

May 1, 1965

I want to insert a couple of comments in this worklist to suggest a little bit more about the tone of the post-March National Council and to urge some of the other people who attended that meeting to share their impressions of what happened. There were two particularly exciting parts to the NC. The first was the general discussion and debate on Vietnam followup which was excellent and raised a long list of questions which need desperately to be raised in each of the chapters and communities where there has been any interest in the war. The NC decided, as the worklist reported last week, that highlights of that discussion should be transcribed and distributed at once. Given the burdens on everybody, "at once" is still a couple of weeks away. In the meantime, local groups really do need to be urged to consider strategically what SDS should be doing about Vietnam, locally as well as nationally. This is not simply a question of what tactic is most effective as the next point in protest; instead the time has come for basic thinking about how we are organizing around the issue. What people are we reaching and how deeply are they being involved. What kind of pressure is needed to end the war and do we really think we can generate it. What possibilities are there for local programs that extend beyond the groups we have thus far reached--and more. The transcripts of the NC debate will help in clarifying some of these questions as well as others, but the point is that people really ought not to wait. The May 9th meeting will not accomplish what it is supposed to unless the representatives from various locals have a sense of what local sentiment is, e.g. do people really want massive civil disobedience as the next step or should we work with much more local, grass roots kinds of organizing approaches. If broadly based meetings to discuss follow-up have not been held already, they should be scheduled this week if possible.

The second exciting element about the meeting was that in small, informally organized working groups of the National Council people discussed at great length a number of the difficult areas that SDS has to deal with and had the kinds of conversations that were creative in describing and thinking about those problems. The reason so little of that appeared in the formal statement of the decisions of the NC is simply because it is difficult to implement many of those decisions. For example the need for intensified internal education in SDS is not something that you can codify. On the other hand one group talked about that problem for a day and a half and came up with an excellent understanding of what needs to be done--some of which is reflected in Robb Burlage's report and suggestions on the Convention--one small portion of the ground the internal education group covered. Other discussions on foreign policy, Vietnam follow-up, University reform and a free university, organizational structure and democracy, and the Mississippi challenge were also productive of a great body of information and inspiration which now needs to be shared. Burlage's letter on the Convention should be an example of ten or fifteen letters that can now be written because of the NC. If people fail to do that, much of the relevance of those discussions to the organization they were about will be lost. In short, this is a plea to people who were at the NC to assume more responsibility for reporting the kinds of discussions that were held in sufficient detail so that other people can pick up those questions.

Paul Potter
President

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