

The SDS and Wisconsin State University Eau Claire

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Table of Contents

Abstract	III
Introduction	1
Origins of the SDS	3
SDS in the Late Sixties	9
333WSU Eau Claire in 1967	17
The Decision	24
Conclusion	29
Works Cited	31

Abstract

The Wisconsin State University Eau Claire was affected by the 1960's just like the rest of the nation. In 1967 the Students for a Democratic Society established a presence on the Eau Claire campus. The SDS wished to obtain a university charter and be recognized as a student organization at the university. The potential charter placed pressure on the faculty and administration; pressure that was placed by the community. This paper will explain the origins of the SDS, how it spread, and the impact it had on the Eau Claire campus and community.

Introduction

The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was an organization that grew rapidly in the mid sixties until its final convention in Chicago in 1969.¹ The SDS played a major role in the student movement during the 1960's. The SDS spread from a select location to having an almost nationwide presence in a matter of years. This student movement gained attention in both large cities as well as small. The spread of the SDS had an effect on communities across the nation. This includes the community of Eau Claire. In the later part of the 1960's the SDS moved to the Wisconsin State University Eau Claire (WSU Eau Claire) campus and attracted attention from the community as well as faculty and staff.

This paper will summarize the origins of the SDS and its original intentions. It will explain why the SDS was attractive nationwide and locally in Eau Claire. It will examine the relationship among students, the Wisconsin State University Eau Claire Administration/Faculty, and the Eau Claire community. Finally it will discuss the SDS and its eventual downfall and its impact today. To do this I will be using primary sources from 1966-68, and secondary documents. Many of my primary documents are from newspaper articles written during this time period. The articles are taken from *The Spectator* and the *Leader Telegram* in 1967. Other documents include Student Senate minutes and documents from meetings, as well as staff letters. Lastly the SDS printed a National Constitution and other documents expressing its point of view.

¹ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 109-110.

This capstone paper will contribute to the local history of Eau Claire. A history of the SDS and their interactions on Wisconsin State University Eau Claire campus has never been done. Past capstones have discussed the sixties and seventies in the context of peace during a difficult time. *WSU-EC PEACE: IT'S WONDERFUL: Achieving University Nonviolence during Turbulent Times The Spring and Fall Semesters of 1970* written by Jeremiah Bartlett is an example of this. However these essays address the whole campus of Eau Claire; they do not focus on the SDS alone. My paper is not about the peace movement but the exchange of opinions and ideas during 1967, when the SDS first appeared on the Eau Claire campus. Furthermore this paper will contribute to the history of UWEC and its surrounding community.

The first section of my paper establishes the background for the story of SDS in Eau Claire. This section explains the origins and establishes information that is important for the story of WSU Eau Claire. The second section explains how the SDS gained large-scale numbers from 1965-1967 across the nation. The last two sections focus on Eau Claire and the introduction of the SDS to the campus. An important piece to the SDS in Eau Claire is the attempt to secure a university charter during 1967. This decision highlights many different point of views towards SDS that were present not only in Eau Claire but across the nation. The process brings out opinions of the faculty, students, and administration. This capstone paper will examine these viewpoints and analyze the why behind them. Furthermore it will explain reasons behind the denial of the charter to the SDS at the WSU Eau Claire.

Origins of the SDS

In the 1960's the SDS became an important representation of the "New Left." However this group of students demanding reform had started much earlier than the sixties. Before the SDS started there were other student groups advocating for social and political change. A book written by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Internal Security says, "In name, Students for a Democratic Society was born in 1959, but its genesis occurred in 1905 when the most important early 20th century student movement in the United States took root on various college campuses."² This quote is referencing the ISS, or writer Jack London, novelist and social reformer Upton Sinclair, and lawyer Clarence Darrow founded the Intercollegiate Socialist Society. David Burner says, "These were three insurgents in the American grain, eccentric, individualistic, experimental in ideas and in life, unfettered by any polysyllabic ideology."³ The ISS is best classified as a labor movement. This socialist advocacy continued until 1917 when war was declared on Germany. Students then suspended actions until 1921 where they adopted a new name.⁴ The League for Industrial Democracy (LID) also had a student section titled the Student League for an Industrial Democracy (SLID) which was up and running by the 1930's.⁵

Shortly after the organization of SLID another student group was organized based on the ideals of communism. The National Student League was founded in 1932 and believed that

² Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 5.

³ David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 151.

⁴ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 5-6.

⁵ Harvey Pekar, *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 3.

capitalism and the government of America were a failure. This new group resulted in competition between SLID and the NSL on campuses across the U.S. This ended in December 1935, when the NSL and the SLID formed a new group uniting the ideas of communism and socialism. "The American Student Union would achieve a paid-up membership of 12,000 by 1939," it says in the book written by the House of Representatives.⁶

This unity was tested during the Second World War and eventually broke in the 1940's. World War II pulled the group in different directions and resulted in the creation of new communist groups and the reemergence of SLID. After World War II the pro communist movement almost ceased to exist. By 1957 the last student organization in support of communism had been dissolved. Meanwhile in 1946 the LID was able to reorganize the SLID, but without the strength it had before the war. However the support of Socialist ideas continued with SLID through the 1950's.⁷

After the war youth organizations increasingly focused attention on the issue of racial equality. During the war many black Americans had focused their attention on equality. In association with the 1954 Supreme Court ruling to outlaw segregation in schools this movement created the perfect opportunity for students to join together again.⁸ This occurred with the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960, which focused on nonviolent forms of protest to promote racial and social equality. SNCC worked mostly in the southern part of America rapidly spread north.⁹ With this new issue pressuring

⁶ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 6.

⁷ Ibid 7-8.

⁸ Ibid 8.

⁹ David Gilbert, *SDS/WUO, Students For A Democratic Society And The Weather Underground Organization*, Pmplt ed. (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press/Arm the Spirit, 2002), 11-12.

America, the SLID restructured its 54-year-old group and renamed itself the Students for a Democratic Society.¹⁰

The SDS and the SNCC had close contact at a conference called “Human Rights in the North” in spring of 1960. The convention was held at the University of Michigan and focused on getting individuals involved in race relations and the fight against discrimination and segregation.¹¹ Even prior to this conference members of the SDS in the North had been donating money to the civil rights movement in the South. From 1960-61 the SDS established itself as a student driven political group aimed to define the topics of controversy for the new left. Robert Ross was elected vice president of the SDS after reorganizing and he played an important role in getting the SDS on the National Student Association (NSA), which was a confederation of American college and university student governments. This group helped the SDS gain national attention and spread the presence of the SDS to 300 other campuses nationwide.¹²

However, despite their best efforts, enrollment in the SDS did not increase. The 1962 convention at Port Huron, Michigan saw only 45 delegates in attendance.¹³ During this conference a man named Tom Hayden delivered a document titled, “The Port Huron Statement,” which outlined the ideology of the SDS. Burner says with regard to the conference at Lake Huron, “Out of it all came a signed document that at once reflected and embodied that early intellectual orientation of SDS and revealed the outlook of the left at a fleeting moment of

¹⁰ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 8.

¹¹ Ibid 8-9.

¹² Ibid 9.

¹³ Ibid 10.

American history.”¹⁴ The document outlines the flaws with American society. Its focus should be on human independence, not capitalism, said the statement. The statement also described poverty and nuclear threat not as evil but as a flaw in America’s claim to virtue. Burner writes, “Also central to the Statement is the concept of participatory democracy...” he continues to say that this idea is based on everyday life not in formal voting, but people that control their own thoughts and actions. He says this is the core of the new student left.¹⁵

The goals of the Port Huron Statement and the SDS included ideas besides civil rights and participatory democracy, although these goals and ideas were not always carried out. For example the SDS also supported women’s rights and the end of poverty but these efforts often ended in confusion or failure. In line with their ideas of social equality SDS led a women’s liberation movement in the late 60’s. However despite the ideas and position of the organization, many women were treated poorly at the 1967 National Convention. David Gilbert writes, “Such blatant hostility was shocking for an organization that always prided itself on siding with the oppressed.”¹⁶ SDS also organized an anti-poverty movement called the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP). The goal of ERAP was to build and interracial movement of the poor.¹⁷ However despite these organizing efforts success was limited. The values and class status of the SDS members and the lower class were much different. This contrast made it difficult for much progress to be made. The presence of SDS only improved

¹⁴ David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 152.

¹⁵ Ibid 152-154.

¹⁶ David Gilbert, *SDS/WUO, Students For A Democratic Society And The Weather Underground Organization*, Pmplt ed. (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press/Arm the Spirit, 2002), 13.

¹⁷ Ibid 12.

the situation of the poor communities slightly and the public and the media of the sixties consider their efforts a “flop”.¹⁸

The importance of the Port Huron statement can be seen when reviewing a quote from the Committee on Internal Security. “The convictions and analysis presented in The Port Huron Statement signified that SDS was committing itself to ‘the search for truly democratic alternatives’ to the present circumstances and its effort would involve social experimentation.”¹⁹ Despite the Port Huron Statement and the SDS’s favoring of socialism, the actual implementation of participatory democracy was difficult. *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement: Students for a Democratic Society* says, “It was socialist-inclined, but it was not favorably disposed toward communism. It was often critical of the way in which the government, business, and the decision makers of America operated, but it was not- at the outset- anti-establishment.”²⁰ The SDS moved from the issue of civil rights to women’s liberation and abolition of poverty to the Vietnam War.

The anti-war protest is commonly assumed to be the SDS’s only goal. This is due largely to their organization of the march on Washington, D.C. on April 17, 1965. The SDS’s initial response to other organizations pressuring them to march was to not do it. This was due in large part to its ideology of mass social change as opposed to focusing on a single issue. After much debate the SDS finally agreed to march on the Nation’s capital in protest of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. On April 17, 1965 15,000 to 25,000 showed up in Washington to protest. This event cemented the SDS as the main force of the New Left. However the march

¹⁸ Harvey Pekar, *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 10-11.

¹⁹ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 11.

²⁰ Ibid 13-14.

on Washington symbolized a significant departure for SDS, one that would lead to the rise and eventual failure of the organization.²¹

²¹ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 25-29.

SDS in the Late Sixties

The march on Washington propelled the SDS to a new place among the nation's youth. Three months after the march the number of local chapters climbed above 100 and the national enrollment grew to several thousands.²² The next two years (1966 & 67) were filled with growth and successful movements for the SDS. It organized a national anti draft movement and called for a rededication of students to participate in politics on campuses. This two-year period saw the creation of the Black Panthers (BPP) and the protest against numerous governmental ideas and policies.

In 1968, though, the SDS began to experience more difficulty than usual within its organization.²³ The Progressive Labor Party (PLP) and SDS came into conflict during 1968. SDS began to oppose the PLP and the Worker-Student Alliance (WSA) because of differences in ideology and implementation of policies. These two groups often worked with the SDS to organize events but they were not a part of the organization. These disputes eventually led to a stoppage of cooperation between the groups.²⁴ This disagreement was due in large fact to the SDS's National Offices desire to lead. This dispute resulted in a more structured ideology and regulation of SDS. Because of the actions of the National Office, the SDS was losing the support of the students on campuses across the nation.²⁵

²² David Gilbert, *SDS/WUO, Students For A Democratic Society And The Weather Underground Organization*, Pmplt ed. (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press/Arm the Spirit, 2002), 27.

²³ Ibid 27-29.

²⁴ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 78-81.

²⁵ Harvey Pekar, *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 38.

The split and the loss of student support spelled disaster for SDS and the continuation of its organization. The lack of commitment and poorly executed administration tactics of the SDS would lead to declining support. As time passed in the sixties more prominent groups gained support and stole the national spotlight for the SDS. These groups included the Weathermen Underground Organization (WUO), The Black Panthers (BPP), and the Republic of New Afrika (RNA).²⁶ These new movements started a time period of violent protest and resistance. The SDS lost membership over the issue of violence as a way to protest because they did not support it. All of these issues lead to the dissolution of the SDS in 1969.

The House of Representatives, Committee on Internal Security writes, "The differing views of tactics and objectives which had coexisted within the SDS organization in the past degenerated into a civil war when the national convention of SDS was held at the Chicago Coliseum June 18-22, 1969."²⁷ The conference resulted in a loss of members to competing organizations or none at all. After a major loss of members and the creation of the dominant WUO the SDS declared dead in 1969 by the *Guardian*, a leftist paper published in New York.²⁸ This eventual downfall can be contributed to early organization faults and unclear policies and ideals.

The lack of structure and conflicting ideas in SDS doctrine led to confusion and false impression of the organization by society. The general public often thought of the SDS as communists or an anarchist group. This notion had merit but was a misconception. The disorganization of the group made it hard to attract members and keep them involved in the

²⁶ David Gilbert, *SDS/WUO, Students For A Democratic Society And The Weather Underground Organization*, Pmplt ed. (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press/Arm the Spirit, 2002), 17-30.

²⁷ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 109.

²⁸ *The Guardian*, New York, October 18, 1969, p.10.

SDS. The lack of a solid idea or position also made SDS hard to understand or categorize. Many prominent figures in the SDS left due to lack of communication and disorganization. This was due to the fact that the National Office had little contact with its local chapters and the SDS idea of a decentralized organization. This resulted in a failure to reelect people to office within the SDS, especially in 1962 and 1963.²⁹ Gilbert says that often at National Conventions both the red (communist) and black (anarchist) flags were raised. He writes, "The challenge to hierarchy felt liberating, even if often chaotic and inefficient."³⁰

This chaotic and inefficient effort could have been avoided had the SDS employed a more structured system of association. The SDS had an important window of opportunity and missed it. The Committee of Internal Security says that it is important to understand the difference between the beginning of the organization and establishment of the SDS. Early on the SDS was anxious to use democracy to institute social change. However it never made the transition from unorganized concerned students to a group that would take charge and dominate other organizations and individuals.³¹ Had the SDS made this transition to organize and include other groups they may have been able to make it to the late 1960's and still dominate the national discussion. Due to their poor strategies and openness to numerous ideologies the SDS failed and made way for other groups.

Although the SDS failed in 1969 its support had increased during 1966 & 67. A large amount of New Left students began appearing across the nation on large and small campuses. The march on the Nation's capital on April 17, 1965 helped the SDS gain national attention as a

²⁹ Harvey Pekar, *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 9.

³⁰ David Gilbert, *SDS/WUO, Students For A Democratic Society And The Weather Underground Organization*, Pmplt ed. (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press/Arm the Spirit, 2002), 12.

³¹ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 13.

group that believed in change. Andrew Kopkind, a famous journalist of the sixties wrote about the student movement:

Its practitioners are almost all in their twenties (or younger), and their education and experience is not exceptional. But they have – perhaps uniquely in this generation – grasped the enormity of the contradictions in the American experience, and they have committed themselves to work for basic social changes.

Later in the article he says, “The most significant thing...is the development of a group of people with no previous political connections who are able to speak and act without being dependent upon higher-ups.”³² This idea of independence from control became popular in the early sixties and gained momentum on April 17, 1965.

This idea based on unrestricted reform attracted students throughout the sixties to SDS and other groups in favor of American reform. The idea of like-minded individuals can be seen in the National Constitution of SDS. The preamble of the constitution states,

Students for a Democratic Society are 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. It maintains a vision of a democratic society, where at all levels the people have control of the decisions, which affect them and the resources on which they are dependent. It seeks relevance through the continual focus on realities and on the programs necessary to effect change at the most basic levels of economic, political, and social organization. It feels the urgency to put forth a radical, democratic program counter posed to authoritarian movements both of Communism and the domestic Right.³³

When reviewing the SDS national constitution it is easy to see why the group gained support from young white Americans across the nation’s campuses. Article 3, Section 1 of the constitution states, “Membership is open to students, faculty and others who share the

³²Greg Doyle, University Acting 'in Loco Parentis', *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, April 27, 1967.

³³ Students for a Democratic Society, “National Constitution,” (June 1962)

http://www.antiauthoritarian.net/sds_wuo/sds_documents/sds_constitution.txt (accessed April 4, 2011).

commitment of the organization to democracy as a means and as a social goal.”³⁴ This statement is very inviting to students as well as anyone in support of democracy. The language used in this section implies that if you do not support the SDS you are not committed to democracy. The support of democracy and freedom is a big issue of the sixties because of the Cold War and the fear of communist influence in America.

The ideas of community, political engagement, and education interested students across the nation. However the idea that widespread support for protest and governmental reform was common among students is false. The student movement although, it had national attention, by 1965 only had 2.8% of the college student population involved in protesting or demonstrating.³⁵ This statistic includes all student organizations not just SDS. This statistic was printed after the march on Washington, which gained the SDS organization national attention and support from a larger group of students. However despite this extra attention the local chapters of SDS only increased to around 100 and the national membership grew to a several thousand.³⁶ The exact numbers of students involved varies from place to place but even after the media brought attention to SDS and the student movement only 150,000 students participated Nationwide. This may seem like a lot but there were 5.2 million college students nationwide during this year.³⁷ So, despite media attention across the Nation participation went up only slightly after the march on Washington on April 17, 1965.

³⁴ Students for a Democratic Society, “National Constitution,” (June 1962)

³⁵ Greg Doyle, University Acting 'in Loco Parentis', *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, April 27, 1967.

³⁶ David Gilbert, *SDS/WUO, Students For A Democratic Society And The Weather Underground Organization*, Pmplt ed. (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press/Arm the Spirit, 2002), 27.

³⁷ Greg Doyle, University Acting 'in Loco Parentis', *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, April 27, 1967.

SDS was often the subjects of news and media coverage. This coverage was most often negative. It covered the issue of sit-ins and anti-war protests while neglecting other issues the SDS was fighting for. However students interested in the movement or a part of it often started to see this and make a point of it. They believed SDS was a platform for positive change. Greg Doyle, a student at Wisconsin State University Eau Claire, wrote in *The Spectator*, "As is often done in our society, newsworthy events of bad nature are given priority over those that are commendable. The outstanding actions of those in SDS are not very often, if ever publicized."³⁸ These actions included the numerous anti war protests and the anti draft movement. It should be mentioned that Greg Doyle was not a member of the SDS. Despite negative media coverage between the years 1965 and 1967 the SDS increased its membership and brought awareness to the student movement.

Not only did the March gain SDS members but money as well. The Internal Security Committee writes, "Thanks to the success of the rally, local chapters increased in number and the SDS annual budget skyrocketed to \$60,000, enabling the national office staff to rise to 12 and obtain SDS's first printing press."³⁹ These new funds help promote the ideas of SDS and spread its thoughts to more people. However, while this time period was good for the SDS, the organization was still overrun by problems.

Many of these problems included the end of the communist exclusion policy, tension between LID and SDS, and communist infiltration of the SDS. David Gilbert, a member of SDS, said that the march on Washington led to the defining break between LID and SDS because the

³⁸ Greg Doyle, University Acting 'in Loco Parentis', *Spectator*, UW Eau Claire, April 27, 1967.

³⁹ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 29.

SDS defied the LID's orders to exclude communism.⁴⁰ During the June national convention in 1965 the SDS voted to remove the communist exclusion statement from its constitution. LID initially wanted this statement in the constitution to prevent a communist takeover of its student body organization.⁴¹ Harvey Pekar writes, "The convention removed a clause barring membership to individual communists. Enraged LID old-timers considered this practically the last straw, but to ordinary SDSers, it was no big deal."⁴² This move by the SDS resulted in tension between LID and SDS and their eventual separation on October 4, 1965. After this separation the SDS became increasingly vulnerable to communist supporters and members. Affiliation with two communist groups, W.E.B. DuBois Clubs and the M2M (May 2nd Movement), spelled trouble for SDS. These two groups wanted control of the organization. This caused problems with collaboration and struggles within SDS chapters. M2M was a student group of the Progressive Labor Party which would eventually result in the breakup of the SDS. In 1966 the PLP disbanded M2M and told all of its members to join SDS.⁴³ This affiliation with communist groups would also increase negative media coverage and increase distrust and misconception of SDS from the general public.

Although the years 1965, 66, and 67 proved useful for the SDS they also brought problems. The march on Washington brought an increase in numbers and revenue. However many of the new members of SDS were communist affiliated. New communist members included registered Communist party members and New Left Marxists. This was due to

⁴⁰ David Gilbert, *SDS/WUO, Students For A Democratic Society And The Weather Underground Organization*, Pmplt ed. (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press/Arm the Spirit, 2002), 11.

⁴¹ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 30.

⁴² Harvey Pekar, *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 14.

⁴³ Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives, *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*: (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970), 35-37.

communist infiltration of the SDS after the 1965 removal of the communist exclusion act from the SDS national constitution. The removal resulted in a split between SDS and its parent organization LID. This caused trouble and would hurt the standing of SDS among the student movement. This three-year period also brought negative media attention that increased the tension between the SDS and the general public. This combination of problems would eventually prove too much for the SDS and would result in a split in 1969 at the national convention.

WSU Eau Claire in 1967

As SDS gained national attention it spread to smaller communities and campuses. In 1967 the SDS gained attention on the Wisconsin State University Eau Claire campus. The sense of community helped the SDS gain participation from Eau Claire students. A SDS member in Eau Claire wrote a document titled, "Invitation to Join," which highlighted the intended goals of SDS. The first line reads, "Students for a Democratic Society 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." This document was published sometime around February of 1967. The last section of the "Invitation to Join," gives a time and place for a meeting to have SDS chartered on campus. The meeting was to take place on Thursday, February 9th, 1967 at 7:30 PM in Davies Theatre.⁴⁴ This meeting and the events to follow would affect SDS in Eau Claire in many ways. Also the aftermath of this meeting would involve faculty and the community of Eau Claire. The SDS often experience resistance or disapproval and this was not different in Eau Claire.

Weeks before the meeting the Eau Claire chapter of the SDS had been preparing a constitution to gain charter from the University. Charter simply means the group is allowed to meet and conduct club business on campus. This is an important thing to have and without it a student group would struggle to survive. The SDS national constitution was the cause of a lot of trouble for the SDS. Many members of the general public criticized it for being too broad and aimed at radicalism. Marvin Dickson, a history instructor at the university and a member of the

⁴⁴ *Invitation to Join SDS, 1967, 1.*

national SDS, organized the SDS chapter in Eau Claire. He organized the students early and helped attract students by laying the ideas of the SDS. Dickson and Edward Crapol were both members of the national organization and initial supporters for the SDS in Eau Claire. Crapol was a former teacher at UW Madison. The events at Madison could have had an effect on Crapol and Dickson. Dickson said in *The Spectator*, "The student movement has finally reached Eau Claire and the SDS in only 'organizing dissatisfaction' that is already present on campus." This article also quotes president Leonard Haas on the issue of the SDS on the Eau Claire campus.

Haas says that the SDS is not an issue because the group had not yet applied for a university charter. He also said that when they do the University had the right to grant or reject charter to the SDS. President Haas would delay the decision for charter based on SDS involvement in another part of Wisconsin. The SDS in La Crosse was denied a charter by the president of that university. Haas was waiting on the decision from Attorney General Bronson La Follette concerning the validity of the action taken against SDS in La Crosse by President Samuel Gates. The article in *The Spectator* quoted the La Crosse Student newspaper, *The Racquet*. Gates says, "It is most difficult for me to conceive of this university giving its approval and encouragement to an organization which nationally has made a mockery of law and orderly change."⁴⁵ The decision by the attorney general and the situation in La Crosse would undoubtedly affect president Haas and his decision to grant or deny SDS a university charter.

The meeting for university charter would only be delayed until March 13, 1967. The constitution of the SDS had to be accepted by the University Senate and then be sent to the

⁴⁵ Brenda Brenizer, "President Haas Delays Decision; Dickson Organizes Meeting," *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, February 9, 1967.

president for approval. On March 13, 1967 the University Senate passed the charter of SDS and the constitution with a vote of 11 to 7 on both issues.⁴⁶ Also a Student Senate vote was passed with a decision of 11 to 3. These results prove that the SDS had mixed support at its inception on the Eau Claire campus. The faculty and students involved in the vote had different feelings and judgments about SDS. The two main arguments against the SDS at this particular meeting were that gaining university charter was a privilege that should not be handed out to everyone and that the SDS would not follow university rules if given a charter. These concerns were not limited to faculty and students present on the University Senate either. Before the meeting to charter SDS many people spoke out against it. Elizabeth Morris, wife of vice president John Morris and an English professor at WSU Eau Claire stated in a letter to the editor in March 2nd edition of *The Spectator* that SDS was dangerous and a problem for the university. She also says in regards to the charter, "If SDS were merely a 'talking' group there would be no question about recognizing it. But SDS is not asking merely to given a hall. It is asking to be permitted to act in certain ways that would interfere seriously with the rights of other citizens to get the education they want."⁴⁷

The apprehension surrounding the SDS did not stop with faculty and staff. Members of the Eau Claire community had issues with the chartering of SDS as well. Often community members wrote letters to the editor; these were printed in both *The Spectator* and *the Daily Telegram*. Two community members wrote a letter to *The Daily Telegram* explaining the problems with the SDS. They quote J. Edgar Hoover directly by saying, "One of the most militant organizations whose engaged in protesting U.S. foreign policy is a student youth group

⁴⁶ University Senate Action on SDS Charter, March 13, 1967.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Morris, letter to the editor, *Spectator*, UW Eau Claire, March 2, 1967.

called the Students for a Democratic Society.”⁴⁸ They also describe the group as communist, radical, and subversive. Numerous letters to the editor can be found in both the *Spectator* and the *Daily Telegram*. These letters often urged for the denial of an SDS charter. Also many of the letters featured a plea by community members to help uphold strong educational values. Many even argued that the SDS was communist or violent. The viewpoints of faculty, students, and community members opposed to SDS were due largely to the mixed messages being sent by the SDS on a national and local level.

Despite the abundance of arguments against chartering the SDS from faculty and community members in Eau Claire campus there were also those that supported the charter of the student group. The majority of support for the SDS was present among students, but also small numbers of faculty and community members supported the students’ right to organize. The most common arguments for the chartering of the SDS in Eau Claire were the right to freedom of speech and organization. Students and faculty argued that regardless of the student’s beliefs it was their right to organize in a group no matter how the group was perceived. Greg Doyle a student at WSU Eau Claire wrote, “I do not belong to SDS and do not necessarily support the views of the organization. But the freedom to organize is as precious as the freedom of speech and should be denied to no one.”⁴⁹ This idea was also the basis for the position of the University Senate. The Senate says that it did not agree with the principles or programs of the SDS. It was quoted in *The Spectator* saying, “We are merely giving our support

⁴⁸ David Owen and David Hass, letter to the editor, *Daily Telegram, Eau Claire*, March 3, 1967.

⁴⁹ Greg Doyle, University Acting 'in Loco Parentis', *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, April 27, 1967.

to a right we felt was inherent in the United States Constitution.”⁵⁰ Students were not the only people to make an argument for the chartering of the SDS.

The sources show that a select number of faculty members urged that the SDS be given a charter. However there were a much larger number of faculty members opposed to the recognition of SDS than in favor. Howard Lutz, an Eau Claire professor, was one who argued that the SDS should be given recognition based on the principles of academic freedom found in the American Association of University Professors and the American Civil Liberties Union. He said it could not be assumed that National affiliation of the SDS would lead students on the Eau Claire campus irresponsible or disobedient. Lutz says, “Should they then engage in illegal or disruptive activities, they could always be disciplined according to due process. Denial of the charter would constitute prejudice.”⁵¹

Of all the faculty members present at this meeting on March 15, 1967 Professor Lutz is the only one that states a case for the charter of SDS on Eau Claire campus. President Haas and four other professors argued the recognition of the SDS would create more problems for the university than it would fix. Prof. Shipley argued that the SDS was violent and charter would be approving of this undignified expression. Professor Krause argues to support the community, which is against the SDS. Also arguments are made that recognition could affect budgets and money the university receives. Lutz urges the committee to see past community pressure when making an academic decision that affects the students of the University. Chairman Fay cited

⁵⁰ Pat Keegan, John Scheurman, “State of the U; Actions on SDS Explained,” *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, 1967

⁵¹ Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Minutes of the Special Meeting; March 15, 1967.

the National Constitution of the SDS as grounds for denying charter. The meeting was adjourned with no formal action being taken.⁵²

The majority of Dr. Lutz's arguments can be found in the *Academic Freedom and Civil Liberties of Students in Colleges and Universities* document. This pamphlet written in 1961 explains the procedures and responsibilities universities have with regards to students and their discipline. Lutz uses these ideas for the basis of his argument. The first section on student clubs states, "Students should be free to organize and join associations for educational, political, social, religious, or cultural purposes." It continues by saying, "The fact of affiliation with any extramural association or national organization or political party, so long as it is an open affiliation, should not of itself bar a group from recognition."⁵³

Lutz also emphasized the main points of this pamphlet when framing his argument. He focuses on free speech, association, and assembly; all of these rights appear in this document. Furthermore the document says all students should enjoy the rights that all citizens of America do. This includes the right to free speech, assembly, and the right to petition.⁵⁴ Finally Lutz maintains that the SDS should not be prejudged and should only be disciplined in the event of a violation. The disciplinary procedures in the Academic Freedom pamphlet state that the procedures stated are to be taken as a last resort, if nothing else works.⁵⁵ This point is the basis for Lutz's final argument that the SDS should be recognized and given a charter only to be punished if the group violates the rules and regulations of the University. These arguments also helped establish support for the SDS among a select number of people in the community.

⁵² Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Minutes of the Special Meeting; March 15, 1967.

⁵³ Some Selections on Student Rights, *Academic Freedom and Civil Liberties of Students in Colleges and Universities*; 1961.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The support for SDS could also be found in small amounts within the Eau Claire community. The Chippewa Valley chapter of the Wisconsin Civil Liberties Union (WCLU) created a document describing the importance of a SDS charter on the WSU of Eau Claire. The WCLU argues that the student movement has a deeper reason than immaturity, irresponsibility, and alienation.⁵⁶ The organization discussed the issues surrounding the student movement and the causes and proposed solutions to the WSU Eau Claire. They finish their document by saying, “We encourage the establishment of meaningful channels of communication between administration, faculty, and students.”⁵⁷

Despite the support of faculty and community members the vast majority of support for the SDS still came from the students of the University. Arguments from students also cover a wider range than freedom of speech or the right to organize. One student cited the group’s objectives as grounds for a charter. He argued for the SDS based on its previous work with the EARP, its concept of participatory democracy, and the lack of communist ideology in the group. He says, “The ideology in SDS is idealism which isn’t an ideology at all. The members of Students for a Democratic Society are idealists who believe in openness and honesty.”⁵⁸

These arguments and sources show that there was support for the SDS in Eau Claire in 1967. With support from students, faculty, and some community members the SDS gained attention and wished to obtain a university charter. However despite this support the decision of the administration would emphasize the larger distrust and fear of the SDS being chartered on WSU Eau Claire campus. The decision would also affect the SDS actions on campus.

⁵⁶ Chippewa Valley Civil Liberties Union, Statement on Campus Demonstrations; 1967.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ B S, letter to the editor, *Daily Telegram, Eau Claire*, March 4, 1967.

The Decision

The student support for the SDS would make no difference when president Haas denied the charter on March 23, 1967. The community and faculty of Eau Claire undoubtedly influenced President Haas. This can be said based on the minutes from the meeting on April 15, 1967. Despite the views of Howard Lutz the majority of faculty members on the committee were opposed to the chartering of SDS as cited before. Many of the professors were opposed to the recognition of SDS because of the assumption that the SDS was a violent organization. The SDS had been granted a charter on both the Kent State campus and UW Madison. The stories of these universities were well known for violence, on said campuses. The other reason President Haas gave was the pressure from outside sources. He is unsure about if the faculty should be involved in the process of gaining a University charter and was concerned with keeping the Eau Claire community happy.

The process and actions surrounding this decision angered the students of the SDS. The decision to deny charter to SDS on WSU of Eau Claire caused the publication of a document titled SDS the Spirit of Resistance on April 18th of that year. This document detailed the actions taken by the Senate and President Haas. The document is broken down into five sections; the Mockery of Law, Paternalism and the Arrogance of Power, Guilt by Association, Legal Action, and Continuing the Program of SDS.⁵⁹ Each section uses the decisions made by the university to focus on problems within society, that need to be changed, which is the focus of SDS.

⁵⁹ Gary Dickson, *SDS: The Spirit of Resistance*, April 18, 1967.

Gary Dickson, chairman of the Drafting Committee, mocked the unwritten rules of the university. He described the treatment of students as implied contempt, and as being controlled by unwritten rules of tradition. He also said, “The veto of SDS expresses this attitude and this contempt perfectly. Students must be protected from the real world, from making real decisions, for that implies the terror of freedom – which student might find more intoxicating than beer.” This document also shows the effect the community had on the decision made by president Haas. Chairman Dickson refers to Haas’s actions as giving into the distortions made against the SDS by the media and the community. He thinks it shows a lack of character and is legally against the law.⁶⁰

There is a large section that describes the legal issues with the decision:

We have been denied the equal protection of the laws; we have been discriminated against without due process. The LaFollette opinion of February 28 (1967) supports us by insisting: “A university president may, in the exercise of his discretionary authority, grant a charter to some student organizations and deny one to others. His decision in this respect, however, must be based upon distinctions which are real and not fancied. He may not act arbitrarily, capriciously or unreasonably.” The Attorney General further maintains: “When an action by a state official discriminates between different organizations the burden is on that official to establish that there is a reasonable basis for that discrimination.”⁶¹

This statement is pointing towards the fact that president Haas was not making a valid argument for the rejection of the SDS charter in Eau Claire. President Haas’s reasons for banning the SDS were taken from the WSU La Crosse document that was written by its President, Samuel Gates. The Attorney General is quoted in the document talking about the Gates decision, “This statement contains mainly conclusions and does not establish the facts

⁶⁰ Gary Dickson, *SDS: The Spirit of Resistance*, April 18, 1967.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

necessary to sustain this action by the president.” Gary Dickson follows by saying, “SDS rests its case with the U.S. Constitution, mainly the 14th Amendment.”⁶²

Further evidence of the legal issues surrounding the decision was made evident in a paper written by a WSU Eau Claire professor. Morton Sipress, a Political Science professor, wrote a paper on March 23, 1967 that was supposed to appear in *The Spectator* but it did not because of editorial decisions. It was instead sent from Sipress to Professor Lutz. The paper stresses the legal issues that surround the conclusion by President Haas. Sipress starts his paper by saying, “Apparently the whole debate over SDS is becoming clouded with emotionalism. While SDS’s stated goals and methods have aroused numerous emotional outbursts of support and opposition, the very important legal aspects have been neglected.”⁶³

Sipress uses the body of his paper to site relevant Supreme Court cases that deal directly with free speech or the right to assemble. He highlights the ruling of *Schenek v. U.S.* in 1919. This case laid down the ideal of, “a clear and present danger.” This states that the government can only prevent the freedom of speech when there is a clear and present danger that congress has the right to prevent. Sipress sites another Supreme Court case, this time in the year of 1958. *The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) v. Alabama* further solidified the relationship between the freedom of speech and the right to assemble. This case also stated that the freedom of speech and the right to association are both rights that are protected by the constitution.⁶⁴

⁶² Gary Dickson, *SDS: The Spirit of Resistance*, April 18, 1967.

⁶³ Morton Sipress, *SDS and the Constitution*; WSU Eau Claire, March 23, 1967, 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid* 1-3.

The Sipress article continues to say, "The constitutional doctrine that one can draw from these cases is that government may not infringe upon freedom of speech, assembly and association without extremely good reasons to do so."⁶⁵ The paper argues that the SDS charter should not be denied because the Eau Claire chapter of the student group showed no threat of clear and present danger. Sipress continues by saying that even though the SDS wished to challenge functions and methods of education at the University this was not grounds for exclusion from a charter. He concludes by saying that banning the group may effectively repress the mentally interesting ideas of the SDS.⁶⁶ This document foreshadows the eventual legal action taken by the Eau Claire SDS.

After recognition was denied to the SDS the group consulted with the Wisconsin Civil Liberties Union. The Spirit of Resistance written by the drafting committee and Dickson explains the legal precedence of SDS's argument. They base their argument on freedom of speech and the right to organize. The organization also argues that there is no reason to deny the charter. The SDS also refused to quit, Dickson says, "We have appealed to the Board of Regents and intend to exhaust all our legal means of redress."⁶⁷ The ideas of the SDS continued to play an important role on the WSU of Eau Claire despite a lack of support from the Eau Claire community and faculty. The group continued to take necessary actions to obtain a university charter. The students on the Eau Claire campus continued to participate in SDS and influence campus life during this time by continuing the attempt to gain a charter and gain membership. However despite these efforts the SDS would not gain a charter from the University.

⁶⁵ Morton Sipress, *SDS and the Constitution*; WSU Eau Claire, March 23, 1967, 3.

⁶⁶ *ibid* 2-4.

⁶⁷ Gary Dickson, *SDS: The Spirit of Resistance*, April 18, 1967.

Despite their best efforts the SDS was denied a university charter from the administration at the Eau Claire campus. The decision made by Haas can be explained by outside influences. The pressure from community members and faculty pushed Haas to deny the right of charter to the SDS. Furthermore he was influenced by other events of the time period including the denial of the charter to SDS at La Crosse by President Gates. Furthermore the events at UW Madison during the early part of the sixties could have affected Haas's decision in 1967. This decision was viewed by some as a success and by others as a denial of constitutional rights.

Conclusion

The early rise of the SDS was based on the struggles and problems that white middle class students considered to be the major problem with American society and structure. The organization had its roots in early 1900's socialist labor movements whose goal was to perpetuate the status of white middle class working males. The early topics of the Students for a Democratic Society were racism and segregation, soon to be followed by the anti-draft movement and the Vietnam War. The SDS effectively made a statement on these issues in different ways and used them to structure a group that was based on change. The SDS was said to represent the New Left in the sixties.

While this organization did gain national attention for the issues it addressed it often garnered negative attention due to its lack of organization and structure. Often the SDS was criticized for being a communist organization, or affiliated with communism. This idea has some truth as well as some ignorance. While the SDS was not explicitly anti-communist there was nothing in the constitution that said they supported communism. However due to this label and the eventual removal of the Communist Exclusion premise the general public often viewed the SDS as a student group that was overrun by communists and their ideas. This common misconception and the negative media attention earned the SDS a bad reputation.

The SDS often gained attention due to negative media images that were reproduced by mass media. It was Greg Doyle who said that often media would focus on the negative and ignore the positive.⁶⁸ This created another reason for misconception and anti-SDS attitudes to

⁶⁸ Greg Doyle, University Acting 'in Loco Parentis', *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, April 27, 1967.

develop within the communities of America. The perceived violence and disrespect caused many people of the general public to fear the SDS as well as the student movement.

This was no different in Eau Claire on the campus of the Wisconsin State University. The SDS here had never done anything violent or disrespectful to warrant suspicion from the general public. However, despite not doing anything many of the community members spoke out when the SDS applied for university charter. Many citizens wrote letters to the newspapers urging that the SDS be stopped. Many encouraged the removal of the SDS due to violence and problems elsewhere across the country. Other community and faculty members declared them to be focused on communism and not democracy, as the national constitution claimed. These fears pressured President Haas into denying the SDS a charter. This happened despite the support of students that encouraged free speech. Also the charter was denied despite the plea of a select number of professors urging that the SDS be given a charter based on academic freedom and principles.

The misconceptions of the general public and the pressures they caused outweighed the concerns of students and faculty members on the Eau Claire campus. The SDS charter was denied and the group failed to progress further. Shortly after this the SDS broke apart on a national scale at the Chicago convention in 1969. This would be the end of the SDS but the student movement would continue through 1969 and into the 1970's.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

B. S., letter to the editor, *Daily Telegram, Eau Claire*, March 4, 1967.

This letter to the editor was used to show support for the SDS from students. The author states the misconceptions about the SDS and then argues against them. The letter served as a useful source when forming an argument around the student support for the SDS on the Wisconsin State University Eau Claire.

Brenizer, Brenda, "President Haas Delays Decision; Dickson Organizes Meeting," *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, February 9, 1967.

This article was very useful. It explained Marvin Dickson and his affiliation with the SDS in Eau Claire. It helped me identify important problems President Haas would face in the coming weeks. Furthermore it gave me insight into a similar situation that was occurring at the Wisconsin State University La Crosse. This article helped me establish two faculty members that supported the SDS as well.

Chippewa Valley Civil Liberties Union, Statement on Campus Demonstrations; 1967.

This brief document showed the collaboration between the SDS and the Chippewa Valley Union. The union urged the SDS to do something about the denial of a charter. They also said they would help the SDS.

Committee on Internal Security and U.S. House of Representatives. *Anatomy of a Revolutionary Movement*. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1970.

This house report printed in 1970 helped me establish a lot background information for my paper. It served as a good source because of the time it was published. It served as a useful background reference but also gave me an insight into the attitudes towards SDS in the sixties. The book had lots of useful quotes that helped me construct a more solid argument.

Dickson, Gary, *SDS: The Spirit of Resistance*, April 18, 1967.

This document was written after the denial of the charter to the SDS. It served useful because it showed the actions taken by the SDS. The document describes legal problems with the administrations decision and its plan to take legal action in order to gain a university charter on the Eau Claire capus.

Doyle, Greg, University Acting 'In Loco Parentis', *Spectator, Eau Claire WI*, April 27, 1967.

Doyle's article highlights why people mistrust and fear the SDS. He is not a member of the SDS but still shows support for the idea of free speech and the right to organize. This article was helpful because it contained some helpful statistics about student participation in the student movement that strengthened my arguments about the SDS. I also used quotes from Doyle to show that even non member students supported the SDS.

Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Minutes of the Special Meeting; March 15, 1967.

This document played a major role in the Decision section of my capstone. This document helped me form and argument about the opinions and attitudes of the faculty at Eau Claire. The minutes had detailed reasons why each member of the faculty did not want the SDS to gain a charter.

The, *Guardian, New York*, October 18, 1969.

This article was referenced in a different source. I found it and used it to explain how the SDS failed in 1969.

Hass, David and Owen, David, letter to the editor, *Daily Telegram, Eau Claire*, March 3, 1967.

This letter to the editor was used to show that some Eau Claire community members did not support the SDS or the charter they were seeking. This source cited lines from a J. Edgar Hoover document about the problems and violence that the SDS breeds. This document helped me build a contrast between supporters and those opposed to the SDS.

Invitation to Join SDS, 1967.

This short document highlighted why the SDS was a good student group to be a part of. It also listed a meeting time to get the SDS chartered at the university.

Keegan, Pat and Scheurman, John, "State of the U; Actions on SDS Explained," *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, 1967.

This article explains the Student Senate's actions on the SDS decision. The article explains that the Student Senate passed the charter and President Haas would then decide if it would be approved. This article also helped me build the idea of student support for the SDS on campus.

Morris, Elizabeth, letter to the editor, *Spectator, UW Eau Claire*, March 2, 1967.

This letter written by Elizabeth Morris stresses her fear of the SDS. She is unsure of the SDS's intentions and states this as a cause for denial.

Sipress, Morton, *SDS and the Constitution*; WSU Eau Claire, March 23, 1967.

This unpublished paper was to appear in *The Spectator* but never did due to editorial decisions. The paper outlines legal cases that strongly relate to the denied charter of the SDS.

Some Selections on Student Rights, *Academic Freedom and Civil Liberties of Students in Colleges and Universities*; 1961.

This document is the basis for Howard Lutz's arguments to approve the SDS charter. He uses these ideas to highlight the importance of free speech and the right to assemble and organize. He was also a member of the American Association of University Professors.

Students for a Democratic Society, "National Constitution," (June 1962)

http://www.antiauthoritarian.net/sds_wuo/sds_documents/sds_constitution.txt

(accessed April 4, 2011).

I used the national constitution to better understand the SDS as well as figure out why it was inviting to young college students during the 1960's. The constitution also served as a good informational tool when reviewing the structure and organization of the SDS itself.

University Senate Action on SDS Charter, March 13, 1967.

This source played a major role in the Decision section of the capstone. It included details about the vote and the reasons behind it. This helped me strengthen my arguments even more and build a strong conclusion about the SDS in Eau Claire and the reasons for the denial of the charter.

Secondary Sources

Anderson, Terry H. *The movement and the sixties: protest in America from Greensboro to*

Wounded Knee. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

This book covered more areas than I needed to for this paper but it was helpful because it gave me a better understanding of the sixties. It helped me build a context for my paper and tie it all together so it would fit with the time period I was writing about.

Burner, David. *Making Peace with the 60's*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

This book is a famous piece of literature that deals with the sixties in America. It had information about the SDS that I used to establish the background of the paper. It also helped me form my argument about communism and the eventual downfall of the SDS.

Cullen, Neil Henderson. *Students for a Democratic Society: a history and analysis of a group of the student left*. Cornell: Cornell University, 1968.

Henderson's book helped me better understand the SDS as a student group in the sixties. I knew some information before picking this topic but this book helped me narrow it down and identify a direction for my paper.

Gilbert, David. *SDS/WUO, Students for a Democratic Society and the Weatherman Underground Organization*. Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press, 2002.

This book featured first hand accounts as well as additional information. It had good information about specific events and how each event affected the SDS. This was a helpful source when discussing the April 17, 1965 march on Washington and the National Conventions of the SDS.

Pekar, Harvey, Gary Dumm, and Paul Buhle. *Students for a Democratic Society: a graphic history*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2008.

This graphic history offered a new and interesting perspective to learning about the SDS. The book featured stories from former members. Also it had illustrations and accounts of events that happened during the time of the SDS. This book helped me build my background section and describe the problems SDS would have and how this would lead to the break of SDS in 1969.