

THE "FREMMING AFFAIR" AND ITS LEGACY: AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS FOR A  
DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY AT TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Kerry Crowley  
Professor Virginia Drachman  
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On the evening of May 14, 1971, eight security officers from Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts arrive at Ballou Hall, the university's central administrative building. They are responding to a call by Vice President John Mitchell to apprehend a group of trespassers from the offices of the university's core administrators.<sup>1</sup> Several minutes later, a large group of students and non-students affiliated with Tufts' chapter of the national student activist movement Students for a Democratic Society [SDS] filter out of Ballou's doorway, ready for a fight. They demand justice for Leona Fremming, an African-American secretary who had been fired from the university in an alleged act of racial discrimination several weeks prior to the demonstration. In the ensuing "scuffle," the Tufts police arrest seven protesters, issuing warrants for seven more in the days to follow. Both sides would later claim that the other used mace and other chemicals to subdue their opponents. Those arrested would receive charges from trespassing and breaking and entering to assault and battery.<sup>2</sup>

What caused this conflict to break out in the spring of 1971? How did a disagreement over a Tufts employee spark such heated and ultimately violent action? To understand the context and motivations behind what Tufts contemporaries labeled the "Fremming Affair," one must analyze several factors: first, one must of course evaluate the story of Fremming herself. Was the demonstration at Ballou nothing more than fodder for a few newspaper headlines? Or did it the controversy surrounding Fremming's employment reveal actual discriminatory practices on behalf of the university? In working to answer these questions, one must at the same time seek to understand the roots of Students for a

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<sup>1</sup> Activities and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. "7 arrested after protest at Tufts over firing", *The Boston Globe*. May 15, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Democratic Society as an organization at Tufts and its critical role in Fremming's campaign for justice. What was SDS, where did it come from, and how did it manifest as a movement on the Tufts campus in the 1960s and 1970s? Perhaps most importantly, how did Tufts SDS become involved in a disagreement between a former employee and university administration?

By considering the many factors at play in the "Fremming Affair" carefully, this analysis seeks to contend that Tufts SDS' attachment to Fremming's cause was not an isolated incident, but rather was indicative of broader trends within the organization as of 1971. At Tufts, SDS in the early 1970s saw a clear shift in focus away from anti-war protest and toward civil rights action; Leona Fremming's claim of racial discrimination was thus in the eyes of Tufts SDS an ideal case around which to reaffirm the changes in the organization's core beliefs during that time. This time of transition for Tufts SDS mirrored changes at the national level, where SDS found itself fracturing into several smaller groups with more focused and specified goals. In this way, the events of the Fremming Affair also serve as an illustration of the ideological and structural changes within Students for a Democratic Society as a whole during this transitional period in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Despite its relative brevity in the long history of the university, the Fremming Affair nevertheless contributes substantially to one's understanding of student life at Tufts in the twentieth century.

#### The Case of Leona Fremming

The discussion surrounding Leona Fremming thus clearly involves several actors, each with distinct motivations and interests; however, before one can make sense of all those involved in the Fremming Affair, one must first have a complete understanding of the

events of her termination and their aftermath. Fremming's story at Tufts University began in November of 1970 when she started work as a secretary for the Drama and Dance Department. Although she described herself as having a "good attendance record"<sup>3</sup> and "g[etting] along well with everyone involved, including co-workers and professors,"<sup>4</sup> Fremming nevertheless received notice of her termination after only one month of employment. During a meeting to discuss her firing, her supervisor justified the decision by asserting Fremming's work was "not up to par."<sup>5</sup> Soon after, however, Tufts employment officers reversed her firing, offering her instead a nearly identical job at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, a Tufts graduate school. According to Fremming, these officers did not offer her an explanation regarding why they rehired her following her termination. Although she later claimed that she felt her firing was a result of racial discrimination after this initial termination, Fremming nevertheless accepted the replacement position and began work there on December 23, 1970.<sup>6</sup>

This incident in the Drama Department would not have been the first accusation of discriminatory employment practices at Tufts University. In fact, the university received significant media attention just one year earlier in a case involving the hiring practices of Volpe Construction, the company placed in charge of constructing the Lewis Hall residence building. Having no more than six people of color in a workforce of one hundred and eight<sup>7</sup>, Volpe's project at Tufts triggered an uproar on campus wherein various student groups,

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<sup>3</sup> Activities and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. Flyer recounting Fremming affair by Leona Fremming. May 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Tufts Students Occupy New Construction Site." *The Harvard Crimson*. November 6, 1969. Accessed November 23, 2017. <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1969/11/6/tufts-students-occupy-new-construction-site/>.

particularly the Afro-American Society [AAS], staged anti-discrimination protests at the construction site. Thus much of the attention and controversy surrounding what would become the Fremming Affair stemmed not just from Leona's personal employment history with the university, but rather also from the larger public discussions on university policy that were popular at that time. Such discussions also echoed protests that were occurring at other universities across the United States in 1969; for example, between April and May of that year, African-American students held protests at schools such as Cornell University and North Carolina A & T State University demanding that the universities increase the proportion of African-American faculty in relation to their total number of professors.<sup>8</sup> In this context, the motivations behind the shift of SDS priorities on Tufts campus toward civil rights action become clearer, in that they seemed to reflect both national and local campus priorities during this period.

Much like her experience in the Drama and Dance Department, Fremming's treatment by her new co-workers at Fletcher quickly deteriorated. She described Dean of the Fletcher School Edmund Gullion as well as Associate Dean Allan Cameron as being "very cold and distant"<sup>9</sup> toward her throughout her time there, despite what she described as an equally impressive job performance as those of the other secretaries in the Fletcher School. On April 5, 1971, Fremming's immediate supervisor Larry Griggs terminated her employment, asserting that she arrived late to work too often; Fremming acknowledged her late arrivals, but insisted that they did not surpass those of her co-workers.<sup>10</sup> Griggs

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<sup>8</sup> Lisa Vox. "The Civil Rights Act of 1968 and Other Key Events in the Movement." ThoughtCo. Accessed November 16, 2017. <https://www.thoughtco.com/civil-rights-movement-timeline-from-1965-to-1969-45431>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

and other Fletcher officials would later add to this justification in private, expressing in a May 5 letter to President Burton Hallowell that Fremming was “psychologically ill”<sup>11</sup> and “refused to start treatment”<sup>12</sup> despite requests from her co-workers and that it was this behavior which led to her termination. Suspecting that her firing was largely due to her race, Fremming appealed her termination to the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity [OEO] and the University Placement Office, two Tufts entities which work ensure that the university is in compliance with all laws related to anti-discrimination; after investigating her complaint, the OEO ultimately issued a statement concluding that Fremming’s firing was not based on discrimination.<sup>13</sup>

The OEO was not alone in its dismissal of Fremming’s claims of discrimination; rather, several student groups also notably also rejected the idea that her termination was racially discriminatory. For instance, the Tufts Afro-American Society argued that Fremming and her initial supporters “had not established that the firing of employee Leona Fremming was ‘racist.’”<sup>14</sup> In later conversations, Fremming claimed that these same leaders insisted that she not fight for her job but instead “get a job in the community.”<sup>15</sup> It remains unclear why the AAS chose not to defend her case; some students claim that the club’s refusal was because Fremming was simultaneously seeking help from Students for a Democratic Society, an organization that Tufts AAS did not support due to their reputation

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<sup>11</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. Letter to the President, 5 May 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. Statement by Provost Ullman, May 18, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>14</sup> “A Clarification on SDS.” *Tufts Hilltopper*. Vol 27 (no. 3, July 14, 1971). Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>15</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. “Sit in Against Firing” PLP leaflet. 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

on campus as a potentially violent organization.<sup>16</sup> But if SDS did have such a contentious reputation on campus, why would Fremming reach out to them? What about SDS as an organization did Fremming believe could help her cause?

### The Origins of SDS at Tufts

As expressed previously, the significance of the Fremming Affair would be useless without some understanding of the movement behind it: Students for a Democratic Society. SDS emerged in 1959 from the Student League for an Industrial Democracy, a social democratic education organization formed in the aftermath of World War II.<sup>17</sup> The new organization held its first meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1960, publishing a manifesto of its principles, the "Port Huron Statement," in 1962.<sup>18</sup> The United States at that time found itself amidst a wide range of conflicts involving racial politics, economic inequality, and foreign policy issues (of which the Vietnam War would increasingly become the most prominent); the "Port Huron Statement" was thus an attempt to synthesize wide-ranging student criticisms of all of these issues into the liberal platform of SDS as an organization. Declaring that college students, by nature of their "permanent position of social influence,"<sup>19</sup> must band together to radically transform American society, the "Port Huron Statement" garnered significant support for the SDS cause and allowed the organization's ideas to spread to campuses across the country. Localized demonstrations against the United States government continued to grow as the movement expanded, their frequency

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<sup>16</sup> "A Clarification on SDS." *Tufts Hilltopper*. Vol 27 (no. 3, July 14, 1971). Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>17</sup> Irwin Unger. *The Movement: A History of the American New Left, 1959-1972*. New York: New York, Dodd, Mead, 1974, 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>19</sup> Students for a Democratic Society, *The Port Huron Statement*. New York: Students for a Democratic Society, Dec. 1964; pg. 2.

sharply increasing following President Lyndon B. Johnson's escalation of the United States' involvement in Vietnam in February 1965.<sup>20</sup> Such demonstrations reached their climax at in the spring of 1968 when national SDS leaders organized the "Ten Days of Resistance," a series of rallies, marches, sit-ins and teach-ins that culminated in the largest student strike in American history.<sup>21</sup> As the political landscape of the United States became increasingly dominated by civil unrest and public demonstrations, Students for a Democratic Society stood as an example of the collegiate ability to affect organized and substantial protest that reached beyond campus boundaries.

SDS arrived on Tufts campus in the fall of 1964, its primary focus at that time being its opposition to the war in Vietnam. More specifically, its mission statement as expressed in the 1966 Jumbo Book was "to increase student and non-student participation in a movement to end the war in Viet Nam and prevent future wars" as well as "rebuild our universities as truly humanist institutions of learning" and "democratize all the major institutions of our society."<sup>22</sup> The Tufts branch of SDS in its early years thus mirrored the core platform of the larger national organization at that time, emphasizing foreign conflict resolution as well as the restructuring of academic institutions. By 1967, Tufts SDS held a substantial influence on campus, organizing marches to New York and the Pentagon as well as hosting political activist Henry Apotheker as part of a national "Spring Mobilization to End the War."<sup>23</sup> By this point in time, the organization counted more than forty Tufts

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Flacks. *The Port Huron Statement : Sources and Legacies of the New Left's Founding Manifesto*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> SDS Club Photo. Jumbo Book. 1966. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>23</sup> "Activism Plus Nonviolence: The Tufts Revolution". *Tufts Criterion*, vol. 3, no. 4, April 1971. UP053.001.001.00015. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.



students as members, with a mailing list of close to one hundred.<sup>24</sup> While relatively small in absolute membership numbers in comparison to those of SDS groups on other college campuses during this period, Tufts SDS nevertheless encompassed a considerable proportion of the Tufts population.

Although Tufts SDS began as an organization primarily focused on efforts against the Vietnam War, the club's priorities began to subtly shift from around 1968 onward; this new alignment of goals placed civil rights activism, particularly the fight for racial equality on college campuses, at the forefront of their organization. The organization made this shift evident through its own advertising, presenting itself on campus in 1971 as a "multiracial student organization that allies with working people to fight racism, male chauvinism, imperialism, and attacks on workers and students such as layoffs, work-study cut-backs, and the wage freeze"<sup>25</sup>: a significant shift from the war-focused mission statement of its early years. Yet the members did not only change the SDS mission statement; rather, they also communicated their changing priorities through events they chose to sponsor as a student group. Instead of promoting speakers on war or hosting draft information sessions, Tufts SDS members for instance participated in a demonstration of over four hundred students at the Admissions Office following the assassination of Martin Luther King in April of 1968. During this protest, these members marched and distributed pamphlets arguing that the university was being racially discriminatory in its admissions policies.<sup>26</sup> This shift was noticeable in Tufts SDS' interactions with other universities as well, as seen in the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Activities and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. SDS flyer, June 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>26</sup> "Activism Plus Nonviolence: The Tufts Revolution". *Tufts Criterion*. Vol. 3 (no. 4, April 1971). Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

organization's support for Harvard SDS' national convention on racism in 1971. In an article in the *Tufts Observer*, a student-run news publication, SDS members stress the importance of attending the event and helping to fight "the upsurge of racism on campus, be it racist textbooks, professors, or administrators and their policies."<sup>27</sup> Other actions by the organization in the following years, from organizing forums on race to distributing pamphlets about racial inequality on campus during graduation ceremonies, illustrated a marked pivot of the Tufts SDS platform toward civil rights action.

All of this information is not to say that civil rights activism was absent within the national SDS movement prior to its emergence in the Tufts branch; in fact, historian Richard Flacks attributes the success of SDS in its early years to its association with what its members considered "real" student rebels, the southern civil rights advocates.<sup>28</sup> Tom Hayden, a well-known SDS leader and author of the "Port Huron Statement", met frequently with southern civil rights leaders and wrote many reports about the similarities between their cause and that of SDS; his 1962 work, *Revolution in Mississippi*, intended to "make [the southern movement] real to outsiders"<sup>29</sup> and thereby rally support for its efforts (and by extension, for SDS as well). In this way, the thread of civil rights protest was in Tufts SDS' DNA from the beginning; it simply required a cause on campus that was substantial enough to truly bring it to light.

### Fremming and SDS

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<sup>27</sup> "National SDS convention to be held on Racism". *Tufts Observer*. February 25, 1971. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Flacks. *The Port Huron Statement : Sources and Legacies of the New Left's Founding Manifesto*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. 72.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 74.

Thus while several institutional resources and student groups ignored or dismissed Leona Fremming's case, she eventually found her support in the Tufts branch of Students for a Democratic Society. The organization moved quickly after joining Fremming's campaign against Tufts; only a week after meeting with Fremming and discussing her arguments against the university, Tufts SDS representatives were already distributing flyers around campus in support of her cause.<sup>30</sup> Having already aligned themselves with several worker's rights movements from the Boston area, Tufts SDS sought additional support and collaboration from the Progressive Labor Party [PLP] on campus, the national Marxist-Leninist political organization that aimed to (among many other things) improve the conditions and treatment of workers at Tufts. PLP and SDS leaders such as John Hess together rallied several students and community members behind Fremming's cause, organizing a "Forum on Racism and Revolution" in early May to discuss her firing and "demand that [she] be rehired immediately and be given full pay for time lost."<sup>31</sup> While these leaders were therefore very passionate and motivated to seek justice for Fremming, their first efforts were not violent in nature, but instead largely involved more peaceful forms of activism. Much of their outreach involved the distribution of pamphlets to Tufts students as well as the writing of articles for SDS' own publication, *The Third Floor*, which included correspondence from Larry Griggs, Fremming's personal accounts, and many other documents intended to incite the Tufts population toward action.

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<sup>30</sup> Activities and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. Flyer recounting Fremming affair by Leona Fremming. May 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>31</sup> Activities and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. Forum on Racism and Revolution flyer, May 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

Such peaceful resistance was indeed present throughout SDS' work as a national organization, with many of its other groups also engaging in efforts to improve their communities and defend civil liberties through non-violent means. SDS' Economic Research and Action Project for example attempted to foster community in urban neighborhoods of cities like Chicago, Boston, Newark, and Cleveland. This peaceful project from the organization's early years intended to "address economic inequality and break down racial barriers by creating common bonds around the problems of poverty"<sup>32</sup> and in so doing create what they called "an interracial movement of the poor."<sup>33</sup> Programs such as the Economic Research and Action Project show that while SDS was commonly perceived to be an organization focused solely on violent resistance, its actions as an organization, as they were on Tufts campus, in fact included many initiatives that were far more moderate and peaceful.

All of this being said, Tufts SDS as of 1971 had nevertheless already gained a reputation on campus as a relatively radical and violent student group. Some of this criticism was simply due to the organization's name and consequently its association with violent bombings and protests committed by SDS members at other universities; other critiques pointed to the actions of the Tufts SDS branch itself, claiming it was responsible for "acts of terror" such as the bombing of Dean Gullion's office in the Fletcher School in March of that year.<sup>34</sup> There was thus an assumption throughout the Tufts campus even before Fremming's dismissal that Tufts SDS had a propensity for violence, resulting in an

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<sup>32</sup>Jennifer Frost. *An Interracial Movement of the Poor: Community Organizing and the New Left*. New York: NYU Press, 2001, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Facilities Management records, "Students survey destruction at Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy after SDS bombing, March 1971," Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

atmosphere of distrust and uneasiness not only among other student groups but among faculty and staff members as well. After a meeting between President Hallowell and SDS leaders to discuss Fremming's employment, Hallowell noted in a memo that he considered the conversation to be "heated," with several students suggesting that it was impossible to make progress through such peaceful discussions.<sup>35</sup> This contentious relationship between SDS and Tufts faculty likely contributed to the treatment of SDS members by Tufts police during events concerning Fremming in the weeks to follow.

Despite this general feeling of distrust of SDS on campus, the specific feeling of contention between Tufts SDS and AAS described earlier is significant in its singularity, as many other universities saw frequent collaboration between their own AAS and SDS groups during this time period. Perhaps most notably, the Student Afro-American Society and the Students for a Democratic Society at Columbia University were the chief organizers of student protests at the school, leading the April 1968 wave of student demonstrations in New York.<sup>36</sup> Such disconnect between the collaboration seen at other universities and the discord at Tufts speaks to a larger phenomenon within the SDS movement by 1971: fracturing and disunity. As anti-war protests began to die down across the country, several subgroups began to emerge within the national SDS organization, each with their own unique vision of what the movement should be doing and in what manner. As evidenced by its relationship with the AAS group on Tufts campus, the university's SDS branch also

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<sup>35</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. Description of SDS meeting by President Hallowell, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>36</sup> James Miller. *"Democracy is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

began to take on a character of its own, a character that increasingly aligned with only certain factions of the SDS national movement.

So what were these factions, and where did Tufts SDS members place themselves in the structure of the larger SDS organization? As mentioned previously, SDS as a national organization had from 1968 to 1970 evolved into what sociologist Sean D. Stryker refers to as “a wholly decentralized, spontaneous, communitarian style of what could no longer credibly be called an organization,” but rather a loose collection of divided groups.<sup>37</sup> On one side stood the Worker Student Alliance [WSA], a group within SDS that aimed to engage students in workers’ struggles, deepen their class consciousness, and thereby spark work reforms throughout the country.<sup>38</sup> WSA leaders, who largely grounded their arguments in Marxist ideologies, actively worked to incorporate such ideas into the platform of the national SDS organization. A second SDS subgroup, the Revolutionary Youth Movement [RYM], stood in opposition to WSA, arguing that its attempts to take over the SDS leadership structure were detrimental to the organization; RYM (subsequently known as the Weather Underground Organization) proposed instead an increased focus on the black power movement and more radical action against the Vietnam War.<sup>39</sup> Thus by 1971 one finds little left of the united, wide-ranging front seen in the early years of the SDS movement, in its place being two polarized and increasingly radical perspectives on where and how to direct student protest.

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<sup>37</sup> Sean D. Stryker, "Knowledge and Power in the Students for a Democratic Society, 1960-1970." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 1993, 116. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/stable/41035467>.

<sup>38</sup> Todd Gitlin. *The Whole World Is Watching : Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley: Berkeley : University of California Press, 1980.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

When one examines how this fracturing within the national movement influenced SDS behavior on individual campuses, one finds that the Tufts chapter chose to align with the faction that most closely aligned with its already existing shift in priorities (priorities that placed issues like Fremming's employment at the organization's center). As expressed in a 1969 article in the *Tufts Observer* entitled "A critique of weatherman SDS", Tufts SDS solely supported SDS-WSA efforts, describing their distrust of the Weatherman movement and its apparent "fetish on illegality".<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, SDS campus leaders responded positively to suggestions from national WSA officials earlier that year to focus SDS' attention on income inequality and unfair working conditions for Tufts workers.<sup>41</sup> In this way, the Tufts branch of SDS engaged in the same discussions regarding division and disunity as its national counterpart, but unlike the larger organization made an explicit choice to favor the more moderate and worker-focused of the two emerging factions; Fremming's case against the university stood therefore as a tangible representation of this choice and the distinct priorities of Tufts SDS. In choosing to work with WSA over the Weatherman faction, the student organization illustrated its concern for worker's rights over the increasingly radical protests against United States involvement in the Vietnam War. Such a decision again speaks to the unique focus of Tufts SDS on domestic issues, particularly as they relate to race, rather than foreign policy concerns in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

### The Sit-In at Ballou

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<sup>40</sup> "A critique of weatherman SDS". *Tufts Observer*. October 3, 1969. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

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For nearly six weeks after Fremming's firing from the Fletcher School, Fremming and SDS representatives organized forums, wrote articles, and attended meetings among students, faculty, and faculty of nearby universities in an attempt to resolve their dispute; ultimately, these efforts failed to result in any admission of guilt or apology from the university. Frustrated by their lack of progress, Fremming and several SDS members finally organized a sit-in at the offices of Vice President John Mitchell in Ballou Hall on May 14. Twenty-five people, including students, community members, and Fremming herself, occupied the offices for over five hours, ignoring a statement from Dean Alvin Schmidt that declared them trespassers "in violation of the law as well as University regulations and the Statement of Principles adopted by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences."<sup>42</sup> As the demonstrators exited Ballou at the end of the work day, they were met by eight Tufts University Security Police officers, at which point a "scuffle" ensued.<sup>43</sup> By the end of the confrontation, seven people were apprehended, arrested, and taken to the Medford police station for booking. Later that day, Medford police identified seven additional people associated with the protest and issued warrants for their arrest; of the fourteen total people arrested, three were Tufts undergraduates, two were Tufts graduate students, two were Tufts alumni, and seven were non-Tufts persons.<sup>44</sup>

While SDS seemingly received some amount of support from the Tufts student body for the majority of its campaign on Fremming's behalf, that support quickly faded following

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<sup>42</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. Statement by Provost Ullman, May 18, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>43</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. "7 arrested after protest at Tufts over firing" *Boston Globe* article, May 15, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>44</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. Letter to the Trustees, May 18, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.



the sit-in at Ballou. In the eyes of Tufts students, the confrontation confirmed their suspicions that SDS as an organization was both reckless and radical. The *Tufts Hilltopper*, a short-lived summer news publication, came out in strong disagreement to SDS's "mode of confrontation used with the Tufts police"<sup>45</sup> during the sit-in, arguing that the group "could have won much more respect in the community, and perhaps in the courts, by facing the police as human beings."<sup>46</sup> The article goes on to claim that John Hess, one of the SDS leaders who was among the group of arrested students, advocated "violent self-defense" throughout the protest in a manner that was "both reactionary and repulsive."<sup>47</sup> Thus while their efforts in defense of Leona Fremming began as a moderate movement, SDS and their perceived "radical" actions during the May sit-in resulted in the loss of essentially all of their remaining support on the Tufts campus.

Much like SDS at Tufts, SDS as a national organization also found a perceived radicalization of its activity to be the beginning of its eventual demise. As the Weatherman faction began to take over SDS operations in 1970 and realign the organization's objectives toward the creation of a "revolutionary party"<sup>48</sup> to overthrow the national government, SDS as a whole met increasing resistance from other voices and on-campus groups. Following a 1970 bombing attempt on a government building, one author in the local Ohio publication *The Bryan Times* describes how opposing student groups compared the Weathermen to the "Narodniki", a group of Russian terrorists who assassinated the czar in 1881 and through this radicalism (much like the Weathermen) "set back the cause of

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<sup>45</sup> "A Clarification on SDS". *Tufts Hilltopper*. July 14, 1971. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> David Barber. *A Hard Rain Fell SDS and Why It Failed*. Jackson: Jackson : University Press of Mississippi, 2008.

reform for decades."<sup>49</sup> A critical consideration of the organization in the *New York Times* during this same time period also took issue with its use and promotion of violence, stating plainly that for the Weathermen, "Community organizing had failed. Mass demonstrations had failed. Fighting in the streets had failed. Only terror was left."<sup>50</sup> Such criticisms illustrate the growing negative opinion of SDS on a national level, an opinion that would contribute to its eventual dissolution in the years to follow. Thus even amidst the decline of its reputation, Tufts SDS nevertheless still reflected the behaviors and interactions occurring with SDS nationwide.

### The Aftermath

Following the events of May 14, several students were found guilty of conduct in violation of the faculty rule against "interference with persons seeking to perform their various duties."<sup>51</sup> John Hess received a suspension from the university until the beginning of the spring 1972 semester; several other students received disciplinary probation for a year or more. Following reports from Tufts police that demonstrators used mace during the confrontation, Hess and non-Tufts affiliated demonstrator Lulu Kenner also received convictions for assault and battery with a dangerous weapon.<sup>52</sup> Protests and rallies in opposition to these charges continued throughout the summer and into the following school year, with SDS members still calling for Fremming's reinstatement in September of 1971. A group of SDS leaders even made an appointment to meet with President Burton

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<sup>49</sup> "Tragedy of Diana Oughton, terrorist", *The Bryan Times*, September 21, 1970.

<sup>50</sup> "Consideration of the Weatherman Underground," *The New York Times*, September 17, 1970.

<sup>51</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. Press release, June 2, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>52</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. "7 arrested after protest at Tufts over firing" *Boston Globe* article, May 15, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

Hallowell privately to discuss the events of the case further, showing their willingness to operate within the rules established by the university in their continued pursuit of justice.<sup>53</sup> By this time, the Committee on Student Life felt that the penalties inflicted on the arrested students were too “harsh,” with Dean of Students Jim Steindler noting that “we were out to prove a point, which we already have”<sup>54</sup>; consequently, the Committee recommended in late September that all criminal charges against Tufts students be dropped. The Tufts Personnel Department offered Fremming a confidential letter containing confirmation of her termination, reasons for her dismissal, and conditions for her possible re-employment, after which point the archival record of public advertisements for rallies in her favor ends. The contents of the letter, which were allegedly approved by both President Hallowell and Dean Gullion, remain unknown.

With the Fremming Affair behind them, Tufts SDS members had little left to sustain themselves as a student organization; few articles about the group appeared in any of the student publications, and even its own *The Third Floor* ceased publishing by the end of 1971. The following year, the *Tufts Criterion*, a news publication written for Tufts alumni, included SDS in an article about the “Tufts agitators of 1960,” discussing the movement as though it were already a relic of the past.<sup>55</sup> Although student backlash to the outcome of the Fremming affair was partly to blame for this gradual disappearance of SDS from Tufts campus, there were many other factors as well. Notably, Tufts began to see the

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<sup>53</sup> Activites and organizations records. Memorandum to Confidential file, September 16, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>54</sup> Activites and organizations records. Students for a Democratic Society. “7 arrested after protest at Tufts over firing” Letter from Jim Steindler to President Hallowell, September 1, 1971. UA024.001.013.00007. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>55</sup> “Tufts agitators of 1960”. *Tufts Criterion*. Vol. 5 (no. 2, November 1972). Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

implementation of several reforms intended to correct the problems around which SDS based its platform, such as increased safeguards protecting university employees from unlawful termination.<sup>56</sup> With these new policies in place, Tufts students quickly became less motivated to support SDS causes or join their demonstrations, instead gravitating toward other, more campus-centered issues.

Yet perhaps even more significantly, Tufts SDS also became increasingly alienated because of its continued failure to align with other civil rights groups on campus (such as Tufts AAS) following the Fremming Affair. Historian David Barber argues in his *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed* that this same problem is what caused such a swift decline in SDS influence nationally, as the movement in its later years "ultimately came to reflect the dominant white culture's understandings of race, gender, class, and nation."<sup>57</sup> As fewer and fewer students began to see the value of SDS as an organization on the Tufts campus, its presence faded away, disappearing completely by 1973. SDS as a national movement had effectively disappeared by this point as well, although its Weatherman Underground would continue as an independent group into the late 1970s.

At first glance, the Fremming Affair might appear as a relatively minor moment in the larger scope of Tufts history, perhaps only worthy of a footnote in discussions of student life in the 1960s; however, when one examines the event and the many perspectives that surrounded it, one understands the true significance of the Fremming Affair in the context of student protests of the time period. Tufts SDS and its behavior

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<sup>56</sup> Russell Miller. *Light on the Hill: A History of Tufts University since 1952*. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA.

<sup>57</sup> David Barber. *A Hard Rain Fell SDS and Why It Failed*. Jackson: Jackson : University Press of Mississippi, 2008, 5.

throughout the Fremming Affair both spoke to the universal aspects and trends of SDS that were occurring across the country while also showcasing the student body's ability to transform the national movement into something distinct at Tufts University. In this way, Tufts SDS also serves as an illustration of the individual character of universities and the student populations that comprise them. Despite its roots in a national organization, Tufts SDS' history on campus was truly unique to Tufts and Tufts alone. Finally, in a time of political turmoil and activism across the United States, the story of Students for a Democratic Society at Tufts University stands as a lesson for all students looking to engage in issues outside the boundaries of their campuses, showing the capacity for young adults to effect change when their efforts remain clear, organized, inclusive, and peaceful. More than forty years after its dissolution, Tufts Students for a Democratic Society remains an important example of student activism and its limits that will continue to resonate on Tufts campus and beyond for years to come.

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