

GALLEY

J.Z. is quite right that it is unfortunate that SDS meetings are the only political dialogue taking place on campus. There are only 5 or 6 SDS members at Bennington that I know of and we have only very recently become a chapter. We have not hashed out exactly what role we are to play here, we have not yet been officially recognized. Most SDS meetings have not been on campus simply because SDS has in the past been a Williams group to which a few Bennington girls belonged.

This year a few of us decided to start a Bennington chapter. We belong to SDS because we agree with the kind of thinking and criticism reflected in the Port Huron Statement. There is however a difference between agreeing with a way of thinking and following a set ideology. Chapters participate actively in the formulation of national SDS policy and programs, and freely criticize and dissent from policies they dislike. To quote from the SDS constitution:

SDS is an association of young people on the left. It seeks to create a sustained community of educational and political concern; one bringing together liberals and radicals, activists and scholars, students and faculty....

I cannot say what, if anything is "wrong" with a "liberal", unless you will tell me first what a liberal is. The terms "liberal" and "radical" sometimes confuse rather than clarify. I tend to think of liberals as people who think that for the most part things are actually pretty good. They tend to see the things that are bad in our society as individual problems, not necessarily related, and not indicative of any deeper disturbance. They try to correct the problems while maintaining the status quo. The radical on the other hand sees the problems of civil rights, individual freedom, poverty and our involvement in Vietnam as intimately related, and as manifestations of deeper, more subtle, and difficult problems. A local tutoring program is a fine idea (such projects have been carried out by many SDS chapters). I have tutored kids in Harlem and in Newark. But no matter how good a job you do, in most cases the kids will just have to go back to schools which allowed them to reach the age of 12 without being able to read, and they will still be living in the slums, will still, most likely, be trapped effectively. The problem lies not so much in the individual as in the social/economic/ political structure of our society. No matter how many kids you tutor there will be more kids growing up in need of tutoring, unless the cause is eliminated. I would contend that a system which allows (if not causes) children to grow up uneducated, deprived of rights we consider natural rights, and impoverished is at best malfunctioning, perhaps inadequate, and badly in need of change.

LBJ is ready to see the need for basic social change in underdeveloped foreign countries, but he seems not to see it here. The question is not whether the administration must always be wrong.

I do not pretend to have all the answers, I don't think national SDS does. We are try to analuze objectively the underlying problems first. Only after the cause of a problem is understood can a real solution be found. I think the administration's analysis of the Vietnam problem is a bad one; I think the conclusions which have been reached as a result of that analysis are worse.

Is there any reason why a Bennington chapter of SDS cannot organize a bus to go to Washington as well as have a tutoring project, discussion groups, guest speakers, clothing collections for Appalachia or the Mississippi Delta? A Bennington chapter would do what its members wanted to do. A "liberal" who agrees with what SDS represents is certainly welcomed to join. We are liberal enough to allow liberals as well as communists - just so long as they believe in participatory democracy. But one need not belong to SDS to participate in discussion or action programs, one just has to want to.

N.S.
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