

The Worker-Student Alliance Caucus

The article on WSA is from Fight to Win, which is explained in the text of the article. The SLAP proposal was presented to the SDS National Council meeting at Boulder in October 1968.

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The Worker-Student Alliance caucus was formed around and is based on these three political points:

1. The basic strategy of the student movement and of SDS should be to build a worker-student alliance and a student movement which is pro-working class;

2. The WSA and the student movement must be anti-imperialist, anti-racist and internationalist; and

3. We must fight and defeat all forms of anti-communism within SDS and among the people we work with.

These three points have been elaborated upon in various resolutions to SDS NCs, in work in chapters throughout the country and now in this paper. Members of the Progressive Labor Party are active in the caucus and helped form it.

Since the concept of building a worker-student alliance based on proletarian ideology was put forth in SDS it has been attacked and distorted from every angle. But, because it has been proven in struggle after struggle to be the correct strategy, it has continued to grow stronger!

At first the idea was laughed at. "Workers? Why everyone knows they're all bought off and always will be. That's 19th Century dogma. Not sophisticated at all." That was in the days of a liberal SDS. Advocates of the WSA were attacked for talking of "imperialism." That word was taboo. "Dogmatic. Doesn't take into account 'new' U.S. conditions."

At the convention in Clear Lake, Iowa (just under 3 years ago) there was a witch-hunt type "forum" held to discuss "communists in SDS." The basis of the attack was that Marxism-Leninism as interpreted by Stalin, Mao and PLP was just as evil, manipulative and murderous as capitalism. SDS advocates of an openly anti-imperialist program were accused of having led the 1930 purges and everything else that has ever happened. Anti-communism was openly admitted. The SDS leadership was desperately trying to hold back the radicalization of SDS. The SDS chapter membership, involved in struggle, fought for a more radical outlook, though not quite sure of the exact direction to head in.

After that the WSA strategy was further developed and projects were built. The first work-in was organized. More people were won to building the worker-student alliance. The class struggle was sharpening, and strikes growing in mili-

tancy. The Vietnam war was very important in shattering the lie that the U.S. was just somehow mistaken in its foreign policy. The Black Liberation struggle was shaking off liberals who were using it for their own ends. SDS was becoming anti-imperialist. Class consciousness was developing.

But the next year, at the Ann Arbor convention, working-class ideology was still rejected by many. Student power, called "student syndacism," was still strong. To hold back proletarian ideology, which was gaining strength, a theory "more Marxist" than straight liberalism or anarchism was projected. Called the "new" working class (NWC), it held that capitalism had changed and was eliminating the "traditional" working class. Further we were told that what was left of that "traditional" class had been bought off anyway. The NWC spokesmen heralded the emergence of a "new" college educated working class. These new technicians would be the revolutionary vanguard. Why? Because they had boring jobs and were alienated from the control over their own work, though they'd be well off in an increasingly affluent society.

Then came the French revolt and Columbia! These were great eye-openers for thousands of students. The work-in had been successful, for a start. Pro-WSAers were leading struggles all over. The NWC theory couldn't stand up in debate with the worker-student alliance. Black workers were taking the lead in fighting on the job and in their community. The potential of working class revolution was felt. The NWC theory lost strength.

The last gasp of the NWC in national SDS came at last summer's East Lansing convention. This convention marked a new high in attacks on the theory of working class revolution and its supporters. An organized attempt to exclude WSA and PLP from SDS failed. The right-wing argued: 1) "external cadre" should be thrown out (a clear call to the ruling class anti-communist argument that communists are "outside agitators" and 2) SDS should become more centralized, less of a mass organization, around a common ideology which would exclude adherents of the WSA. The common ideology—put forth by Bell-Dorhn-Holliwell—was basically Marcusean NWC. Thus another attempt was being made to defend anti-worker politics, hold back the progressive development of SDS and throw WSAers out.

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WSA Caucus Formed

This was the convention that elected the present leadership of SDS. It was also the convention at which supporters of the worker-student alliance formed into a caucus.

The recent history is better known. Coleman and Klonsky (part of a "national collective" which is not talked of openly by them in SDS) have jumped from position to position. Never any explanation for the changes: just moving with the opportunity. It's hard to know what new position they'll come up with next.

An example of this came just a few months ago at a special conference at Princeton. They argued that SDS should mainly fight "the increasing militarization" of the campuses. The WSA caucus and other SDSers fought for emphasizing fighting racism, while supporting anti-ROTC and similar struggles. We said that ROTC, etc. should not be fought because they represented "militarization," but because they were pro-imperialist.

The "militarization" outlook is a revisionist old-CP line—holding that what's really wrong with this country is the military; what's wrong with the university is the growing presence of the military. But Coleman and Klonsky responded by saying that to emphasize fighting racism, was not anti-imperialist enough for them! Soon after, without explanation, they dropped the "anti-militarization" fights which they had just pushed as SDS' major drive. In fact, WSA caucuses have led numbers of struggles against ROTC, LINKING THEM TO ANTI-RACIST DEMANDS (like at Harvard where ROTC, and Harvard's expansion into Roxbury, were fought)!

The "national collective's" politics are as stable as the Sahara's sands. But one thing remains constant—opposition to the WSA. They have projected a couple of major distortions about the WSA. It's important to set things straight. Many SDS members have been told to hate the WSA, without having had the chance to talk things over with us. What are the distortions?

1. "WSAers ass-kiss to any economic struggle of workers." We DO believe in supporting economic struggles. They are class struggles in which the workers and the bosses fight over surplus value. They are very real struggles for better conditions. What isn't mentioned by the usual distortion, is that we raise political questions in these struggles: Vietnam, racism, capitalism, union mis-leadership, etc. We actively oppose racist strikes, like the N.Y. teachers walkout. We oppose a sectarian view towards economic struggles. We want to unite with work-

ers, learn from them and raise our politics with them. We should fight to raise the level of these struggles to political struggles. But that won't happen by not supporting the economic struggles.

2. "The WSA downgrades student struggles and just gets us off campus." False. We should fight around "on-campus" issues like ROTC, course content, etc. But the politics on which we fight these struggles must be pro-working class. Thus we oppose ROTC, not because it isn't a "proper" course for the university academically, but because it's used to suppress workers and peasants around the world. In every struggle there is a working class and a ruling class position. As Mao says: "Every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class." The WSA says that in every campus struggle we must build the working class position.

The worker-student alliance is now under sharp attack in the press and from the "national collective." This isn't anything new. The WSA has been constantly growing throughout this. The main reason has been PRACTICE and STRUGGLE.

Why publish this paper?

New Left Notes has consistently refused to print or has severely politically edited—articles by WSAers and others in SDS who oppose the politics of the "national collective." Dozens of articles sent in—both theoretical and reports of concrete struggle—have never been published. Others that were printed have had the political guts cut out of them. Some have had any sentence that had any criticism of the politics of the "national collective" cut out of them.

One article from the University of California at Berkeley SDS chapter, for example, had almost every mention of anti-racism cut from it by the editors of NLN. Sections were cut out so that it seemed the article didn't attack racism. And at the Austin NC they made it clear that this policy would continue.

Therefore, we felt it necessary, in order to get our politics—and the experiences of struggles we have been involved in and led-out to SDSers across the country, to publish this paper. It is internal to SDS. We wish we didn't have to spend the time putting it out. But it's absolutely necessary at this time. We invite other SDSers who have met this same response from NLN to send their articles into FIGHT TO WIN.

The STUDENT-LABOR ACTION PROJECT Proposal

WHERE ARE WE?

The student movement remains isolated from the majority of students and almost all working people. We have fought on numerous particular issues, but we must begin to carry on these fights in the context of a strategy of uniting the majority of students and workers in sharp struggle against the common oppressor.

WHY ALLY WITH WORKERS?

Exploitation of workers is the basis of this imperialist society! Students are also victimized materially - that is, both economically and intellectually - by the same system that exploits and oppresses working people. Therefore, there exists the basis for a common fight. Most students become part of the working class after they flunk out, drop out or graduate. Teachers, social workers, and other white collar workers, mostly former students, have been drawn into sharp union struggles recently against their oppressors.

In the process of struggles on and off campus, students face a choice: whether to ally with working people or with 'liberal' sections of the bourgeoisie. The wrong choice can be made overtly -- relying on Eugene McCarthy to get the US out of Vietnam instead of relying on the people to force the 'liberal' and other imperialists out; the wrong choice can be made in a less obvious fashion -- attacking ROTC as bad because it represents an invasion of the ivory tower instead of exposing it as an arm of the anti-working people US foreign policy which bribes college kids into a fight against their interests. Moreover, anti-working class ideas are very strong on campus, and even have a hold among us. Unless the student movement is built on an explicitly pro-working class basis, it can easily de-

velop into a force more or less openly allied with imperialism against working people.

Working people also face a similar choice: should US workers ally with Vietnamese working people or the boss's government; should white workers ally with Black workers or the boss; should skilled workers ally with unskilled workers or the boss; should teachers ally with working-class parents and children or with the racist Board of Education; should social workers ally with clients or with the oppressive Welfare Department?

The question is not one of students in missionary fashion 'liberating the working class' because of a supposedly superior intelligence. The fact is that students and white-collar workers cannot fight successfully against their oppression without allying with the key force: production, transportation and communications workers.

France is the sharpest people's struggle in recent history in an advanced capitalist country. It clearly shows that the industrial working class is the key force on the people's side in the advanced capitalist countries. The theory that a 'new' working class - professionals and technicians - is the key force did not materialize in practice. French students were very clear that while they could start the fight, the working class must finish it!

Some hold that while the working class may be the key force in the anti-imperialist struggle, to win them we only have to provide a sharp focus of action to which they will be irresistibly drawn. France shows that this approach is one-sided and necessarily leads to an inability to consummate the Revolution. The French students provided such a focus. But the revisionist 'Communist' Party had the base among workers and was therefore able to sell out the people over the objections of the unorganized opposition among the workers. The situation in the US is similar. Just as on campus we must do the hard work of base-building, so radicals in factories will develop an anti-imperialist base through day-to-day struggles. After graduation, some students should go to work in plants with a perspective of becoming part of the working class and helping to build this base. Of course, this crucial work is in no way a substitute for building the student movement on a pro-working class basis.

THE TIME TO START BUILDING THIS ALLIANCE IS NOW

Some say we don't have to start building a worker-student alliance now. Either (a) we should wait until the workers have a powerful, politically conscious movement, or (b) we should first develop a student movement on a 'purely' student basis, and make alliances with workers later. We say the time to start is now.

As we said earlier, the question of who students ally with comes up in every struggle. At Columbia, students could decide between accepting a few 'student power' reforms or standing fast behind the people of Harlem on the issue of the gym. Another example -- many strikes of campus workers have occurred. In these cases, the movement can militantly back the workers and help them win, or it can remain indifferent while other students scab (it's happened) and defeat the strike. Failure to ally with workers now and to win the movement, in every struggle, to the pro-working class approach, will make any alliance far more difficult in the future. A student movement which doesn't consciously try to build this alliance can be more and more presented to working people as just a group of future petty exploiters out for themselves. And in practice, the movement could turn solidly against workers.

Behind SLAP, therefore, is the notion of worker-student alliance. This does not mean we give up student organizing. It means we realize that US Imperialism is based on class exploitation, that to defeat it in the long run - indeed, even to win immediate victories against it - we must develop a class approach, build support for the working class in all struggles, defeat all anti-working class ideas, support workers' struggles, and launch anti-ruling class battles that concretely link workers and students in fighting their common enemy. A special point should be made here in regard to racism. The student movement has virtually ignored the immense struggles of Black people. Although a racist reaction to rebellions exists both on and off campus among white students and workers, most radical students have done little to support rebellions. Struggles for admission of Blacks have often been ignored. Attempts to expose and smash racist super-exploitation and oppression of Black working people is key to building a real worker-student alliance!

We can't leave the development of this to chance or individual cases. A nationally organized thrust is needed to make the strategy of worker-student alliance a reality in the movement. The important struggles at Columbia and San Francisco State at the end of the last term show that it is crucial and possible to build a mass base on campus in a pro-working class direction and ally those students with working people in struggle. Our weakness at these and other schools has been the failure to put that strategy into practice thoroughly.

TACTICS OF S. L. A. P.

SLAP involves both a strategy of worker-student alliance and various tactics. Some of the tactics could be and should be done by entire SDS chapters -- such as bringing pro-working class/anti-ruling class ideas and tactics to 'purely' student struggles. Others (like strike support) will in most places require actual Student-Labor Committees to carry them out. What part of the SLAP approach requires a SLC and what doesn't depends on the particular chapter. In general, SLCs should be set up all over on a chapter and regional basis.

We should build a stronger base on campus, reaching out to all schools, to masses of students, leading them in sharper struggles against Imperialism. Students will not organize workers. The point is to develop a student movement rooted in struggles against the ways Imperialism oppresses students, increasingly pro-working class, more and more consciously allied with workers in a struggle. Developing a worker-student alliance is a long process. In building that alliance, important activities are:

1. Leading students to link up their struggles directly with working people: Oppression of campus workers, workers in University-controlled hospitals, university expansion at the cost of local workers (and students) are a good basis for link-up struggles. The idea is to tie the fight against the way the school screws students with one of its anti-working class policies. Exposures and explicit condemnation of the racist content of many of these policies is key.

2. Strike support: This includes bringing large numbers of students to picket lines; raising money (and food and clothing) on campus; bringing the story to the school paper; inviting rank-and-filers to speak on campus; leafletting on campus and in the community to support the strike (as was done with the farm workers' strike); researching to aid the strike; and more militant tactics. In Los Angeles, students ignored the racist, pro-boss labor bureaucrats, and 250 workers and students blocked the struck L.A. Herald Examiner from coming out for several hours. In Chicago, the SDS Work-In organized support for wildcatting Railway Express workers who were led by militant Black workers. In New York City, the Work-In helped 800 workers at Figure Flattery company win a very important strike in the garment center. In these and other support struggles, students learned a lot and found they could talk with the workers. Another example: stop on-campus recruitment by companies whose workers are on strike!

3. Summer work-in projects: Going into factories to work over the summer can help students learn first hand the actual class oppression of workers. Bringing up political ideas to workers can mean that a few will have a clearer understanding of the war, racism, and other key political issues. Weekly, small workshop meetings should be organized to evaluate our approach to workers and to improve it. These should involve regular study -- by getting clearer about what is true, we can make the discussions of how to reach workers more useful.

4. Support for Black rebellions: As we said earlier, a key part of building a worker-student alliance is opposing racism, showing the especially harsh way Black workers are exploited and oppressed. Support for Black rebellions should be large-scale and as sharp as possible. Militant demonstrations on campus and before armories demanding all cops and troops out of the ghetto, massive leafletting among white students and workers explaining why the rebellion is just, pointing out they have a common class enemy with Black working people, are some possible activities. It is important that the work of exposing and attacking the oppression of Blacks be done beforehand! This includes forums, leafletting, classroom agitation. Racism can and should be fought on campus with militant struggle. Two possibilities: (a) anti-expansion (which usually means Black removal) struggles and (b) fighting for more low income Black (and white working class) admissions.

5. Educational work on campus and in courses to attack and defeat anti-working class ideas like: working people are no-good sweaty racist pigs and only intellectuals have any grace and delicacy; workers are the main supporters of the status quo, and have produced a reactionary foreign policy out of their greed for high-paid defense jobs and their hatred of commies; workers are a vulgar, low mob and the sacred ivory towers must be held up to stem the tide; Black workers are especially bad and violent, and even lazier than most workers. These false ideas can and should be fought not only in occasional leaflets discussing experiences with workers during strikes, etc., but should be raised in the course of all on-campus struggles.

6. In general, think campus struggles out carefully to answer the question, How can this fight be directed most sharply against the ruling class? How can the real class relations of America be most sharply exposed? How can we raise the need to ally with working people in sharp struggle against imperialism effectively?

AMENDMENTS TO S. L. A. P.

At the Boulder National Council Labor workshop, discussion produced several friendly amendments to the SLAP proposal which were included when the proposal was put before the plenary. The National Office apparently has mislaid these amendments, so the sense of the amendments is stated below, roughly, from memory.

1. The point was made that building an alliance between students and workers is part of a longer-term process. Many students (although not all) have positions after they graduate in which they are oppressed by imperialism. Like students, these people can either side with the basic industrial working class, in practice, or with the rulers.

2. In the section which discusses tactics, several very important forms of support work were added. We should help organize on-campus workers, support their strikes and defeat scabbing among students, and oppose university racist hiring practices.

3. After graduation or for other reasons some students should actually enter the basic working class, with the intention of becoming part of that class to help organize it in a revolutionary direction. On the basis of experience with this situation, labor committees can begin to work out relations with such people, aiding their work by providing some kind of collective.

4. Reaching high school students, developing ties with them, especially supporting their (often ferocious) struggles are very important. Anti-draft work can be effective in this area, and, in any case, work against the draft (which should always be opposed in the context of the imperialist use of the draft!) can be an excellent way of linking future college students and future industrial workers in struggle.

5. The point should be emphasized that in conducting support work or in fact in all our work it is very important to raise all radical and revolutionary ideas. Walking a picket line helps the workers. Raising radical ideas with them helps them much more. (This, of course, also applies in on-campus organizing.)

