

“A Change in Consciousness”: The Penn State Students for a Democratic Society and the Neil Buckley Document Collection

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Courtesy of The Pennsylvania State University Archives



Penn State students protesting outside the university's Old Main Administration Building.

Background

Eric Walker, President of the Pennsylvania State University from 1957 to 1970, recalled the incipient rumblings of student unrest when they first echoed in locations far removed from his tranquil campus: “It started like a long, low, roll of thunder, far in the distance, in a storm that could not possibly reach us. From California came news of something called the SDS, the Students for a Democratic Society, who were demanding, mostly at the University of California in Berkeley, a say in the governance of the university.”¹ SDS was the primary force in the students’ rebellion against autocratic, patriarchal policies at universities, which swept through America in the 1960s. As a rural school, isolated from major metropolitan areas and situated in the conservative town

of State College, Penn State seemed an unlikely candidate for an outpost of this left-wing movement. Yet, a devoted group of students worked throughout the late sixties to develop an active Penn State SDS, building a protest village called "Walkertown" beneath the graceful elms that lined their campus and staging rowdy protests in front of the stately administration building, Old Main. A case study of the SDS experience at Penn State reveals the major issues which penetrated the physical isolation and entrenched traditions of a large state university to compel its students to demonstrate and protest.

Although located in traditionally conservative State College, Pennsylvania, the Penn State SDS manifested the values and ideals of the national movement. The founders of the national SDS began as student members of the League for Industrial Democracy, a left-wing social democratic group. In 1962, the students pulled away from their parent organization to form the SDS. Gathering at the AFL-CIO's wooded FDR camp at Port Huron, Michigan, sixty members met to craft a manifesto for their movement. Its major themes included a belief that personal politics were important, that the individual could make a difference, and that direct action based upon a personal commitment by individuals was the way to effect change. The heart of its message was a call for a new kind of democracy:

We would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason and creativity. As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that the society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation...politics should have the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community, thus being a necessary, though not sufficient, means of finding meaning in personal life.²

The movement gained in strength over the next couple of years, establishing chapters across the country. It became more prominent after an outburst of activism at the University of California at Berkeley in the fall of 1964. Berkeley students questioned the relevance of their curriculum, their alienation from faculty and administrators, and their lack of input toward shaping university policy. They demanded that they, not the administration, should govern their lives outside of the classroom. In 1965, a major anti-war march in Washington, D.C., garnered more popularity for SDS. These events gained the attention of the media and, consequently, the interest of thousands of students and new members seeking organization in their personal battles against the bureaucratized university and the war in Vietnam. Meanwhile, at Penn State, the ostensibly serene campus was nurturing seeds of sympathy for the burgeoning SDS movement.

Throughout the sixties, Penn State students were mostly Pennsylvania residents from middle and working class families. Between 1964 and 1969, the number of undergraduates at Penn State grew from 16,200 to 22,500. A survey of freshmen in 1968 revealed that 39 percent characterized their father's occupation as "laborer," 23 percent as "small businessman," and 14 percent as "professional."³ During these years, the students and faculty were both tightly clasped in the firm grip of the administration. President Walker fondly described the situation:

Warnock was the dean of men, and his word was law. If he said a student was out, a student was out. Hearings were very brief and protests weren't allowed. Marquart, the registrar...could tell the faculty what it could do and what it couldn't do. And Dean Weston, with her Victorian ideas, ruled over her 'little flower buds' with an iron hand. Any mother sending her daughter to Penn State could be assured that she would be kept from all harm and would have only pure white thoughts.⁴

Women were prohibited from living off campus or even visiting men's apartments, while men were forbidden to enter the women's dormitories or gymnasiums. Curfews were enforced.⁵ These parietal rules and the paternalistic attitude that the university adopted toward its students created a strict environment. Although some students had always found this atmosphere stifling, the majority passively accepted it as a condition of higher education. The typical Penn State student, asserted Undergraduate Student Government President Robert Katzenstein in 1966, "is passive, conscientious, law abiding, responsible and ultraconservative. He is content to study, date, and perform the rituals of existence."⁶

While the majority of students appeared content, isolated groups were forming to protest both the *in loco parentis* policies as well as larger issues of war and racism. In 1965, Carl Davidson, a graduate student in philosophy, formed the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Freedom which attracted one thousand nominal members, drew up a students' bill of rights, and had it passed by the Undergraduate Student Government. At the end of that school year, Davidson left Penn State to take a position as a philosophy instructor at the University of Nebraska. But by 1966, some members of his group had chartered themselves as a student organization, SDS.⁷ That August, Davidson ascended to a position of national significance when he became nationwide vice-president of SDS. From this position he steered the movement towards a grass-roots orientation, striving to energize local chapters to focus on local grievances.⁸ As a national officer, Davidson also strove to counter radical students from the elite universities who rejected his populist goal of building an ideologically inclusive, non-violent peace movement which would join

working-class youths and white ethnics.⁹ Davidson maintained close contact with his friends at Penn State, encouraging them to develop the chapter.

In the 1966-1967 school year, the major activities of the Penn State SDS included organizing a state wide convention, holding a sit-in at Eric Walker's office, and staging a "bake-in." The convention focused on topics like student power, anti-war activities, and community organization. The event drew national attention. Greg Calvert and Carl Davidson, SDS national officers, both came to State College to speak at the convention. "It turned out damn near everyone in the national SDS leadership on the east coast decided to attend as well,"¹⁰ a participant noted. The sit-in began when Walker did not respond to an SDS letter demanding to know if he would reveal their names to the House Un-American Activities Committee as other university presidents had done. Covered and analyzed in *The Collegian* and *The Centre Daily Times*, the sit-in engendered public controversy. It also disrupted the activities of President Walker and his staff for several days. The bake-in occurred during the HUAC protest when some members decided that "Walker did not love enough and was not used to any kindness from the power structure." Nine large freedom cookies were baked and decorated with messages such as "it's MY life," "NO HUAC," or "Student Freedom."¹¹ These and other events from the SDS's early years are examined in greater depth in the descriptions of the documents which follow.

These activities laid the groundwork for the more intense protests that followed between 1968 and 1970. By this time the doctrine of *in loco parentis* had been slightly modified by action from the Undergraduate Student Government. But women were still forbidden to live off campus or to receive male visitors. However, the prime impetus for a major protest was the severe housing crisis that plagued the University in 1968. At the beginning of the fall semester, over 800 students were squeezed into cramped recesses in the study lounges and recreation rooms that served as temporary housing, while another 400 were still seeking apartments off-campus.¹² This situation prompted SDS to set up "Walkertown" on the lawn outside of Old Main. Walkertown was a small group of tents, pitched by students, some homeless, some not, who were hoping to prompt the university to do something about the housing problem. However, during the two week encampment, Walkertown came to represent more than just the housing problem.

Students constructed a platform near the windows of Walker's office, where student speakers aired their grievances, including the war in Vietnam and the draft. They gained widespread appeal when they focused on the problems of everyday life at Penn State which concerned large numbers of students. They demanded a university bookstore, co-educational visits in the residence halls, the right for women to live off campus, and student voting representation in the University Senate. On nice fall days, as many as 500 people gathered around

Courtesy of The Pennsylvania State University Archives



"Walkertown," an encampment on Old Main lawn to protest the housing crisis at Penn State.

the little settlement. They were drawn not only by the rhetoric but by the adventure and fun. "A carnival atmosphere prevailed," writes Penn State Historian, Michael Bezilla. "Rock bands performed, alcoholic beverages were consumed openly, and the scent of marijuana wafted through the crowd."¹³ This popular event thrust SDS into the spotlight of student activism, where it remained for the next couple of years.

In October, 1968, on the day of the home football game with Army, SDS members staged an anti-war "lie-in" in the driveway of President Walker's home. They were protesting the visit of Army Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland who was making a social call on Walker.¹⁴ Then relative calm prevailed until February, 1969, when SDS invited Jerry Rubin, head of the Youth International Party, to visit Penn State. Rubin spoke to an overflowing crowd of two thousand students in the HUB Ballroom. He mentioned the conflicts at from other campuses which occurred the previous spring and asked when he would see the headline: "At Penn State, students have seized the administration building."¹⁵ The students provided a prompt answer.

A crisis had already been brewing when the SDS joined with the black rights activists in the Douglass Association to form the Steering Committee to Reform the University and issued a series of non-negotiable demands to President Walker. These demands included off-campus living quarters for women,

Courtesy of The Pennsylvania State University Archives



SDS members demonstrating outside Penn State President Eric Walker's home to protest a visit by General William Westmoreland.

eliminating academic credit for ROTC, banning military recruitment and research from campus, building a student bookstore, and giving students more say in university affairs. When they had not received any response by their deadline, the afternoon of February 24, about 400 members of the Steering Committee and their sympathizers marched into Old Main and refused to leave the building. Police were called in, and a counter rally began outside as other students gathered to protest the occupation. The original demonstrators left the building by ten o'clock that night but their behavior was not forgotten. The administration imposed academic probation on four of the SDS leaders who had been present and threatened to come down hard on future attempts to invade Penn State property.¹⁶

By spring, 1969, the campus had settled down. SDS staged several small protests against military recruitment. The Young Americans for Freedom, a conservative group, obtained a court order against them for disturbing the recruitment tables in the student union building.¹⁷ There was a minor stand-off between SDS and YAF in May, 1969, during an SDS demonstration at the Old Main flag pole. SDS members wanted the flag flown at half mast to show solidarity for a Berkeley bystander killed by police fire during a protest.¹⁸ None of these events drew large crowds.

Ironically, during these relatively peaceful months, the administration finally succumbed to many of the popular demands of the students. Student representatives were installed on the University Senate and the parietal housing rules were abandoned. Women moved off campus, and individual dorms were free to establish their own visitation policies.¹⁹ Although many of the more popular grievances had been obviated, fundamental aspects of the University bureaucracy continued to incite SDS members. In addition, the immediate threats of the draft and Vietnam War were moving closer to students in State College.

On October 15, 1969, national anti-war groups proclaimed a moratorium day of peaceful protest against the war. At Penn State, over four thousand candle-carrying students, faculty, and townspeople joined an orderly march through campus to the Garfield Water Tunnel to peacefully protest the war. A later moratorium, on April 15, 1970, was not non-violent.

The spring moratorium drew only about 500 people who, led by the SDS, entered Old Main with a new list of demands for President Walker. These included open enrollment for anyone seeking higher education, an end to all University connections with the military, and a halt to the University's alleged suppression and intimidation of students. The students occupied the building. When the sheriff arrived to read an injunction, they grew hostile and began kicking in doors and causing other damage. The situation grew progressively worse as state police arrived and began taking students into custody on buses parked in front of the building. The officers and captive students were met with taunts, jeers, and pelts from rocks, bricks, and glass. The student body was outraged by the presence of state troopers on their campus. Twenty four students were arrested and the police remained on call at Beaver Stadium.²⁰

Chaos broke out across campus. A boycott of classes was declared by the USG to protest the presence of the police and to support the students who had been arrested. SDS members attempted to enter Old Main and declare it "strike headquarters" for the boycott of classes, but were frightened off by the police injunction. Conditions deteriorated even further when news of the Kent State massacre on May 4 reached the Penn State community. All classes were officially canceled for the remaining two weeks of the semester and replaced with informal discussion to focus on "timely topics."²¹

The order and routine of the Pennsylvania State University crumbled in the spring of 1970, as activists, students, faculty, and administrators attempted to cope with the violence they found in Vietnam, Kent State, and, ultimately, the sprawling lawns of their own campus. The student unrest had reached its climax in the spring of 1970. By this time, many of the students' goals had been met, including an end to the parietal rules and the establishment of student positions on the University Senate. However, several of the major issues involved, like the housing shortage and the lack of student input in

administrative decisions, were never fully resolved, but merely concealed by a new veneer of student apathy. The students went home for the summer. By the next school year, they showed little interest in protests or demonstrations and instead settled back into the familiar campus routine. The era of student unrest at Penn State had run its course.

Introduction to the Penn State SDS Archives

The major events of the period of student unrest are recounted in history books like Michael Bezilla's *Penn State: An Illustrated History*, and Kenneth Heineman's *Campus Wars: The Peace Movements at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era*.²² However, a researcher can craft a more vivid and textured reconstruction by exploring the actual leaflets distributed by the SDS, the personal letters of its members, and the minutes of their meetings. These can be found in Neil Buckley's SDS Files, housed at the Historical Collections and Labor Archives Room of Pattee Library on the University Park Campus of Penn State.

The items in the files were collected and assembled by Neil Buckley, the head of the SDS Steering and Evaluation Committee. They cover the years between 1966 and 1969. Buckley dedicated himself to Penn State SDS from fall, 1966, to spring, 1967, when he left Penn State to become a full-time traveling representative for SDS. He continued to collect materials from his position in the national organization. The documents he accumulated provide rich insight into the early development of the Penn State chapter. They reveal the specific grievances that SDS members had with their University and identify the issues that compelled Penn State students to act. Buckley's personality and ideals animate much of the collection. A Penn State chemistry undergraduate, Buckley returned to his alma mater after one semester at Purdue to pursue a masters degree in English in 1966. He held a teaching assistantship and instructed freshman courses in business writing. According to his department head, Henry Sams, who was also head of the faculty senate, Buckley was a good teacher.²³ Along with this substantial collection of documents Buckley left a note: "I'm sure there is dome dark cabinet space into which this collection can be instilled until scholarship—or the Revolution—seeks them out."²⁴

Buckley came from Clearfield, a small town in central Pennsylvania. Long before Neil joined the Socialist Club at Penn State, the Buckley family was involved in Left-wing protest. Neil's grandfather, Ernie Buckley, worked on the floor of the J&L mill in Alliquippa where he and his wife were active in the 1936 United Steel Workers Union strike. In high school, Neil worked as a laborer on a crew laying sewer pipe. "Within a week, we were organized by the Laborer's Union and on strike," he wrote in 1996, "within a day the boss's sons were trying to run us down on the line with dumptrucks, calling us worthless scum commies."²⁵ Buckley's political leanings stemmed from these

early experiences and drove his work in the Penn State SDS.²⁶

As he wrote to his parents in 1967, Buckley's reasons for returning to Penn State included the desire to find "more time for my writing and more of an atmosphere in which I could be productive as a poet."²⁷ However, Buckley found neither the time nor the atmosphere that he sought at Penn State. "Departments of English," he concluded after two years of matriculation, "are not the place for poets who wish to write."²⁸ Dissatisfied by the conditions at Penn State, Buckley felt that he had an obligation to take action. "What I would like to do," he informed a writer from his hometown newspaper, *The Clearfield Progress*, "is to be able to sit down and read and write poetry and listen to good music and go for long walks by the sea. Unfortunately, there are things in this society which I see as wrong. In good conscience, I cannot allow these things to continue. I feel it is my moral duty to change them."²⁹

A prolific writer, Buckley produced an abundance of leaflets, letters, booklets, articles, and reflective musings on the issues he believed were important for students. He also retained a variety of mailings from national organizations, including anti-draft groups and anti-racism movements, as well as SDS. In addition, his correspondence included many leaders from SDS groups throughout Pennsylvania and the national organization. Over two hundred items are included in the collection. This eclectic assortment of materials is arranged into nine different files. I attempt here to describe the general flavor of the documents in each file and to highlight items of particular historical interest.

Information from the SDS files can also be complemented by the documents in the Penn State Room at Pattee library. The Penn State Room has a documentary produced by WPSX, the campus public television station, called *1969: The Year Behind, The Year Ahead*. It covers the student unrest during 1969. It also holds records from the Trustees meeting and oral histories of Eric Walker. Two collections of specific relevance to student unrest at Penn State include The Student Activism Files and Eric Walker's Papers.

The Student Activism Files contain an administrative overview of students' protests, newspaper clippings, student petitions, and an extensive collection of photographs gleaned from the student newspapers and yearbooks. They cover student unrest from the mid-sixties into the seventies. This collection includes a variety of primary source material that corroborates and expands on the documents in the SDS Files.

Eric Walker's Papers are also maintained at the Penn State Room. As the President of Penn State from 1957 to 1970, Walker was deeply concerned about the SDS's activities. Like Buckley, Walker kept files on meetings and demonstrations that he considered important. He recorded details about events and encounters, as well as his own perceptions, plans, and opinions. His views provide a valuable counterpoint to the attitudes of SDS members and offer

the opportunity to juxtapose two differing perspectives of the same events. In addition to his first-hand accounts, Walker himself had considered, around 1986, writing a book about the student protests that occurred during his tenure in office. The preliminary notes he compiled are included in the archive. Walker was self-reflective and insightful in many of his notes, revealing his personal interpretations of the student unrest from the perspective of a member of an older generation.

The student newspaper, *The Daily Collegian*, and the local paper, *The Center Daily Times*, are both available on microfilm at Pattee Library. In addition, bound copies of *The Daily Collegian* are kept in the Penn State Room. Both of these papers included articles on SDS activities which can be located through a subject index. The student paper in particular provided extensive coverage of SDS sponsored events, speakers, movies, and demonstrations. In addition, its editorial pages offered a valuable forum for students' opinions about SDS and for SDS writings. Often, especially during its most active periods, the SDS was mentioned daily in *The Daily Collegian*.³⁰

Description of the SDS Document Collection:

The first four files of the collection contain the majority of the primary, unpublished material on the Penn State SDS. Correspondence, both official and personal, and analytical writings about the SDS' goals and organizational structure dominate these sections. From these documents, a reader can glean the major issues and concerns that motivated SDS activities and permeated the thoughts of its members.

File 1: Correspondence, 1966-67, General PSU-SDS.

This file contains drafts of letters or articles sent to *The Collegian*, copies of letters from the Penn State SDS as a unit, and accounts of SDS activities kept for their own records. Approximately twenty different items are included, most with multiple drafts. The major events covered in this file are the stand-off with University President Eric Walker, the subsequent occupation of his office, a statewide convention, and a publicized disagreement with the Undergraduate Student Government.

Some of the most evocative documents in this file are the colorful descriptions that Buckley composed for *The Daily Collegian* and his own files about the conflict with Walker. These center around an issue that sparked nationwide concern among college radicals, the release of SDS member lists to the House Un-American Activities Committee by the Universities of California and Michigan. On January 17, 1967, the Penn State SDS sent Walker a group letter asking if he planned to follow the example set at other schools:

...The decision to release membership lists is not the proper function of administrators. As administrators, you have no right to decide how students exercise their rights of free speech and protest. Since the release of the SDS membership list by your administration would be an implicit regulation of our basic freedoms, we seek clarification on the position of the Penn State Administration regarding your possible cooperation with HUAC and other Federal Government investigation committees....We consider these questions to be of such a serious nature that we wish an immediate public clarification from your office.³¹

When they received no response, the students sent two more letters. Then, they staged the first student occupation of Old Main. On Wednesday, February 1, thirty-five SDS members picketed in front of Old Main for an hour and a half before they entered the building, picketed in front of Walker's office until 1:00 p.m., then entered Walker's office and sat down, commencing their sit-in. In spite of the threat of arrest, the students remained in the office until late that evening and returned the next day at eleven in the morning to repeat the process.

The Deans of Men and Women and Walker's administrative assistants did not take the situation lightly. They made repeated threats to bring in the police and used other tactics as well. Both SDS chairmen were called to private meetings with the deans in which they were advised that their parents would be notified and they could be thrown out of school. One woman was asked if she believed her behavior might "hurt her parents' feelings," while another student's parents were called to State College to meet with a dean. But the students continued their protest into a third day. The description of this day of the sit-in provides a good example of the records they kept:

The demonstration continued in Old Main on Friday from 9:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. when Simes³² and his assistant Raymond Murphy called the demonstrators into Simes' office where SDS was informed that they were faced with "serious disciplinary action," the nature of which and the authority of which Simes refused to disclose. Rather than be dragged into a meaningless shouting match with unreasonable (*insert: and inflexible*) men, the demonstrators left the building in disgust.

A major breakthrough occurred the same day. Apparently feeling the full force of SDS' intentions, Walker arranged a meeting with SDS representatives on Saturday, 4 February. The high points of the twenty-minute meeting with SDS, Walker and a University lawyer³³ were: Walker would answer a "polite" letter from SDS; Walker had been "holding off" certain groups which demanded stronger action against SDS (which we later learned meant he was keeping people from physically attacking us—assuming, no doubt, that we were non-violent resisters); Walker was under great pressure from other groups to take a hard line against SDS yet he still acted as a free agent in all

University matters, a point which contradicts itself internally as well as in fact; that the country was "tired of protecting protesters"; and that Walker "had not forgotten about the sit-in," inferring that his office was considering "strong disciplinary action," no doubt internal University actions which could not be fought in the courts. . . . SDS declared the sit-in and recognition by Walker of SDS' claim a victory at the Sunday night educational forum.³⁴

Although SDS declared their sit-in a success because Walker acknowledged their claims, the protest evolved to focus on the larger issues of free speech and administrative authority. During the demonstration, an editorial appeared in *The Collegian* suggesting that "if Dr. Walker releases or has released the names of students in anti-war activities on campus, he will have made the arbitrary decision both to cooperate with a truly un-American inquisition and to trample the students and every other citizen's basic rights of speech and assembly."³⁵ By the end of the sit-in Buckley had concluded that the protest had moved beyond the simple HUAC issue to address freedom of speech and petition as well as administrative authority. "Considering the concerted attempts of the Administration to intimidate individual SDS members," Buckley writes, "through the continued suggestion of unexplained disciplinary action . . . the issue now is one of the bounds of arbitrary the administration thinks it can reach."³⁶

An interesting counterpoint to this description can be found in Walker's notes from the same incident. He, too, kept detailed records of the student unrest. In a February 6 draft for his personal files, Walker gave his perspective of the HUAC issue:

I have not been asked for their names, and, as a matter of fact, we do not keep membership lists. On the other hand, I am not going to answer a hypothetical question. I do not know whether I will be asked to give the names of their leaders or by whom or under what circumstances. As a matter of fact, the very denial of my freedom of speech is contrary to one of the [blank space in text] they are supposed to hold."³⁷

Walker also described the attitude towards SDS that he encountered among his circle of acquaintances: ". . . apparently there is a growing body around the University who want to 'throw them out bodily.' Talk from professors, students, and townspeople to me indicates that there are those who would like to get them, shave them, clip their hair and give them a bath."³⁸ Walker also gave his personal interpretation of the SDS members he met with during the HUAC crisis:

This business of suffering seems to be a part of their dogma. Molinaro [SDS Co-Chairman] in part of his conversation with me said that they had to be

different and they had to suffer to protect new ideas. This too often becomes a part of their principles. As a matter of fact, I think that they dress outlandishly just to prove that they are different even though by so doing they prove they are alike. It is also a fact that one person will never come in alone. He must have someone else to lean on. Most of them are partly paranoiac and I suspect that a lot of them will run into many difficulties before they get through.³⁹

Walker's comments suggest that the attention given SDS was not always supportive. As students suggesting change in the traditional atmosphere of the campus, they were often viewed with skepticism and resistance. Keeping in mind USG President Katzenstein's description of the student as "passive, conscientious, law abiding, responsible and ultraconservative," this was a logical response to student activists who were shaking up the stable realm of Happy Valley. A *Collegian* editorial on February 2, 1967 suggests that, as its protest wore on, SDS was losing student sympathy: "SDS is composed of some of the most articulate and intelligent students on campus. They will demean themselves and prejudice the value of their legitimate social concerns by choosing this particular action as their issue of the term."⁴⁰

File 2: Correspondence, 1966-69, Buckley

The density of this file attests to the fact that Buckley was an avid correspondent. He kept up cordial dialogues with SDS leaders from other schools as well as national officers. He also saved letters exchanged with his parents and teachers. The documents in this file offer a vivid re-creation of the youth culture of the sixties as seen from one young man's perspective. Idealism and a powerful sense of mission permeate these letters. A caustic aversion to American capitalism colored many of his remarks. At this stage in his life, there was nothing moderate or reserved about Buckley's attitudes and his letters indicate that he was joined by a wide variety of comrades. Throughout his letters, Buckley explored the problems he saw in the Penn State community and the larger American society, the apathy he witnessed among his students, and the generation gap he perceived between himself and his elders.

Some of the most revealing passages in this file come from the letter Buckley sent to his department head to explain his decision to leave the University. Buckley sent copies of his letter of resignation to all members of the English Department, President Walker, SDS national offices, and a variety of publications. It provides a specific case study of one person who chose to drop out of "conformist society" and devote himself to activism. In this letter, he expresses dismay at a lack of "humanness" among his students and a lack of community at the university.

As a teaching assistant assigned to instruct freshmen courses on business writing, Buckley was disappointed by the attitudes of his students. He believed that modern society had broken the bonds of love and sincerity that should characterize truly human relationships. Buckley wrote:

I imagined I could help students to recognize and live by basic human values—love, sincerity, responsibility—without which no person can presume to call himself a man. The society from which most students come has so effectively destroyed or submerged the ability of people to relate in human terms that it now seems useless to attempt to reconstruct any semblance of humanness from the shattered youth of this nation in the classroom. There is much truth to what W. D. Snodgrass wrote in "Heart's Needle": "Whom equal weakness binds together/none shall separate." I must seek ways to separate the now weak, clutching human products of an inhuman America from each other and bring them together in a community based on love, not neurotic need."⁴¹

Buckley also railed against the failure of the University to create any sense of community among its members. He suggested that decisions which affected the University were not made by all participants acting in a democratic fashion but by a small group of administrators:

The American university, a microcosm of American society, retains its power by refusing its members the right to come together as a community and make decisions which directly affect the operation of the university. Basic long-range and procedural decisions are made by a small group of people at the top of the structure, usually a board of capitalists un-democratically appointed or elected, as in the case at Penn State; these facilities, the protection and control of university property and the best interest of the capitalists who constitute the board, are dictated to the people they directly affect.⁴²

Buckley concluded his letter on an extreme note, indicating that his new job as SDS traveling representative would be "to resist the forces which oppress people in this country and in the world and mobilize people who will eventually bring about the destruction of American Capitalism." He signed his letter, "For Love and Freedom."

Buckley gave an even more personal account of his decision to leave Penn State in a letter to his mother and step-father. In this letter, he explained the dichotomy that he felt between his parents' lives and the visions he had for himself. Buckley addressed the generation gap between them and emphasized the idea that many of his peers were also choosing: to break away from the courses set for them by their parents. He wrote:

We have both changed much in the past several years and have grown isolated from one another not only in space but in outlook. The business we read in the press about the so called "generation gap" may very well be true. The "gap" between us is indeed real and more a matter of "generation" than anything else. It's a matter of a difference in the way we see the world, a matter of the way we see our lives forming and the meaning we give to our lives and forms they may take. For both of you a new Thunderbird and the Elks on weekends and other things you find enjoyment in make up your lives—plus your work of course. I can find no meaning in such a life and cannot find any joy in trying to pursue such a life.⁴³

In an effort to console his parents, Buckley also included a list of his friends who were joining him in "dropping out of the society in which we've been raised" to work for SDS. He also elaborated on his reasons for dropping out:

For years I've been trying to find a life that would be both personally and intellectually satisfying for myself, a life I could lead without pretense and without fear of compromising my own views of the world and what life should be from my standpoint. . . . These constant changes were a reflection of my uncertainty about my own life and about my own desire for being a person who could help others.⁴⁴

In other letters Buckley also addressed the challenges and issues involved in organizing a SDS chapter. He was in contact with leaders from Lehigh, Dickinson, Bucknell, and other local schools, as well as with national officers, President Greg Calvert and Vice-President Carl Davidson. These letters depict the common concerns and struggles of SDS leaders around the country. One student leader, Barry Friar, from Wyoming Seminary, provided a student's eye view of the radicals on his campus:

There are great possibilities here for building a strong, continuing movement at Wyoming Seminary. A lot of kids are working for McCarthy or Kennedy and their eventual defeat or sell out will disillusion these kids so much that they will be ready to become radicals. There are also a lot of unorganized kids who smoke pot. There are possibilities there.⁴⁵

Letters from national officers reflected the problems facing the movement during the late sixties and their efforts to salvage the organization. Greg Calvert, the national President of SDS, expressed his enthusiasm for the restructuring of SDS that Buckley wanted to undertake at Penn State. This program is covered in the section which follows. Calvert wrote:

Your program for the reorganization of the Penn State chapter sounds really exciting. Please keep me closely informed of progress so that I can get the

word out to other chapters and organizers . . . this kind of experimentation seems to me to be extremely valuable at this point in our development and it is vitally important that organizers be aware of what's going on.⁴⁶

File 3: Penn State SDS Leaflets and File 4: Drafts of Leaflets

These files contain over thirty different leaflets, flyers, and writings that circulated within the Penn State SDS. File 3 holds the finished copies while File 4 contains working drafts that illustrate the creative process Buckley used in his writing. Items such as posters advertising meetings, news releases of meetings, and ideological pamphlets provide information on the recruitment and intellectual developments in the Penn State SDS. In addition, booklets and flyers that address the structure and role of SDS provide information on the questions and problems faced by the entire movement in the late sixties. As sources, these are very useful in uncovering the important issues and ideological stances that the Penn State SDS focused on.

In "Democracy at Penn State," a leaflet used by the Penn State SDS in September, 1966, and December, 1967, Buckley criticized an increasing tendency in the university community to focus on grades and material production at the expense of the individual students. "A student voice," he wrote, "though unsolicited, may well be relevant to the degenerating academic and social environment caused by the dehumanization inherent in a grade and production oriented university community."⁴⁷ Buckley then elaborated on his specific complaints:

Only the most naive can fail to recognize the anti-democratic overtones of the arbitrary edict demanding medical fees at Ritenour, the sudden price rises for extracurricular activities, the absence of a student bookstore, the faculty's abortive fight against the term system, the unannounced cancellation of the forgivable NDEA loans, the "protection" afforded by the "balanced program," and the "benevolence" extended through the awesome staff of dorm counselors. Surely, democracy is called for when a power structure concerns itself with everything from defending U.S. foreign policy to the vaginal status of our coeds.⁴⁸

In his conclusion, Buckley called for action:

We must stop acting like products off an assembly line and start acting like individuals, like men and women of feeling. . . . We must break the barrier between student and teacher and find a goal beyond the grade. We must ask who made *that* decision, find him and ask why he made it and by what write. Finally, we must either create for ourselves an environment where we can openly, honestly and with dignity control our own lives or, if necessary, bring this inhuman Orwellian machine to a grinding halt until it yields us

the respect and educational opportunity we deserve. We must stand up like human beings and be heard!⁴⁹

There are also several booklets that deal with structural problems in the SDS organization itself. In a selection of leaflets prepared during Buckley's first year as a traveling representative, he addressed the polarization of leadership and membership that prevailed in both the national organization and the local clubs. He asserted that very few people were actively involved in decisions affecting the national organizations and a small number of leaders actually provided most of the impetus for the group. "While in the ideal sense SDS is democratically controlled by its membership, in fact the organization is controlled as far as program is concerned by a non-sinister elite."⁵⁰

Buckley described this phenomenon at the local level in more detail. He believed that there were three types of people who participated in SDS, organizers, superintellectuals, and "shock troops." While a small number of organizers and intellectuals dictated plans and held esoteric discussions about political ideology, the typical members remained on the outskirts of the group and eventually lost interest. About the eighty-five percent of the members who were shock troops,⁵¹ Buckley wrote:

The chapter dynamic is such that kids never go beyond a gut-level reaction and gain good political education within the chapter. Without political savvy the only role the shock trooper can serve within chapters is that of door-blocker, window-breaker, leafletter, and general shitworker. He is a tool of a ruling elite, and he knows it; he takes orders for a while, sees through the bullshit, becomes dissatisfied with his limited role—the right reaction to conditions—and drops out into the nether world on nonpolitical dope, glittering beads, Zen flagellation, the student-on-the-make mentality and apolitical attitudes. Shock troopers, once lost, stay lost.⁵²

Buckley also blamed sectarian in-fighting for the lack of unity within both national and local organizations. "The old decentralized SDS with no clearly defined ideology is dead," he wrote, "Factions and sects have appeared and are indulging in continuous ideological warfare among themselves."⁵³ Buckley described the deterioration of the nationwide movement as analogous to the problems facing Penn State: "The vacuum in which Penn State SDS is operating is a reflection of the general situation of the American Revolutionary Left. The lack of centralization and discipline coupled to the continuous sectarian in-fighting has paralyzed Penn State SDS. What we need then is a total reshaping and re-structuring of the organization along more efficient lines."⁵⁴

According to these documents the two main problems facing SDS were a failure to include newer members and a lack of unity. Buckley's solution was "cell organization," the formation of smaller groups within the larger club.

Each person within the small groups would be able to contribute to plans and discussions, build personal relationships, and gain a more genuine sense of belonging. Yet, the cells would also be closely connected to the larger group through delegates and meetings of the whole chapter. This idea would be implemented throughout the country so that “rather than being 300 local groups with the same name, the national would be 300 sub-cells in a national political organization which works as a coordinated unit.”⁵⁵ These ideas are explained in “Get Organized—Proposals for Restructuring Penn State SDS,” and further elaborated in “Burning Questions for our Movement—Will SDS Retain State Power,” a position paper for the 1968 National Convention, “Analysis for the New Constitution,” and “SDS The Threatening Catastrophe and how to Fight it.”

* * *

The next five files contain mostly items that were not created by the local Penn State SDS but were mass-produced by a variety of national organizations. Although these files contain fewer documents than the first four, they are valuable as sources for examining the Penn State SDS because the selection of a document for inclusion in the file shows that SDS was sympathetic to the cause that sent it and proves at least a superficial connection among the different organizations of the New Left. Deep sentiment against the Vietnam War, imperialism, and capitalism permeates these files.

File #5: Miscellaneous SDS National Leaflets

This file contains an assortment of leaflets from the SDS national organization. These range from instructional literature about organizing chapter activities or protests to philosophical treatises on the New Left. Some titles include: “Notes on the Uses of Violence in Revolutionary Strategy”; “SDS Recruitment and Education”; “Racism, the Student Movement and the Student Strike”; “Summer Organizing; and “Preparation for Elections 1968.”

One intriguing document is an open letter to the New Left from Columbia Sociology Professor C. Wright Mills. He discussed left-wing movements throughout the world, relating their history to the SDS. He contested the idea that New Left ideology embodied a dead philosophy. “We’ve got to study these new generations of intellectuals round the world,” he wrote, “as real live agencies of social change.”⁵⁶

Another leaflet with a Penn State SDS connection was written by Carl Davidson, the founder of Penn State’s SDS. He wrote “University Reform Revisited” in which he related the war in Vietnam and other national problems to campus reform goals, concluding that they are all part of the same system:

We have named the system in this country corporate liberalism. If we bother to look, its penetration into the campus community is awesome. Its elite is trained in our colleges of business administrations. Its defenders are trained in our law schools, its apologists can be found in the political science departments . . . what we have to see clearly in the relation between the university and corporate liberal society at large.⁵⁷

File #6: Anti-Draft Leaflets

The items in this file offer a glimpse into the anti-draft and anti-Vietnam War movements. It includes a number of pamphlets, sponsored by the SDS and independent organizations, offering advice on how to organize against the draft, including instructions for demonstrations, draft card burnings, and protests. This file also includes memos inviting eligible men to join a collective lawsuit against the draft. The blocks comprising the foundation of this case are the ideas that “every man must follow the dictates of his conscience” and “no man may be called to serve in action outside the bounds of the law.”⁵⁸

The Penn State SDS was actively involved in the fight against the war in Vietnam and the draft. It held a demonstration at a recruitment table in the Hetzel Union Building in 1969 and brought in speakers to protest the war and the draft.⁵⁹ In 1967, SDS collected funds in the Student Union Building to help bring wounded Vietnamese children to the United States for medical treatment.⁶⁰

File #7: Radical Media

This brief file holds documents that illustrate an intriguing interplay between the growing technology of the media and political activism. A resolution on mass media by the national SDS warned that the media is tied to the ruling class and advised its members to “talk to press people about the alienating characteristics of their work.”⁶¹ Other aspects of media, however, became useful tools for the SDS. This file contains a list of newsreels that were then available and could be used to illustrate the horrors of war. It also includes a list of movement publications and resource centers.

File #8: American Liberation League

This file contains information on the American Liberation League. All of the documents here were produced by that organization and sent out as mailings so they do not have any historical significance specific to the Penn State SDS. The group’s ideals are summarized in “The Manifesto of the American Liberation League”:

The American Liberation League has been forged by some who would assert as their vocation the task of building an anti-imperialist consciousness in America.

It is open to all who would share in this work. We are involved in discovering the future, developing ideas and forms as vehicles for changing a reality which for us—as for our brothers of the Third World—is negation, distortion, oppression, death. Against this travesty, we stand for liberation . . .⁶²

File #9: "Freedom Budget": A. Philip Randolph, 1966

A. Philip Randolph was a black labor leader and prominent advocate of civil rights throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In "Freedom Budget," Randolph equates a restructuring of capitalists society with the movement towards racial equality. Many of his ideals parallel those of Buckley and the Penn State SDS. A brief introduction states the goals of the "Freedom Budget":

The "Freedom Budget" spells out a specific and factual course of action, step by step, to start in early 1967 toward the practical liquidation of poverty in the U.S. by 1975. The programs urged in the FB attack all of the major causes of poverty—unemployment and underemployment; substandard pay; inadequate social insurance and welfare payments to those who cannot or should not be employed; bad housing; deficiencies in health services, education, and training; and fiscal and monetary policies which tend to redistribute income repressively rather than progressively. The FB leaves no room for discrimination in any form, because its programs are addressed to all who need more opportunity and improved incomes and living standards—not just to some people.⁶³

Conclusions : The Years of Student Unrest in Retrospect

With the years of student unrest decades behind them, the people involved have had the opportunity to evaluate events from a new perspective. They have questioned whether their actions made an impact. Remembering the view from inside Old Main, Eric Walker suggested that "the whole episode was unnecessary, uninformed, and unproductive."⁶⁴ Recalling the actions and accomplishments of the SDS on campus, Neil Buckley declared that he would "do it all again in a New York minute!"⁶⁵

Walker acknowledged the drastic changes that occurred in social policy during the years of student unrest. For example, he cited the abandonment of the parietal rules that limited women's housing choices, curfews, and visits off campus. Although these rules changed, Walker was not convinced that this was a result of the student activism. "They might have come about anyway," he wrote. "What was required were changes in attitude of the students, the University Administration, the public and the students' parents. All of these did change but not with the same speed, and it was this disparity at various points in time, which produced the protests."

Walker also attributed the student unrest to the unique attitudes of the younger generation. "My observation is that it has something to do with the

responsibilities being thrust upon, and not being thrust upon a generation of young people," he wrote. For Walker, the two World Wars and the Depression were events that defined his own generation. He felt that common experiences of such magnitude had led his generation to appreciate the relative prosperity of the sixties. The younger generation, however, had no role in this common drama. "They were events known only by talk of their elders," wrote Walker. "The elders who talked with some eagerness, some pride, even as one talks about being present at the World Series. Obviously they were going to resent the older generation; the generation that had something they could never have; the generation which set the rules; the generation which was the establishment." Walker also revealed the personal philosophy, probably stemming from his generational standing, that shaped his attitude towards the younger activists:

I could not believe that students would ever act like that. I had been brought up in an aura of authority; if Mother said do something, you did it. If teacher said something was required it was required. My concept of society had come from reading Dickens, David Copperfield, Bleak House and so on. Society was built that way and the way to get ahead was to conform, to respect your elders and betters. . . . Students came to learn and teachers came to teach and that was all there was to it. Going to college was a privilege that came to only a few persons. No one paid your way; you worked and scrounged and found your way through. And if you did well, you were rewarded with good grades, scholarships and eventually a job, responsibility, respect and power; that was the way it was.

Neil Buckley, who now holds a Ph.D. in chemistry and is employed by the University of California at San Francisco, agreed with Walker that several of the misunderstandings between them were questions of age, characterizing Walker's contemporaries as the Cold War generation. However, Buckley disagreed with Walker's analysis of the legacy of student activism. Almost thirty years after his time at Penn State, Buckley feels that while some of the rhetoric used by his organization was bombastic, the content and ideas it promoted were absolutely right. For Buckley, the years of student unrest at Penn State, and across the country, left an important legacy of change.

Looking back, Buckley believes that the single greatest accomplishment of SDS was ending the Vietnam War. Although Buckley began his political activism in the Penn State Socialist Club, arguing that a restructuring of capitalist society should be the students' top priority rather than the war, in retrospect he thinks that the students and protesters pushed the government to the point where it had to withdraw from Vietnam. Buckley also believes that SDS contributed to positive social changes like increasing rights for women and blacks. At Penn State, it opened up opportunities for people, especially for women. However, for Buckley, the greatest impact of the SDS at Penn

State was a “change in consciousness.” Buckley acknowledged that Penn State was very conservative. SDS only had about fifty or sixty members and only occasionally persuaded masses of students to demonstrate. Yet, Buckley asserts that “there was a lot of stuff that affected people that was not physically expressed.” He feels that “it was the little conversations, the personal interactions, getting people to think about issues” that led to a change in people’s attitudes.”

For participants and scholars, whether the years of student unrest are memory or history, much analysis remains to be done. Although the Penn State SDS was an active group with close ties to the national organization, it has received little historical attention. Kenneth Heineman wrote an interesting book that examines the Penn State SDS in the context of peace movements at state universities. However, Buckley asserts that Heineman misrepresents him in *Campus Wars* by portraying him as a middle-class Marxist, when in reality he was from a working-class background. Heineman builds an argument around the alleged comparison between Buckley’s middle-class activism and Davidson’s working-class ideals that is not justified. Buckley also feels that Heineman exaggerates minor differences of opinion among members of the Penn State chapter and the national organization. Finally, Buckley has identified several passages in which his documents were blatantly misquoted or misinterpreted. Buckley believes that Heineman misinterpreted his papers and took the biased comments of his interviewees to build an inaccurate portrait of him: “statements given by the interviewees were apparently taken at face value, a dangerous gambit for an historian writing about relatively recent events when the participants are still alive and able to contest with other documentary proof the ‘facts’ and conclusions of the historian.”⁶⁶

Beyond any personal grievances Buckley has with the current historiography on the New Left, a new work on the Penn State experience would make a valuable addition to the scholarship. Walker’s papers have not yet been explored. The impact of SDS on the Penn State campus experiences of women and minorities should also be examined. Penn State, as a rural, conservative school, attended by students with working-class ties to the Old Left, provides a new perspective on the origins of student activism. Neil Buckley’s papers also provide a glimpse into the youth culture of the era. As the years of student unrest move beyond the shadowy realm of memory into the chronicle of history, it is important to find diverse vantage points from which to observe and record these tumultuous and exciting times.⁶⁷

Notes

1. Eric Walker, "Student Unrest," 1986, Walker Files, Penn State Room, Pattee Library, Penn State.
2. Stuart Burns, *Social Movements of the 1960s* (Boston: 1990) p. 56.
3. Michael Bezilla, *Penn State: An Illustrated History* (University Park: 1985) pp. 309-310.
4. Eric Walker, "Student Unrest," 1986, Walker Files.
5. Bezilla, p. 296. By 1966, Curfews were extended and eventually dropped, women's living and visitation restrictions, however, remained in effect.
6. Bezilla, p. 294.
7. "Administrative history," Student Activism Files, Penn State, p. 1.
8. Burns, p. 75.
9. Kenneth Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (New York: 1993) p. 6.
10. Neil Buckley, correspondence with the author, April 10, 1996.
11. Neil Buckley, records, January 26, 1967, SDS File 1.
12. Bezilla, p. 297.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
14. "Administrative History," p. 2.
15. Bezilla, p. 301.
16. "Administrative History" p. 2.
17. *Ibid.* p. 2.
18. May 6, 1969, Student Activism Files.
19. Bezilla, p. 304.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 305-306.
21. "Administrative History" p. 2.
22. Kenneth Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (New York: 1993).
23. Walker, February 6, 1967, Walker Files.
24. Excerpt from a letter addressed to "Charlie" (Charlie Mann, PSU Librarian) from Neil Buckley, File 2, SDS Files.
25. Buckley, correspondence with the author, April 10, 1996.
26. For a discussion of the relationship between the Old Left and the New Left, see Maurice Isserman, *If I had a Hammer, The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: 1987).
27. Buckley, letter to parents, 1967, SDS File 2.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Buckley, quoted by William F. Lee in *The Progress*, Clearfield, Pa., Jan. 7, 1967. SDS File 3.
30. I thank University Archivist Leon Stout for guiding me to resources in the Penn State Room.
31. Letter from the SDS to Walker, Jan. 17, 1967, SDS File 1.
32. Frank Simes, Dean of Men for Penn State.
33. Delbert McQuaide, of State College, Pa., law firm, McQuaide, Blasko, Schwartz, Fleming and Faulkner.
34. SDS records, Feb. 9, 1967, SDS File 1.
35. *The Daily Collegian* editorial, quoted by Buckley on Feb. 9, 1967, SDS File 1.
36. Buckley, "The HUAC Struggle at Penn State," Feb. 9, 1967, SDS File 1.
37. Walker, February 6, 1967, Walker Files.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. Editorial Page, *The Daily Collegian*, February 2, 1967, p. 2.
41. Buckley, letter to Henry Sams, March 8, 1967, SDS File 2.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Buckley, letter to parents, 1967, SDS File 2.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Barry Friar, letter to Neil Buckley, April 17, 1968, SDS File 2.
46. Greg Calvert, letter to Neil Buckley, January 22, 1968, SDS File 2.
47. Buckley, "Democracy—A Radical Idea at Penn State," SDS File 4.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. Buckley, "The Primitiveness of the Anarcho-Marxists and the Organization of Revolutions," SDS File 4.
51. As estimated by Buckley in "Participatory Democratic Centralism," SDS File 4.
52. Buckley, "Participatory Democratic Centralism," SDS File 4.
53. Buckley, "Proposals for Restructuring Penn State SDS," SDS File 4.
54. Buckley, "Get Organized" SDS File 4.

55. Buckley, "The Primitiveness of the Anarcho-Marxists and the Organization of Revolutionaries," SDS File 3.

56. Reproduced letter from C. Wright Mills, SDS File 5.

57. Carl Davidson, "University Reform Revisited," SDS File 5.

58. Collective lawsuit memo, SDS File 6.

59. "Administrative History," p. 2.

61. Resolutions on Mass Media, SDS File 7.

62. Manifesto of the American Liberation League, SDS File 8, p. 1.

63. A. Philip Randolph, "Freedom Budget," SDS File 9, p. 1.

64. Eric Walker, "Student Unrest," 1986, Walker Files, is the source for this and all further comments by Walker.

65. This and all further comments from Buckley, until the next to last paragraph, are from a phone conversation on April 9, 1996.

66. Buckley, correspondence with the author, April 10, 1996; Heineman, *Campus Wars*.

67. There is an assortment of literature on student unrest in the Sixties that can be used to place the Penn State SDS in the proper context. In addition to the books already cited, see Alan Adelson, *SDS*; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*; Tom Hayden, *Reunion*; James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*; and R. David Myers, *Towards a History of the New Left: Essays from Within the Movement*, for histories and memoirs of SDS. Also see Peter Buzel, *Political Passages*; Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts About the Sixties*; and Guenther Lewy, *The Moral Crisis of American Pacifism*, for conservative responses to the Sixties. See Annie Gottlieb, *Do You Believe in Magic? Bringing the Sixties Home*; and Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture and the Shaping of a Generation*, for cultural history of the Sixties.