical, inhibited, asexual, lesbian, frigid...women are different! Free the socialistic eminence from their middle-class tails!"

With the conference still chuckling about the flyer, a female SDS-ler stepped to the microphone for another declaration of independence, and of silence: "You have missed the chance to hear the phenomenological criticism on your sex and your repressive communications structure that we had to offer. We are not willing, nor are we able, to break out of an attitude in which emancipation and the related political problems can only be grasped in the categories of consumption and sensation...We understand our attitude toward you not as a retreat, but when you in part hysterically demand that we must legitimize our work, so we answer: Since when must the oppressed legitimize themselves against their oppressors..."

The male SDS-lers, she accused, "cement" the ruling society in the SDS, perpetuating society's strictures on woman's participation in political discussions. "Originally, the flyer was to serve as an ironic entrance to a discussion about the genuine experiences of oppression," she continued. "It was intended as a self-irony about the genuine collective experiences, but we see little possibility that you will grasp it, for you coddle us and our products only to consume...We won't group ourselves here under the 'problem of the small groups,' because we suspect that just these small groups will finally participate in the power structure which we attack. We also observed yesterday how the heirs of the SDS reacted to these groups, as if it were a struggle for power in the SDS. We declare that we are neither a small minority under many anti-authoritarian grumblers, nor do we demand equal rights in the sense of the cemented clique economy, but that our solidarity alone presents a practice which will not allow itself to be classified in the current canon of fighting factions."

Pledging a strategic retreat to their own sex, the women said their battle cry "should motivate you to develop ideas on how you can work toward your own emancipation." When the discussion did turn toward emancipation, the girls, true to their new credo, refused to participate.

"They're building a boo-man," scoffed Semler. "Do they consider themselves workers? The working woman is not oppressed in the home but in the factory. This thesis of double oppression is only verbal--the problem is that the women must articulate their own needs. This endless self-mirroring of the petty bourgeois woman," he said disgustedly..."An emancipation is only sensible in the total revolutionary process."

"The abolition of marriage and the establishment of communes has not been discussed," added another SDS-ler. "The whole sexual organization must be destroyed." But without a feminine counter-attack, the discussion soon broke up for the night, and the sociological-existential problems were left for treatment "at home" in the local groups.

Although the emancipation campaign has been a topic for ridicule in the press, the female rebellion is a serious matter in at least the Berlin and Frankfurt SDS groups, as SDS-ler Helmut Schauer told me later. "If they can't overcome their shyness, their feeling that they're being used, their retreat could dangerously dilute the SDS. It isn't easy, but most of us realize that the problem exists." The sexual relationships in the SDS seem to be heterosexual, I commented. "Is it possible that the girls' formation of their own group will lead to homosexuality?" "I don't think homosexuality is prevalent now," replied Schauer, "but if the girls cannot make a political contribution in the community work, it is possible that the men will shut them out--and this could lead to homosexuality on both sides."

I have not read or heard of similar emancipation movements among the New Left in the United States. Is this a German phenomenon? Is the American woman accepted on her own merits as a political animal?

Insecurity and suspiciousness on the part of some women SDS-lers resulted in my expulsion from another meeting the following day. The workshop sessions met at noon, and I sat in for about an hour on the justice campaign discussion. SDS-lers from nine cities and towns were on hand, and each group gave a report on how its local campaign was going, how many trials were on the court dockets, hints for changing defense into offense.

The Berlin group, suggested Free University student Eberhard Schultz, finds it useful "to use political arguments in the courtroom, to go into the political background of why the process is being held." To show the accused that he has support from the courtroom audience, "we have shifts--as soon as some are kicked out of the courtroom for disorderly conduct (note: this usually includes questioning the judge about his Nazi background), another group comes in."

A Tübingen SDS-ler noted that a successful tactic in their experience had been to have their defense witnesses "come in jeans...but they had a Doctor title. This makes a great impression on the judges." Despite the organization of a Rechtshilfe (which raises money for student court costs and lawyer fees), the costs of student trials in Tübingen are phenomenal, up to \$10 thousand for the first trial, he reported. To raise money for the Rechtshilfe, the Tübingen group plans an all-star evening of jazz music, protest songs and an address by Ernst Bloch, respected Marxist philosopher who is a Tübingen professor, "with a ball for the legally persecuted afterwards."

"We also plan a sexuality campaign," added the Tübingen student with a grin, "advising the wives of judges not to sleep with their husbands." (I've

often heard complaints that the German leftists are too theoretical and have no sense of humor--but if this plan isn't fantastical and funny, my funny bone is out of line. Unfortunately, I don't know if the plan has become reality.)

A Hanover delegate complained that the political police appeared at every student's trial, "but the young lawyers are there too. And that's probably one of the best achievements in the campaign." Political police, broke in the experienced Berliner, "are part of our daily life since a year ago. We're used to being photographed. But we can show definite phases in the justice system's changing attitude toward us...at first we had individual trials, then we went through the group trial phase, and now they're doing it individually again."

The justice work group in Berlin "wants to unmask the legal functionary who hides his individuality behind his robes...we gather information on the background of the judges now."

At this point a trim blonde Berlin girl warned the student he shouldn't speak so freely with press in the room. "Why not?" asked Schultz, "since most of the information they know anyway. But if it makes you uneasy..." The women decided the press must go...and that meant me too. Evidently the old CIA charge was whispered about again, because during the plenary session that evening two perfect strangers, a boy and a girl, looked up at me on the balcony with hate in their eyes. With nothing to be ashamed of, I stared them down...but it was an unsettling experience, nonetheless.

During my exile I talked with a Freiburg SDS-ler, Stephan Becker, who explained to me the four major goals of the SDS program for the current year. These he listed as 1) justice campaign, 2) university politics, 3) the third world, and 4) international cooperation.

"The justice campaign is an outgrowth of the Easter riots and the campaign against the emergency laws, but it also means an expansion of the university politics into the total society. In the university program, the goal is to transform and reorganize the university so that science, which is in current society both a productive strength and a historical factor, becomes a functional dysfunctionality."

The label, as Becker told me, stems from American sociologists Robert Merton and Talcott Parsons. Another German sociologist explained this seeming contradiction in these terms: "We must place the contemporary processes of highly capitalistic ruling society (which are functional in this capacity) in the service of social-political objective aims, which finally imply a dissolution of the established order of society...in other words, a university, science and society which is designed not to preserve and protect the society but to change it."

"This means a long-term strategy in which the content and the forms of teaching are examined and adjusted for their social relevance," continued Becker. "In research, just as in teaching, we want to reach a long-term

process of democratization, so that the action analogue for schools and universities reflects the functional curriculum."

The SDS is against the autonomy of the schools being regimented by the state cultural ministers, he continued, and he added that the leftist base of the SDS is growing on university campuses. "Students new to the university are already farther along in the socialization process." And the SDS, like the American Students for a Democratic Society, plans to push the "socialization" back further still, by placing new emphasis on high school students.

In the last plenary session on Monday night, discussion centered on whether to accept the Heidelberg or Tübingen groups' offer to take over the national leadership responsibilities, or to elect individual SDS-ers to a "collective" national committee. After arguments for and against, the consensus agreed to turn over "seminar" responsibilities on the main campaign points to separate universities (university reform, Heidelberg; international, Berlin and Marburg; justice, Tübingen and Berlin) and to elect a five-member "collective" for national coordination.

The collective, the SDS-ers themselves admit, is not the final solution to the organization problems. But Frankfurt SDS-er Krahl, overriding the derisive heckling from the anti-authoritarians, persuasively argued for keeping this remnant of the hated "social democratic" system: "The temporary committee named at the Frankfurt conference was given as a death notice for the SDS. But some haven't recognized that a socialist organization must and can change itself...we've isolated ourselves into groups, but the strong central organization is still necessary for campaigns like justice and the emergency laws. The strength of the SDS basis groups, which are spread out on the university and into the community, are a sign of the new organization realities. The radicalizing of the university revolt is not led by SDS alone now."

At the Tuesday meeting, Krahl expanded this theme: "We've seen that the mass basis for SDS on the university level is not lost. It's just that SDS is not focused on confidence. Each time we have to explain why we make protest actions; we can't simply tack on the mass basis. We could have agitation and actions against the authoritarian reforms in the Uni--such as close the Uni for a week and swing the discussion to university reform in the seminars. But when we organize university reform, we need to take on research problems too--what is the place of the intellectual in the class society, is the intellectual still an individual as Marx says, or can he now be treated as a class?"

Krahl was proposing a resumption of the theoretical explorations that originally brought recognition to the SDS among Germany's left intellectuals, but he cautioned against acceptance of piece-meal reforms, and meant actually those reforms (such as tri-parity) which SDS itself proposed some eight years ago. "Through the reforms that are now suggested, a new strategy is seen. They (he means the university and government establishment) no longer protest changes in hierarchial structure, but resist any attempt to free

science from the capitalist society. Science is sold as a capitalist product. All the reforms suggest a representative administration, but there is now an attempt to integrate radical critique into the majority decisions, for example at the Otto Suhr Institute. The reform of university content is in danger...they grasp institutional changes, but use them against the changes in content."

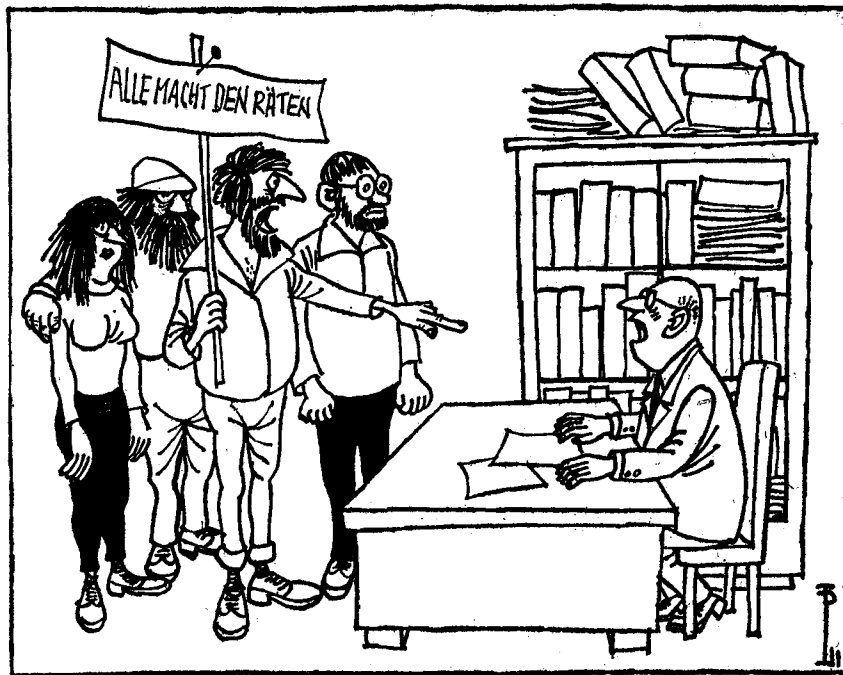
Reinhard Wolff added that the professional horizons of students must be broadened. "Most don't even want a science free from the capitalist system of values," he said, "because after graduation they're expecting to move into a post as undersecretary in the CDU (the Christian Democratic Union)!"



Reinhard Wolff, at podium, leads fellow SDS-ers in singing the Internationale at the closing plenary session of conference.

Wolff, a graduate theologian who is now studying for his second doctorate in sociology at the Free University, was one of five SDS-ers elected to serve on the national collective at the close of Monday's plenary session. In a speech setting forth his ideas on the future goals of the SDS, he declared that "the basis of SDS now, as earlier, is the university. But the number of comrades will increase who are workers, and the number will increase of those who give up their university work because they find it futile in the present society. Our work is to fight against examinations, for new content, for a university reform that will take away the power from the professors. We want to give comrades a critical education. But members of the SDS must ask themselves if they will follow the parliamentary way...that has no future in the long run."

German journalists who have covered other SDS conferences in recent years described the Hanover meeting later as the "weakest" in the organization's history. The election of an old-style national committee, after so much talk of reorganization, was "an act of resignation," wrote reporter Paul Lersch in the conservative Die Welt. SDS leaders themselves spoke of "decay" and various factions seemed to vie for the privilege of flagellating each other. "Self-tormenting," said Lersch, "the SDS in its current phase is experimenting without anaesthetic on its own body."



.. und übernehmen wir ab sofort den Lehrbetrieb!"

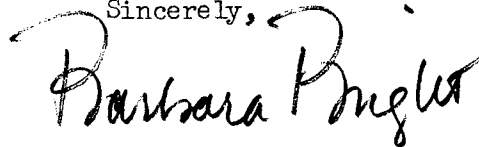
SZ-Zeichnung: P. Leger

Satirical cartoon in the Sueddeutsche Zeitung; the sign says "All Power to the Councils (or soviets)" and the caption reads, "...and we take over the teaching immediately."

The SDS re-emphasis on campus actions is indicative of their search for a purpose. With university reform, they are attacking one of the nation's saddest anachronisms. Yet West Germany's leading radical organization, refusing to compromise its revolutionary goals and take one step, or even three, at a time, is driving itself further into isolation from the society at large. Liberal professors and intellectuals who now applaud the earlier reform theories of the SDS are vilified and attacked with more vehemence than the conservatives.

Without giving the establishment time to catch up, the SDS-ers have sprinted off to more radical goals. My leftist friends would argue that the establishment never would catch up anyway, and I heartily concur in their pessimistic analysis of the government's constipation. But what happened to Rudi Dutschke's "long march through the institutions"? The millenium won't come tomorrow. After confrontation, can't it afford some time for communication? Without communication, the SDS is in danger of propagating the antithesis of the participatory democracy, the democratic socialism, the new society of the humanized technological age it professes.

Sincerely,

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

Barbara Bright

Received in New York January 27, 1969.