

Report on Open Staff Meeting of the Southern Student Organizing Committee by Doug Jenness, May 5, 1969.

An open staff meeting of the Southern Student Organizing Committee was held in Atlanta on April 20th. There were about 80 people at the meeting at its peak. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the future perspective of SSOC in light of the sharp criticisms made against SSOC at the SDS National Council meeting held in Austin, at which SDS broke its fraternal ties with SSOC.

Since its inception in 1964, SSOC had fraternal relations with SDS. A sort of unwritten understanding existed between the two organizations that organizing in the South would be left to SSOC because of its supposed understanding of "peculiar Southern problems." Although SDS has never really tried to build itself in the South, several SDS chapters have been organized. Most, but not all, of these chapters have also affiliated with SSOC.

The harshly worded resolution severing SDS's relationship with SSOC supported by both the PL and National Office factions, focused on SSOC's acceptance of foundation money and its "Southern Nationalism", which the resolution characterizes as racist. As a result of this, many SSOC leaders and members have been questioning the role of SSOC and its policies.

There were basically four proposals made regarding SSOC's future:

1. Dogget proposal (He is from Mississippi SSOC): Establish a "mankind" emphasis. Eliminate centralism, elitism, and "old leftism." Respond to revolutionary youth movement.

2. Shannon proposal (He is from the National Staff of SSOC.): Build SSOC around active local groups with a national program staff that would operate on the basis of making collective decisions. It was felt by those supporting this proposal that at the present time SSOC is basically a staff organization with little or not local representation. Develop a local fund-raising rather than relying on foundations. Develop a revolutionary internal education program.

3. North Carolina SSOC proposal:

- a. Dissolve SSOC.
- b. Work to build strong active local membership groups.
- c. Maintain ties with each other as an association of independent radicals in the South convening regularly to discuss ideological questions.
- d. Disagree with perspective of a SDS region on three grounds:
 - 1) Not sure that SDS position that South is not a colony of the North is correct.
 - 2) Not sure that SDS perspective of building a revolutionary youth movement instead of revolutionary student movement is correct.
 - 3) Not sure that even if it were correct to build a revolutionary youth movement that SDS is the proper form for building that movement.

4. SDS Caucus proposal: Do not dissolve SSOC but urge chapters and members to affiliate with SDS. Establish SDS regions in the South such as Florida, Georgia-Alabama, North Carolina-South Carolina. This perspective was motivated on the grounds that SSOC is not as political as SDS, that it attempts to argue its superiority over SDS on the basis of services that it can provide to local groups rather than on the basis of political program. It was also pointed out that a national organization is needed to fight the government in Washington, and that SSOC's position on Southern Liberation was inconsistent with support to the black liberation struggle.

It should be pointed out that the SDS caucus is composed of key SSOC leaders and members, including Lynn Wells from the SSOC National Office and David Simpson, SSOC's main organizer in Georgia. It appeared to have considerable support and was definitely organized as a caucus, even having closed caucus meeting.

The SDS caucus is clearly the left wing of SSOC. The discussion on the perspectives tended to be a debate between this group and the rest of SSOC, with the North Carolina people sort of in the middle.

The moderates drew up a list of organizational questions around which the discussion should be oriented, but the SDS people opposed this and successfully convinced the meeting to discuss the political bases behind the proposals. An agenda with the following points was drawn up:

1. Anti-capitalism
2. Black liberation
3. Women's liberation
4. Imperialism
5. Enemies vs. brothers/sisters
6. South

Cliff Conner and myself, who were attending from the YSA, were not able to stay for the entire discussion on this agenda. Nonetheless we heard most of it and the most important part, the discussion on the first two points.

Discussion of the South, Southern nationalism, anti-capitalism, and the black liberation struggle all came up on the first point. A relatively high level discussion on what is a nation, can there be a multi-national state, the difference between a state and a nation, is the South a colony, etc. took place. The moderate elements attempted to find some historical basis for proving that the South was an exploited colony and, therefore, demanded an exceptional southern movement. The SDS caucus had prepared themselves well and took the offensive against this position and all variations on it. Noel Ignatin from the SDS National Office led the charge and in 15 minutes gave a Marxist analysis of the history of the South, the origins of the black nation, why the South is not a nation, etc. I couldn't have done better myself. It left the opposition sputtering.

Discussion on the black struggle centered around whether or not to support all the demands that black students raise and whether or not SSOC might run the risk of becoming merely a "supporter" group to the

black student movement.

There will be a membership conference in Mississippi, June 5-8 to discuss these proposals. Meanwhile, local chapters will discuss them and they are supposedly going to be printed in the Phoenix. But the basic decision has already been made: an entire wing, the most lively and militant wing of SSOC, is committing itself to organizing SDS. Actually, they have already begun to do this, and by June it will be an accomplished fact.

Whether the moderate elements can hang together enough to keep SSOC going without the militants is still up in the air. SSOC is undergoing a process of disintegration. Although the SDS caucus did not call for the dissolution of SSOC, this was done primarily to avoid a premature split so that they can have more time to convince the wavering elements in SSOC to come over to SDS.