

New student group emerges

By RICHARD SACKS

A serious split occurred at the meeting of the continuations committee of the Student Mobilization Committee (SMC) held in New York June 29. The SMC was the sponsor of the April 26 International Student Strike and was a broad coalition of campus and high school peace activists.

The continuations committee meeting was called to try to iron out political differences which existed within the organization. The months previous to the meeting were marked by a continual polarization of the group into two camps.

One camp was represented by the Trotskyite Young Socialist Alliance (YSA), youth group of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), and the other was represented by the independents in the organization. The polarization took place because of the actions and tactics of the Trotskyite faction.

Majority position

The position which probably had the most support from the broad masses of students represented in the SMC were the proposals of the "independent caucus" at the meeting. The independents called for "radical programs involving mass demonstrations and local organizing." The themes of the action would be immediate withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam, an end to the draft and encouragement of draft resistance, an immediate end to university complicity with the war, and support for the struggle for black liberation. The independents felt that there was an intimate relationship between these issues and the war.

The YSA-SWP faction opposed these proposals. They wanted the SMC to remain a single-issue organization. They accused the independents of "trying to derail the anti-war movement."

Far from "derailing" the movement, the independents' proposals would have strengthened it by making struggle against the war directly relevant to people's lives. They would have made it possible for a wide struggle against the war to develop by coordinating organizing on the local and national levels.

Into the streets

The Trotskyites opposed the proposals because they conflicted with their line of "getting people into the streets," that is, of large mobilizations only.

One YSAer said, "You don't struggle for the minds of people but you get them to struggle against imperialism." The independents recognized the relationship between these two struggles, maintaining that the struggle must be for both if either is to be accomplished. Putting YSA's attitude into practice means having people struggle, but not letting them know what the struggle is about.

The Trotskyites were, in effect, demanding that the movement blindly submit to their leadership, in theory and in practice. In practice, the two Trotskyites on the working committee of the SMC continually flouted the decisions of the majority of that committee, refused to implement those decisions when the office they held required it, and they instead put

forward their own political line in SMC posters, publications etc.

The rest of the working committee recognized the exclusionary and undemocratic nature of the actions of the Trotskyites and fired them on those grounds. Then YSA hypocritically screamed that the working committee was the one being exclusionary.

No political discussion

Unfortunately, no real political discussion took place at the meeting because of the Trotskyite attempt to directly control in the most undemocratic way, the policies of the SMC.

The June 29 meeting was composed of about 400 people, slightly less than 200 independents, and slightly more than 200 YSA-SWP. The Trotskyites had brought as many of their members and supporters as they could and as a result controlled an absolute majority at the meeting, despite the fact that they are actually but a tiny fraction of the movement.

Delegates to the conference were chosen in the weeks preceding by their local organizations, and their composition reflected the composition of the movement — that is, the Trotskyites were a small minority. But they were determined to dictate their own terms to the SMC.

By a procedural gerrymander, and by packing the convention, they were able to challenge the democratically elected delegates and force the election of a new credentials committee to review the delegates.

Everyone a delegate

The new committee of six contained 5 Trotskyites and one independent. The "majority" report of the committee stated that 60 delegates had been challenged by the committee and since time did not allow a complete review, everyone at the convention would be considered a delegate.

This proposal would have turned the conference over to a small minority.

Every independent, with few exceptions, was against these exclusionist and elitist tactics. Linda Morse, SMC staff member, declared, "I'm not going to stay if this proposal passes."

A leader of the high school caucus said, "The high school caucus is not going to stay in this undemocratic organization." It was clear that if the Trotskyites forced a vote, the movement would be split. They did, and the independents walked out.

The independents met that night and the following morning to plan a course of action. Many questions faced them. Was a new organization needed? What kind of organization?

The group thinking was close to the proposals the independent caucus made at the conference. One person said, "The important thing is hitting at those things which directly affect

people's lives."

A provisional group of co-ordinator-organizers, based in Philadelphia, was chosen to work and travel in the next two months so that a new organization would evolve by the time school opens again in the fall.

It seems that the best strategy the group can take is the four-point program endorsed by the independent caucus which embraced both mobilizing and local organizing. There is an objective need for such a movement today among youth.

The existing organizations, SMC and Students for a Democratic Society only mobilize and only organize. But if the independents who walked out of SMC and who saw the need for organization and mobilization could found such an organization, it could bring masses of people together for the first time on a local and national basis. That could be the starting point for a truly mass anti-war, anti-imperialist movement in this country.