

# THE FIRST SftP NATIONAL

*After ten years, Science for the People came together for our first international conference. Fifty individuals and chapter representatives from California, Texas, Illinois, Missouri, New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Washington D.C., Massachusetts, Florida, and Montreal, Canada met in Ann Arbor, Michigan on the weekend of March 23-25. Preparations for the conference had been made at the Eastern, Mid-Western and Western regional conferences. (See the Jan./Feb. 1979 issue of SftP.) People came to the conference prepared to begin building Science for the People as a national organization. The regional conferences had discussed proposals for national decision-making bodies, democratic policy-making by the membership, decentralization of editorial control of SftP magazine, and common political principles for SftP.*



With less than two full days of meetings, the conference agenda was very tight. We began early Saturday morning (8 A.M.!). After the inevitable procedural matters of final revisions in the agenda, and agreement on conference rules, we began with presentations on the history of Science for the People. Reports were given on the history of SftP activities in areas such as: Sociobiology, Science for Vietnam, the SftP trip to China, XYY research and AAAS actions. To set the stage for later discussions of political principles within SftP, a history and analysis of the 1974-1976 period within SftP, in which political caucuses debated SftP goals and strategies, was given. The plenary session then broke up into working groups, to begin drafting proposals on national decision-making, chapter-building, editorial reform, a new national flyer and principles of unity.

After lunch, two sets of workshops open to the public, were scheduled. These workshops covered the broad range of SftP activities and interests: Occupational Health and Safety, Nuclear Energy and Disarmament, Politics of

Pollution, Affirmative Action, Working with Unions, Health Care, Cuba, Sociobiology, Alternative Technology, and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) support work. Workshops enabled members to exchange information on activities in different chapters, and to develop projects which could tie chapters closer together through joint work.

The topics for discussion at various workshops were:

#### *Health:*

Discussions focused on the problems of various proposals for a system of National Health Insurance, and the contradictions facing such programs operating within a profit oriented medical system. Attention was also drawn to the struggles to maintain existing health care facilities for poor, minority and working class families, against cutbacks such as Proposition 13 in California, and the threatened closure of Cook County hospital in Chicago.

#### *Occupational Health and Safety:*

After sharing personal experiences in the field, members talked about the role of SftP chapters in supporting regional

Committees on Occupational Safety and Health, such as the ones in Chicago and Massachusetts (CACOSH and Mass-COSH). A major concern was the role SftP should play in the movement to defend OSHA legislation from attacks by large corporations and weakening by the federal government. Many urged an expansion of educational work by SftP, in coalitions with unions and community groups. A network of SftP activists in the OSHA field was established.

#### *Cuba:*

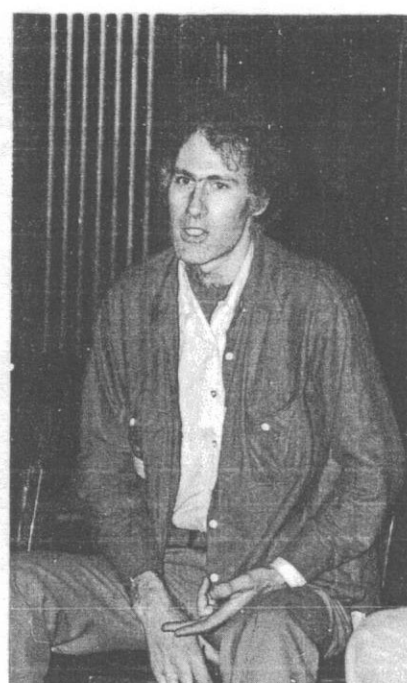
The original impetus for this group was to explore the possibility of an SftP trip to Cuba, similar to the two delegations which have visited China. However, most people agreed that planning for such a trip was premature. A group was formed to study the interaction of science, ideology and political economy in Cuba, and to try to establish close contact with individuals within Cuba.

#### *Politics of Pollution:*

The major concern was how SftP's involvement in various sectors of the environmental movement could be used to raise broader political issues such as: industrial "runaway shops" exporting en-

# CONFERENCE, SPRING 1979

by Champaign-Urbana SftP



Photos by Dale Fast

vironmental hazards (such as asbestos and pesticide production) to the Third World to avoid stricter U.S. standards, the defense of current standards against calls for reduced "bureaucracy" and de-control from industry, and how to defend the jobs of workers threatened by "runaways" and cutbacks blamed on environmental controls.

## *Affirmative Action:*

The Bakke case and its impact on minority and women's access to education was discussed. Criticism of SftP's lack of involvement in the Anti-Bakke coalitions was general. A comparison of experiences at various universities and federal agencies brought out the lack of significant gains in the participation of women and minorities in scientific/professional fields. The workshop drafted a conference resolution, calling on SftP to join the movement to overturn the Weber case, dealing with affirmative action in employment. The group will draft a current opinion piece for the magazine on this subject.

## *Alternative Technology:*

Participants discussed their experiences in community-based alternative

technology experiments. Chapters had worked on projects such as assisting minority neighborhoods develop alternative heating sources, and collective greenhouses. Major problems with alternative technology concerned maintaining collective control of technologies developed, against the threat of monopolization by government and industry.

## *Nuclear Power and Disarmament:*

The interactions between nuclear power and weapons development were discussed. The need for SftP to bring a wider political perspective to the anti-nuclear movement was seen as central. Particularly important is an understanding of why nuclear disarmament has not been as strong an issue as the anti-nuclear power movement, and how this can be changed.

The evening agenda was rearranged so that we could join a picket line in support of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC). The Ann Arbor chapter of SftP has been active in supporting the FLOC strike against tomato growers and the food processing multinationals which dominate tomato growers and farm workers. The FLOC

picket line at a local supermarket was part of a nationwide boycott against these multinationals, particularly Libby's and Campbell's.

A brief plenary session brought everyone up to date on progress in the working groups. This was also our first chance to evaluate how the conference was proceeding. A women's caucus held prior to the plenary raised the discussion of how the structure of the plenary sessions tended to limit participation by women.

Working groups then took the rest of the evening to produce the final proposals for discussion at the Sunday morning plenary. What follows, are the proposals in their final form as adopted by the conference. The proposal on national decision-making lays out the procedure for approval of these resolutions by the entire membership.

## **PROPOSAL FOR NATIONAL ORGANIZING**

This proposal concentrates on building new chapters of SftP, and publicizing SftP for general recruitment. St. Louis and Tallahassee chapters are tak-