

“The SDS is an education and social action organization dedicated to increasing democracy in all phases of our common life. It seeks to promote the active participation of young people in the formation of a movement to build a society free from poverty, ignorance, war, exploitation, racism, and sexism.”
– SDS membership card.

Well, we have a lot of work to do. The Patriot Act was reauthorized on March 9, 2006 with little changes to the original law. The Bush Administration has cut more than \$12.7 billion from the college student financial aid budget. In New Orleans, more than 60% of the population – including an estimated 80% of the African Americans in New Orleans – are disfranchised with little hope of returning to New Orleans and will be unable to vote in the upcoming election. The American empire is expanding with 725 military bases in 130 foreign nations.

Clearly, these are issues that affect all our lives. Our country has to change, but there is no united student movement to bring about that change. Historically, students have been an effective force for political and social change. For example, the student led Civil Rights Movement and Anti- War Movement in the US in the 1960s, the student led movement that almost led to an overthrow of the French government in 1968, the student led protests in China that took place in Tiananmen Square in 1989 that showed the courage of students up against impossible odds, and most recently, the student led movement against the new labor law, the CPE, in France that led to the occupation of universities all across France, the outpouring of thousands upon

thousands of people into the streets and the eventual recall of the section of the CPE that would directly working people. These movements show that students play a crucial role in changing society and there is an obvious need for a united student movement in the United States, as shown by the rapid growth of SDS since January with currently 90 chapters and more than 500 members. Despite this rapid growth, I'm often asked the question "Why SDS? Why not start something new?" From the ideas put forth in the Port Huron Statement to the name, SDS – Students for a Democratic Society, we need a student led movement to challenge authoritarianism and build a democratic society. We are faced with the realization that we do not live in a democratic society, and rather than start a new organization, we are picking up where an earlier generation left off. We are learning from the past, both successes and failures. Unlike the original SDS, we are not breaking with the "Old Left". Instead, we are carrying on the fight for participatory democracy.

Within the movement there is a clear need for a broad, inclusive organization that is encompassing of the left: an organization that can unite a wide range of individuals with diverse political ideologies. Within the movement, we have seen the pitfalls of single issue organizing because no single issue is isolated, they are all connected.

Therefore, we need a multi- issue organization that can fight for change on many fronts.

Regarding the structure of SDS, it is important that we provide a democratic, anti- authoritarian alternative within the movement. For far too long, many organizations that have dominated the Left have been hierarchal in structure and disempowering to students rather than motivating, giving students little voice or power to make decisions within the organization. A perfect example of this is the upcoming march for Peace, Justice and Democracy sponsored by United for Peace and Justice: For an organization that supposedly recognizes the importance of having youth and students on the frontlines of the movement, they are placing their youth and student contingent in the very back of the march! As students we should be leading the march! A second element missing from many of the organizations that dominate the Left is the element of militancy. I think now more than ever our movement, as many movements have in the past, needs to make that jump from protest to resistance. Despite the growth the movement has been experiencing, despite the escalation of US imperialism abroad and repression of the Left at home in recent months, despite widespread disapproval of the Bush Administration and the Iraq War by the American people and the world, we have yet to see an escalation of tactics within the movement. As former SDS member and political

prisoner David Gilbert has said, “Love for the people means nonstop struggle against imperialism.” We are entering yet again another period of worldwide social upheaval as shown by the massive outpourings of people at the pro- immigration rallies, the courageous students in France taking the fight for equality to the streets, and the time is now for SDS to carry on the fight for democracy here in America.

But most importantly, we need a student led movement. Although SDS is multi- generational and its purpose is not to marginalize the non- youth and student portion of the activist population, it’s important that we are a youth led organization, that youth and students have a dominant voice in SDS and are in charge, an organization where youth and students are able to determine the direction of the organization but also work in coalition with older generations.

The question of “Why SDS?” is often followed by, “Is there room in the movement for SDS?” Not only is there room for it, there is a need. The organizations that currently dominate the Left do not offer a democratic, anti- authoritarian structure that places an emphasis on youth and student involvement and these organizations are unwilling to make use of aggressive tactics to bring about political and social change. Let’s change that.

I'd like to end with the last paragraph of the Port Huron Statement:

“As students for a democratic society, we are committed to stimulating this kind of social movement, this kind of vision and program in campus and community across the country. If we appear to seek the unattainable, as it has been said, then let it be known that we do so to avoid the unimaginable.”