

FORUM

*A Discussion and Information
Bulletin Published by the
Independent Socialist League*

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Price

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Date

March, 1957

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EDITORIAL NOTES

Although the convention call has not yet been issued, this issue of Forum begins the pre-convention discussion. As indicated to you in a communication sent out to the branches, the material issued on the question of socialist regroupment and unity with the SP-SDF, particularly the Memorandum, which is to be developed as part of the document on the American resolution, is to serve as part of the pre-convention discussion without awaiting the formal date for opening discussion.

This issue, therefore, contains the first resolution on SP unity adopted unanimously by the PC, and the communication which accompanied that resolution; the statement on "regroupment and the stalinoids," the Memorandum of the PC majority, the Motions of Haskell and Draper and two articles by the aforementioned.

The reason for reprinting all of the documents is so that the record of our actions will be complete within a single cover and to enable every member to have a copy of the documents in connection with the discussion.

We shall try to get Forum out as frequently as possible. That will depend in part on the material that is sent in to it from various areas in the country. The only necessary caution to bear in mind is the size of contribution.

The editors
March 8, 1957

2662

(The letter below was sent out with the resolution "Socialist Unity and the SP" printed in Labor Action for November 5, 1956.)

To all Branches:
To all Comrades:

October 25, 1956

The report in Labor Action on the status of our case should bring you up to date with this added information. The reply to the Government's Proposed Findings and our own recommendations must be in by December 2. The WDL committee will be issuing material shortly on other aspects of our campaign.

Attached you will find copies of a resolution of the PC on our attitude toward unity with the Socialist Party. This resolution, adopted unanimously, is the result of many discussions which the PC has held in the last several months and which began when the SP left wing proposed such unity at the last SP convention.

The PC agreed that in general such unity would be desirable but differing estimates became evident on such questions as whether it is possible to achieve unity on an acceptable basis with the SP today, on what basis, etc.

It should be added, that no negotiations have taken place, nor are there any concrete proposals on the agenda. We did agree to proceed where possible with conversations with leading SPers to find out what their opinions are and to indicate our own.

In our discussions in the PC, various opinions on the broad questions relating to perspectives of socialism in the U.S. were touched upon. These views have either not yet been fully clarified, nor have they been presented in documentary form. Such questions will be properly discussed in connection with the coming national convention on the basis of resolutions that are to be prepared for it by the PC.

However, between now and then, any practical steps taken by us will be governed by the resolution unanimously adopted at a recent meeting of the PC.

I must add again to what I have written to several comrades: no negotiations have taken place; no "deals" are being made, let alone contemplated. The resolution is the outcome of a discussion made obvious by the event of the SP convention to which we have tried, quite properly, to provide an answer not for any specific moment, but for the question in general as we face it today. Obviously, the matter is presented to you so that you may yourself consider the question, discuss it, and advise us of your views.

Fraternally yours,

Albert Gates

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Socialist Unity Resolution #1

SOCIALIST UNITY AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY

(Resolution adopted unanimously by the Political Committee of the Independent Socialist League on October 22, 1956).

(1) We welcome the initiative taken by left-wing comrades in the Socialist Party in proposing to explore the possibility of unity between the Socialist Party and the ISL and other socialist groups.

(2) We are for such unity, as a step toward revitalizing a militant socialist movement in this country against both capitalism and Stalinism.

(3) We are ready at any time to enter into discussion with representatives of the Socialist Party to explore the possibilities of such unity, without laying down any conditions in advance of such discussion, programmatic or organizational. We think that every opportunity should be taken, both by the comrades of the Socialist Party and our own, to explore such possibilities, and to mutually clarify our respective points of view with each other. Our attitude in favor of unity is not conditioned on any change in the program or leadership in the SP; what we have in view is not unification exclusively with the left wing or any other single section of the SP. We are in favor of uniting with the SP as a whole as it is now.

(4) The socialist unity we stand for is intended to further a lasting regroupment of socialist forces, and must be the antithesis of any kind of "raid" by one socialist group or another. We are for such an organizational merger as promises to lead to a stable and lasting coexistence of the merged forces on a healthy and mutually agreed basis: it is this whose possibilities we want to explore. While we would want the most favorable possible unity from our point of view, we do not condition our attitude on securing it.

(5) This statement is, therefore, not put forward as a temporary or conjunctural expedient, but as a statement of continuing policy for the Independent socialist movement, to make clear that among the tenets of Independent Socialism is also this one: that we stand for socialist unity. Short of unity, or until it may become possible, we stand by the same token, for a maximum in amicable and cooperative relations with the SP, in spite of or above and beyond our legitimate political differences and argumentation, and we favor measures which will contribute to such amicable and cooperative relations for the future.

Socialist Unity Resolution #2

PROPOSED STATEMENT ON POLICY

(On Socialist Regroupment)

(Statement adopted unanimously
by the Political Committee of
the Independent Socialist
League, December 24, 1956)

The question of socialist regroupment has been under discussion by virtually every socialist tendency in the United States and has been raised inside the Communist Party by men like John Gates and Steve Nelson. We are eager to join in the discussion, of course. In order to indicate the attitude of the PC as quickly as possible we are sending out this very sketchy summary of the results of our discussions without waiting to formulate a lengthy document of analysis. We will go further into the question in our pre-convention material.

In the current discussions by all degrees and varieties of socialists, liberals, Stalinoids and Stalinists on the need for socialist regroupment, the PC recommends that our comrades of the ISL take roughly the following position:

We are for the constitution of a new democratic socialist movement in America. We do not prejudge the question of just how soon such a movement will come into being, or exactly what elements will go into its make-up. We are for the widest discussion, public and private, among all who consider themselves socialists in any sense of the word, for the purpose of exploring and furthering the possibility of the creation of such a new movement.

We do not consider that such discussions should be directed toward arriving at a common theoretical agreement among all socialist tendencies. Although theoretical discussions are by no means to be excluded, discussions should be directed toward finding out whether there exists, and toward bringing into existence, sufficient political grounds for a united movement.

For instance, it is our view that theoretical differences over

the nature of the Russian state, or of Russian society should not be a bar to unity. The same applies with regard to views as to whether what is needed in Russia is a political revolution a social revolution, thorough-going reform, or what not. What is essential is that all who would participate in a united movement be for a complete democratization of Russia, be willing to support struggles for such a democratization, and oppose the suppression of such struggles. No socialist movement, which is in any way tied to the Russian government or its ruling party, of which supports the totalitarian regime in Russia, can gain the support of or significant influence in the American working class. In any event, we are not for such a movement.

We are for barring no group in advance from consideration as part of a united socialist movement in this country because of its past political positions or affiliations. The attitude we take toward individuals and groupings depends on the positions they take on this central question of democracy in both the Communist and capitalist camps concretely today, not on what they stood for in the past.

It is our view that although, on the basis of the above approach, groups would obviously be eligible for participation in such a movement who believe that Russia, China or the satellites have "socialist" regimes or societies, in some sense of the word, such a movement could not refer officially to these countries as "socialist" without compromising its own democratic conception of socialism in the public mind.

Without at the present time going into any pre-judgement of the ultimate form of the socialist movement in America, it is clear from the above that we have in mind a broad type of socialist movement, not a strictly disciplined, ideologically homogeneous one. While adherence to the democratic principles outlined above would be expected of all, we are for such a movement as would maintain the best socialist traditions of internal democracy, including all rights of minority expression of opinion.

We wish to emphasize that what we are proposing to our comrades is a line to follow in discussions with all interested parties. We want to become known among the radical public as the organization which advocates this kind of socialist regroupment at this time. When and if the time should ever come when concrete negotiations for unity between us and one or more organizations becomes practicable, it will be time enough to discuss among ourselves the exact terms and conditions.

The policy toward groups such as are dealt with above must not be regarded as being in contradiction to the resolution adopted by the PC on the question of unity between the ISL and the SP, nor can any of our activity or relations with regard to such groups be of such a nature as would impede the achievement of unity with the SP on the basis indicated by the PC resolution.

In all discussions we urge the inclusion of the SP and we urge

the SP to participate. In contrast to the SWP, for example, which makes the "defense of the SU" a line of demarcation in who joins with whom, we call for the inclusion of all democratic tendencies, including the SP. The participation of the SP would be exceptionally important in avoiding a Stalinoid tinge to any regroupment. We call your attention to the Fall 1956 issue of the Int'l Social Review (SWP) 1st col. p. 114, which presents a line which would exclude the SP and ISL.

This statement is being issued for the purpose of obtaining the reaction of the NC and the membership to the line we propose to advance on immediately re socialist regroupment in our press and in discussions with socialists. For a more fully developed official resolution we will have to wait til the convention. But we would like your reactions to this immediately, as articles on the question in our press are long overdue.

We must hear from you on this matter in two weeks, as we propose to write on this question at that time.

PC-ISL

12/28/56

MEMORANDUM ON OUR PERSPECTIVE
AND ORIENTATION IN THE MATTER
OF SOCIALIST UNITY

(Memorandum adopted by a majority of the political committee of the Independent Socialist League, Feb. 2, 1957. A majority of the PC voted that this memorandum supercedes all previous statements on socialist unity adopted by the Committee.)

Our orientation in the problem of socialist unity must be rooted in our relationship to the development of the working classes. The unification of the AFL and CIO has brought the American working class to its highest point in strength and made it the most numerous and powerful social movement in the country. The unification has been achieved without the surrender of any of the basic principles that distinguished the progressive section from the conservative section, but indeed with the formal acceptance of these principles by the latter and in the increasing real acceptance of them by the labor movement as a whole. The unification of the labor movement in this way is an historic turning-point is being recorded by another section of the working people, the Negroes in the South, in the irreversible movement for equality that embraces virtually all of them. Not only are the two movements historically linked but, despite the insignificant organizational ties between them at present, they are already linked politically and socially in the significance and consequence of their development.

Both developments are of decisive importance for the future of a genuine, effective socialist movement in this country. For a wide variety of reasons, both of them have unfolded without the socialist movement being strengthened thereby and without the socialist movement or any section of it having any influence upon them. Yet, socialism cannot become a serious movement in this country until its main foundations rest securely in the organized labor and Negro movements and struggles. In its present fragmented and disoriented form, socialism is in no position to lay these foundations. It is important to add: regardless of its form and orientation, socialism will not be in a position

to lay these foundations until the objective conditions engender a new wave of massive class struggles and radicalization among the workers.

Objectively, all the discussions, ferment and reconsiderations now manifest in all the sections of the socialist, Stalinist and intermediate groups, even though precipitated apparently by the outbreak of the crisis in the Stalinist world abroad, boil down to resolving the problem of how to achieve or restore the union of socialist (or pseudo socialist) ideas and the labor movement from the standpoint of each of the groups and tendencies involved. So it is the case, as it necessarily must be, with the ISL. Our decisions must facilitate, not in some unrealizably ideal or abstract sense but in the sense of the maximum possible under the concrete circumstances, the advancement of our ideas of democratic socialism in the ranks of labor and Negro movements, and the corresponding growth of a socialist movement based upon these broad mass movements and exercising an increasing influence among them. Any decision taken in the matter of socialist unity, or in relations with other groups, must serve this objective. Any decision, no matter what success it seems to yield of a temporary or isolated nature, but is not conceived and carried on in a way which is consciously subordinated to the attainment of the objective, is wrong.

We recognize that the bulk of the radical movement, including the socialist radical movement, in the past twenty years has been under the ideological, political and most often the organizational leadership of the Stalinist Party. This movement, which helped identify socialism with the theories and practices of Stalinism, and of the Stalinist regimes, in the minds of the public, and above all in the minds of the working class, ended by producing an immense antagonism to Stalinism and, correspondingly, to socialism, in the working class. The Stalinist leadership of this movement is now practically dead. The ideology of Stalinism among the residue of this movement has been severely shaken by the Stalinist crisis. It is not, however, as dead as is the leadership of the Stalinist party, but remains to one degree or another. Indeed, the extent to which this ideology dominates the political thinking of various intermediate groups (ex-Stalinist, ex-Progressive Party, ex-Trotskyist) and their supporters, or the extent to which they have freed themselves, formally or actually, from this ideology, determines in large measure the contribution they are able to make to effective socialist regroupment. In turn, the extent to which it is possible to create or build an effective socialist regroupment as an alternative pole of attraction to that constituted by Stalinism, will determine in large measure the degree to which these groups shake off the remnants of the ideology of Stalinism. From the foregoing follow these conclusions.

1. If a regroupment took place essentially through the unification of all the above-indicated groups into a new, united movement, excluding only the Stalinist leadership, it would result certainly in excluding all or the great bulk of those who, without accepting all the policies that distinguish the ISL, are committed to democratic socialism and are hostile

to supporters, including critical supporters, of Stalinism in the name of socialism. Such a new coalesced movement would carry the stamp, not so much by formal decision as by its predominant composition, of a re-formed and modified pro-Stalinist movement. We do not see how such a coalition could play a genuinely positive role in the growth of a socialist movement as we conceive of it. Neither is it in the interest of the further progress in the right direction of those who are to one degree or another moving away from Stalinism. It would tend to halt such ideological and political progress and thereby contribute to nullifying the effectiveness of those who have a contribution to make to the growth of the socialist movement. Our contact, discussion or collaboration with these groups and individuals must therefore aim at persuading them not to yield to any tendency toward such a coalition, at persuading them of the negative character of such a direction of their efforts, and at turning their attention and efforts in the direction of concrete alternatives. While we seek friendly contact and discussion, free from violent polemics, with such groups and individuals, we must decline sponsorship and responsibility for any organization or "semi-organization" which associates us with any groups that has not declared, plainly, whatever its estimate of the social nature or course of development of the Stalinist countries, that it is hostile to and independent of the totalitarian regimes that rule them, and supports all genuinely democratic movements and struggles against these regimes. Inasmuch as all the groups involved in any possible unification, have to one degree or other condemned the attack of Stalinism upon the Hungarian people, and expressed support for the democratic and socialist struggles of these peoples against the Hungarian and Russian Stalinist regimes, our proposal for such a general declaration on their part cannot reasonably be objected to as an attempt by us to impose an ultimatum upon them.

2. For us to declare that collaboration with other groups requires their acceptance of all our theoretical position, including our position on the nature of Stalinism and of Stalinist society, or that such acceptance is required for coexistence in one socialist organization, would be wrong and ultimatic and contrary to our conception of the socialist unification that is now required. We make no such declaration and we reject it when made by anyone else. We regard the theoretical differences on the Russian question, on Stalinism, which were the main cause of the splits in the past, as "frozen" for the present as regard the groups now discussing unity. We do not refrain from advancing our own theoretical position, but we do not make it, or the position of any other tendency, the pre-condition for unity. The pre-condition for unity is acceptance of the general principles of democratic socialism, agreement upon a democratic life for the united organization and support of the democratic struggle against the totalitarian regime. This does not encompass the full position of the ISL, to whose tendency we reserve the democratic right of advocacy in a responsible and not disruptive way in a united socialist organization, which is the right of any other tendency as well. This viewpoint

indicates that we do not regard to put forward the ISL as the basis of the reunification of the socialist movement, but do consider it as an indispensable element of the unity and as a tendency in it enjoying full equality with all others.

3. The ISL is in favor of unity with the Socialist Party because it can become the framework for such a unification and make a tremendous contribution towards its advancement. If the SP neglects the opportunity at hand it will drastically reduce the prospects for its growth in the immediate period ahead and in the future as well. The orientation of the ISL is based upon doing its best to help realize the former possibility. The ISL decides firmly in favor of unity with the Socialist Party as it is at present constituted and without posing any conditions of an organizational or political kind save those that are incontestable for all members enjoying equality of rights and duties. The ISL has neither the intention nor the desire to unite with the Socialist Party in order to "capture" it, for even if this were possible such a "victory" would not only be meaningless but, what is worse, it would defeat the very objective of converting the SP from its present position of isolation and weakness to an effective, influence, broad, democratic socialist movement in the best traditions of the Debs period. Without for a moment abandoning our right to present our own views on the policies and tactics of the socialist movement, we favor the exercise of this elementary right in such a way as to serve the aim of building the Socialist Party, of bringing into it new and numerous elements from the labor movement, the Negro movement, the student youth, the intellectuals and professional people, and not in such a way as to sterilize the party by making it a vanishing battleground for hard-and-fast factions or sects. Without for a moment abandoning our support of the principles and practices of democratic socialism as the basis for a reunited and healthy socialist movement but rather by insisting upon these principles, we aim to build a Socialist Party which successfully takes up the challenge offered by the existence of great numbers of radicals who have already broken with Stalinism or are in the course of doing so, and seek a vigorous socialist organization which rejects sectarianism and aims at becoming a living movement. It is precisely in this sense that the Socialist Party has the possibility of displacing the Stalinist Party as the leader and spokesman for the radical and progressive movements, not only and not even so much those of the past period but the new ones that are surely to develop.

Individual radicals formerly under the influence of Stalinism may be recruited to a revolutionary sect. But the bulk of these who are still ready to work for socialism can be attracted only to an organization which is a serious political movement or which has the possibility of being developed into such a movement. From this point of view, too, the ISL favors unity with the SP as the organization which it is possible to build up as a serious pole of attraction to all radicals of yesterday, today and tomorrow, which offers a significant alternative to Stalinism in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism. If the SP takes advantage of

of the real possibilities that are arising before our eyes it will be able to become just such a poke of attraction. Meanwhile, in discussions with the various so-called "pro-Soviet" elements in and outside the CP we emphasize above all our minimum political platform for democratic socialist regroupment and present and defend the ISL's proposal that it unite with the SP. We strongly urge that the SP enter into all the current debates and discussions on regroupment.

4. Our aim with regard to the Socialist Party must serve in turn our wider long range aim with regard to the labor movement, as the most important of the mass movements in the country. The present period is a long interlude between the last radicalization wave and the one to come. In such a period it is not possible to think in terms of a genuinely powerful socialist movement numbering many tens of thousands and influencing many hundreds of thousands and more. But it is possible and necessary to utilize to the maximum all the possibilities now at hand to consolidate during this interlude the kind of socialist movement that will be best able to assist the working class in its further economic and political progress and be assisted in turn by the most conscious elements from its ranks who join and build the socialist wing of the labor movement.

The ISL has no grandiloquent illusions about the immediate possibilities for a powerful socialist movement. It is however anxious to do all in its power to utilize present concrete possibilities, no matter how modest, in conscious preparation for the much greater possibilities of the future. It is also in this sense that the ISL is prepared to unite with the Socialist Party and to pursue a course of building it up that will best advance the cause and influence of socialism in the labor movement, now and later. It is in the same sense that we refuse to support any movement which equivocates on the key question of the Stalinist regimes, for, among other reasons, it is precisely the identification of Stalinism with socialism in the minds of the American working class that had militated so strongly against the progress of socialism in this country.

ON SOCIALIST UNITY

The following motion is presented as a substitute for the sections of the PC majority's "Memorandum on Our Perspectives..." dealing with the ISL-SP unity (point 3 and following).

With regard to the SP-SDF, our views are as follows:

The SP-SDF is a right-wing social democratic sect, not significantly larger than the ISL. It is just as isolated as we are from all influence in any section of the labor and Negro movements, and hardly less isolated from the general "socialist" public in America. Its political and organizational life is at such a low ebb that for some time its only public voice has been the Call, a bi-monthly magazine. Since even this publication appears to lead a semi-autonomous existence, the views of the SP national committee and other authoritative bodies on vital current issues tend to remain the private property of these bodies and the membership of the party with little effort made to spread them to a broader public. Even the historic events which have produced the present ferment and re-evaluation in all sections of the radical movement appear to have left it unmoved and unruffled.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the SP's tradition and historic reputation in America confer on it the possibility of becoming the framework for the socialist regroupment and revival which we all ardently desire. It is not the only possibility, however. If the membership and leadership of the SP-SDF cannot be shaken out of their sectarian lethargy by argument and by events, either now or in the future, another one will have to be found.

As far as we are concerned, the big contribution the ISL has made to the regroupment discussion now going on has been to put forward the concept of an all-inclusive socialist party as the form of the socialist movement in America for the coming period. In the PC motion "Proposed Statement on Policy," which we hereby reaffirm, we have delineated the programmatic limits for this "all inclusiveness" as far as we are concerned vis a vis the Stalinists and Stalinism.

In countries where the social democracy is a mass movement, we have been for the participation of our co-thinkers in such movements for a long time, despite the right-wing political program or character of such mass social democratic movements. But a proposal for unity between the ISL and the SP-SDF presents revolutionary democratic socialists with an entirely different political problem. What is proposed is not the dissolution of a revolutionary sect for the purpose of joining a mass, all-inclusive social democratic party, but the uniting of two sects to form the basis for the regroupment and revitalization of a broad socialist movement in this country.

Political Basis for Unity

In this connection, we want to draw special attention to Point 4 in the resolution on "Socialist Unity and the SP" printed in the Nov. 5, 1956 issue of Labor Action. Among other things, this

point states: "We are for such an organizational merger as premises to lead to a stable and lasting coexistence of the merged forces on a healthy and mutually agreed basis."

The "Memorandum of Understanding" which formed the political basis of the recent merger of the SP and SDF, and the political discussions and negotiations which preceded its acceptance by both organizations is an example of the kind of process we have in mind in the passage quoted above. In the concrete case of an organizational merger involving the ISL and the SP-SDF, we would propose the following concepts as a political basis for unity:

1). Both parties to such a merger would recognize that the purpose of the unity is to lay the foundations for the regroupment and revitalization of a broad socialist movement. This does not mean that either need accept the theoretical concepts or even the political program of the other. It does not even mean that the SP-SDF has to accept in advance our regroupment perspective exactly as we have put it forward up to the present moment. This, as well as other questions, remains an area for the most extensive and friendly discussion between us, and we desire to set no a-priori conditions to the SP-SDF, programmatic or tactical, as a condition for such discussions and negotiations.

It does mean, however, that at this time we consider as an indispensable prerequisite for a healthy unification of the two organizations that each must accept the other as a legitimate partner in this political enterprise on whose broad objectives they are in agreement.

2.) The unity of the ISL with the SP-SDF would have little to recommend it were it not for the hope and expectation that a unity consummated on the basis of a perspective of re-building the American socialist movement on new and broader foundations would attract a considerable number of people to the united organization who would not join either separately. These people will participate, along with the original members, in forming the program of the new movement. All the ISL needs, and all the SP-SDF needs, in the way of assurance that the future program of the movement will form an acceptable basis for the progress of American socialism is confidence in their own views and in the new generation of socialists who will join the movement in due course.

At the start, however, since two forces of roughly equal size would be joining together in such a unity, and since some time may elapse before the new wave of radicalization sweeps thousands into the party, and even before appreciable new tens and hundreds join it, the problem must be faced of the co-existence of tendencies with programs which diverge considerably at this time, in the same organization. This problem is not solved by a vague reference to the democratic rights which all individuals and groups would enjoy in such a movement.

Because we advance the concept of an all-inclusive socialist party, combining left and right wing democratic socialist tendencies, we recognize that the maintenance and growth of such a movement would be imperiled at this stage if either side sought to impose its whole program, however democratically, on the other. This means that the program of the movement would have to be a minimum program, stated in such broad terms that it could be supported and propagated loyally by all members, while any groupings in the party would naturally preserve the right to advocate their special points of view in a manner

consistent with their loyalty to and support of the party organization.

Perspectives

We cannot say in advance whether the SP-SDF can be convinced to accept unity with the ISL on the basis of the conception set forth here (or on the basis of any other, for that matter). However, every effort should be made to convince them of the prospects for themselves and for American socialism which such a unity would advance.

The members and friends of the ISL should recognize that however desirable such a unity might be, there is no guarantee that the present wave of regroupment sentiment in the radical movement will actually result in a significant socialist regroupment at this time. The mood is new. The suspicions and sectarian habits in the whole movement are old and deeply rooted. It would be only something slightly short of a political miracle if the very first shake-up of Stalinism on a world scale should lead to a reconstituted broad socialist movement in America in the admitted absence of a significant surge in the mass movement.

If we could achieve a healthy unity with the SP-SDF on the basis described here within a short time, that would open excellent prospects for us and for the whole socialist movement. But if it should prove that the obstacles to such unity cannot be overcome now, we can make a very healthy advance if our unity line has been correctly conceived and executed.

The first gain we are making already: a clarification of our own concepts of our character as an ideological tendency and the role we have to play in the socialist movement of the future. The second comes from the recognition we are bound to get in all sections of the radical movement for the conception of socialist regroupment which we are advancing. The third is the personal and organizational contact and exchange of ideas which, even if it should fail to achieve a united movement now, has already gone a long way to replace prejudice against us, or just plain ignorance of what we stand for, with intelligent disagreement based on understanding of our tendency.

These advantages can be developed, or they can be dissipated, depending on the clarity with which we advance our concept of the kind of socialist movement this country needs and the way to build it. They can be helped or hindered, depending on the way in which we advocate and argue for our "Independent Socialist" views on all political questions in the new circumstances in which we find ourselves. They, and our very existence as a tendency can be gravely endangered should the evident desirability of a healthy unity with the SP-SDF as a first step toward building the kind of socialist movement in America we are for give rise in our ranks to a feeling or program for "unity"-- meaning in effect dissolution-and-entry--"at any cost." Such a mood and program could lead to the disorientation and eventual demoralization of the ISL.

A healthy unity with the SP-SDF is a desirable goal, and we should do all we can to persuade the SP-SDF of its desirability. No other kind of unity could actually serve the purpose of laying the basis for the great socialist movement of the future, and we should arouse illusions neither among ourselves nor in the SP-SDF about its prospects. And if the time should prove not to have ripened yet for the regroupment of the socialist movement, we have everything to gain and nothing to lose for the present or the future by the kind of unity line set forth here.

FOR A HEALTHY SOCIALIST UNITY

by Gordon Haskell

For the past ten years all sections of the American socialist movement have been in decline. The reasons for this are so well known in our organization, that they need not be gone into here.

A decade is a long time. Only the firmest conviction in their principles and the utmost tenacity of purpose have kept socialist groups in existence. All of them—all of us—have been ardently looking for the day when we could emerge from our terrible isolation and begin the construction of that broad, vital, effective socialist movement, firmly based on the mass organizations of the working class and the Negro people, which we are convinced will one day arise in America. Since world Stalinism has been one of the main obstacles to the reconstruction and revitalization of the socialist movement, it is quite understandable and quite right that the first major crisis of Stalinism should produce in the whole socialist movement a state of expectancy, ferment and re-evaluation of its status and prospects.

The independent Socialist League has once again demonstrated its political vitality by its response to the crisis in the Communist Party and in the so-called "pro-Soviet" circles. Not only has it sought to intervene directly in their discussions, but it has sought to present them with a concept of the form of a new socialist movement in America which can attract and aid in the re-orientation of those among them who are seeking a way out of the blind alley of Stalinism.

Ever since we dissolved the Workers Party, we have been moving in a direction which makes our coming out now for an all-inclusive socialist party for the next stage of the American socialist movement a natural, spontaneous political act. When we formed the ISL, we announced in word and in action that we do not consider our tendency as the basis for the broad socialist movement of the future, but rather as one element among others. Our specific weight, our specific role in such a movement is not conferred on us by history, but depends on the validity of the views we have developed over the years, and on our intelligence in applying them.

The crisis of Stalinism, the recession of the wave of reaction in America, the unity of the labor movement, the struggle of the Negroes for equality—all these bring closer on the horizon the possibility of the regroupment and revitalization of the American socialist movement. They create the conditions for a new radicalization wave in America. But that wave has not yet started to build up. And no one can tell how many months or years it will be before it does.

These are the conditions, this is the background for our proposal for unity with the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation.

WHAT THE SOCIALIST PARTY IS AND WHAT IT CAN BE

The SP-SDF is a right-wing social democratic sect which combines a general adherence to socialist ideals with critical support to the capitalist camp in the struggle against Stalinism. Its views on the nature and tactics in the struggle against Stalinism are closely related to, if not identical with those of the more progressive wing of the labor movement. But aside from this closeness of views, the SP-SDF is as isolated from influence in the labor

and Negro movements as we are. In addition, they suffer from a special kind of right-wing social democratic sectarianism which has left them all but unruffled and unstirred by the crisis of the Stalinist movement. Having joined the SP and the SDF together, with negligible political or organizational results, the bulk of their leadership is far more interested in some form of "fusion" (which politically means dissolution) with or into liberal movements to their right than they are with re-grouping the socialist movement for a new beginning in America. Their perspective is not to seek to rally the large mass of socialistically inclined people who have been set adrift by the collapse of Stalinism, so that the socialist movement, thus broadened and strengthened, could exert determined and effective political pressure on those sections of the labor movement closest to it. They are, rather, oriented toward maintaining the SP-SDF as, or transforming it into a socialist study circle, whose members meaningful political activity is carried on outside it, as indistinguishable followers of the politics of Reuther and Stevenson.

Though the approach and politics of the SP-SDF leadership is far from promising from our point of view, it is clear that in any all-inclusive socialist movement they, or people like them would be an indispensable element. Our proposal for unity with them, like our proposal on socialist regroupment made to the "pro-Soviet" elements, is a political act which demonstrates in practice the nature and genuineness of our commitment to the idea of an all-inclusive socialist party in America.

I have said that the politics of the SP-SDF are an indispensable element for any all-inclusive socialist party in America. At the start of such a party, and for a while period after, they may even be the dominant numerical and political element in such a movement. Such a prospect should neither discourage nor dismay us in the least.

But let us face it. There is no such movement today. The SP-SDF's reputation and tradition make it possible for them to form the framework within which such a movement can be built. But that possibility can be realized only if the membership and leadership of the SP-SDF can be brought to understand, accept and act to bring it about.

They are not such a movement at this time. And they plus the ISL would not be such a movement unless they, like us, are willing to set out consciously to become the basis for such a movement.

THE REAL MEANING OF ISL-SP UNITY

A unity involving the ISL and YSL and the SP-SDF would be the merger of, in effect, two propaganda tendencies or sects. The political problem involved is not the problem of the existence and functioning of a left-wing democratic socialist tendency in a mass right-wing socialist party, but of the co-existence of two propaganda groups of relatively equal size under the same organizational roof.

Others would join the day after such a unity, to be sure. But until the radicalization wave starts to move, they would be in the tens, not the hundreds or thousands.

Now, all this should not lead us to be indifferent to or opposed to unity with the SP-SDF. But it should make it clear to all parties concerned that if this is to be a healthy and viable unity, if it is to serve the purpose

of laying the foundations for the broad socialist movement of the future, it must be brought about on the basis of such agreement between the parties to it as will make possible their lasting and fruitful co-existence.

In my opinion, the minimum basis for such agreement is this:

- 1) Each party to the unity must accept the other as a legitimate partner in laying the foundations for the all-inclusive party which they both aspire to build.
- 2) They both agree that the program of the united party should be stated in such broad terms that it could be propagated and supported loyally by all members, while any groupings in the party would naturally preserve the right to advocate their special point of view in a manner consistent with their loyalty to and support of the party organization.

It is argued that the SP-SDF cannot be convinced to accept our perspective on socialist regroupment, and that any insistence on our part that we be afforded the same opportunity to seek to negotiate a minimum program acceptable to both, such as the SP-SDF has just negotiated, is in effect a rejection of the idea of unity.

Let us be quite clear. We do not ask that the SP-SDF accept our exact formulation on socialist regroupment in advance of discussion and negotiations, and not even necessarily in the course of them. We do not propose that they bring their program closer to ours before we are willing to negotiate unity. We do not propose that we present them with our program, either straight or a bit watered down, as the basis for unity. We do propose that we explore the possibility with them of sufficient agreement on the purpose and perspective of the united party before unity so that we do not find the week or month after that hostility, recriminations and disunity be the product of misunderstanding. We do propose that we explore with them the possibility of formulating a platform for the united party stated in such broad terms that we could loyally support it, and that none of its terms be in such flagrant conflict with our views (or theirs) that we (or they) could be justly charged with disloyalty for propagating such views inside and outside the party after unity had been achieved.

PC MAJORITY POSITION

The position of the PC majority is different. They are ready to accept the SP-SDF program, as it is right now, as the program of the united party. They oppose any suggestion to the SP-SDF that we discuss or negotiate over program. They describe any such suggestion as de facto opposition to unity, on the ground that the SP-SDF would never agree to it. Their attitude on the question of unity is: don't talk about politics, don't talk about program. The SP-SDF is our chosen framework for the unification of the socialist movement. The only problem is to get us into that framework. That is going to be hard enough in any event. Don't make any difficulties. Once we are in it, we will revitalize it, we will build it up, we will reconstitute it as the basis for socialist regroupment.

In our own way, we of the PC minority have more respect for the comrades of the SP-SDF than that involved in the majority position. Their organization could be the possible framework of the broad socialist movement of tomorrow. But it is not an inert object, a copyrighted brand-name, or an abstraction. It is made up of men and women with a certain tradition and certain politics of their own. So is the ISL. If we unite, we are going to have to live

together for some time before we are re-inforced and transformed by the adherence of a new generation of socialists who will put their own imprint on the movement and change the relationship of forces within it. Unless we unite on a sound, agreed basis, the united organization would be in gravest danger of flying apart before this could happen.

The majority resolution speaks of "insisting" on "our"... "principles and practices of democratic socialism as the basis of a united and healthy socialist movement..." In the context of their line, that is a meaningless phrase, to put it politely. They propose to insist on nothing except unity itself. In addition, they propose only that we be granted the usual democratic rights of other SP-SDF members. Implicit in the logic of their line of accepting the SP-SDF program as the basis for unity and the program of the party, without discussions or negotiations for its modification or "neutralization" in a manner which would make it not inconsistent with third camp politics, is a commitment not to use such democratic rights to bring about such a change in the foreseeable future.

In our opinion, the logic of their line is such as to lead to or justify a simple dissolution of the ISL and entry of its members as individuals into the SP-SDF. They are not for that now, they would like some formal recognition of the ISL as a tendency in the SP-SDF. But such is their headlong commitment to the idea that unity is the road to issue from the isolation of the ISL, and that this road must be entered this very moment, or all is lost....that should the SP-SDF agree to unity on no other basis, we see no logical reason for them to reject it.

WHAT WOULD WE LOSE - WHAT WOULD WE GAIN?

It is no crime to propose the dissolution of a socialist sect, however good its program, into a broader socialist movement. It is simply a matter of weighing what one would gain for one's principles as against what one would lose. In this case, we say: unless unity is achieved on a healthy, agreed basis, we would lose the advantage of the untrammelled presentation of our third camp socialist position and our views on the regroupment of the socialist movement. And we would gain...not the chance to lay the foundations of the all-inclusive socialist party of the future together with the comrades of the SP-SDF, but either a long period of self-imposed, stultifying political and ideological self-effacement, or a wearing, sterile internal struggle between tendencies who had united without having found a healthy common ground for their unity.

It has been argued that if the ISL can get into the SP-SDF on "any basis," five minutes after we are in, we can change the program of the party as we will.

Such an assertion is utterly misleading. No one wants to unite with the SP-SDF and then to split it. If the SP-SDF leadership is not willing to negotiate with us on any basis whatever; if even the suggestion that we want to talk about perspectives and program would end all discussions with them, what would their reaction be if, after they had been convinced we were utterly harmless, and despite their suspicions and misgivings had been cajoled into looking the other way while we crawled in the back door--what if after such a "unity", not after five minutes, but after five months, we began to press for programmatic changes?

Obviously this could only lead to disaster. The real meaning of such a unity

would be a prolonged silence on our part, broken only for the purpose of policing any of our people or others who might be suspected of being our people, who might raise their voices to demand such changes.

IS A HEALTHY UNITY POSSIBLE?

For remember this: the way in which we achieve unity will determine the way we have to live in the united movement for a considerable period of time. And the length of that time depends not on our will, but on the amount of time it will take for a radicalization wave to start building up in the country.

Can the SP-SDF be convinced to unite with us on the minimum basis we propose? We don't know. If it is not attempted, we may never know. No one can give any honest assurance that they can be convinced to unite with us on any basis...even to let us sneak in through the back door.

Proponents of the PC majority say that they are really for unity, while we are for a line which, since it cannot be realized, is really against unity. We are, they say, for the continued existence of our little sect, with its Third Camp banner bravely flying in the breeze.

The fact of the matter is, however, that they have unity with the SP-SDF no more in their back pockets on their basis than we have it in ours on our basis. Both of us only have a line, a course of action, to propose to the comrades of the ISL and of the SP-SDF.

In deciding on any tactical line, specially in a matter which involves the very existence of an organization, a wise tactician must consider the negative possibilities and consequences of a failure of his tactic as well as the positive gains which would result from its success.

The PC majority line is geared only to the optimum possibility. Since even its most enthusiastic supporters cannot guarantee its success, it is actually staking the very existence of our movement on a political gamble.

The policy proposed by the PC minority, on the other hand, can produce favorable results regardless of the outcome of the present unity mood in radical circles. Since it proposes no self-serving ultimatic demands on the SP-SDF, it demonstrates in practice our concept of the kind of broad socialist movement we want to build in the U.S. If it succeeds in convincing the SP-SDF comrades, a healthy and durable unity could result. If they cannot be convinced now, no doors have been closed for the future.

The advantages of a healthy unity are worth a strong try. We should not be discouraged if they don't go for it first crack out of the barrel. We should not talk ourselves into such a state of "unity-itis" that if the obstacles cannot be overcome now, political life in our own organization no longer seems worth living.

That is one of the dangers of the majority approach to unity. It is revealed more in their approach to the question in discussion and in the press and in opposition to the policy we propose than in their diplomatically worded "memorandum."

The desire to break out of our isolation after the murderous decade through which we have just gone is understandable, and of itself, highly laudable. It can become a danger to our very existence as an organized tendency, however, if the desire becomes father to political invention based on hopes and

frustrations rather than on sound political realities and perspectives. That can lead only to disorientation and demoralization.

We are for an organizational merger with the SP-SDF which promises to lead to a stable and lasting co-existence of the merged forces on a healthy and mutually agreed basis. We are for working for such a merger without raising false hopes or illusions among our members and supporters on its likelihood, or giving rise in our ranks to a feeling that, if worst comes to worst, unity "at any cost" --meaning in effect, dissolution and entry --is better than holding on until a more propitious time makes possible a healthy regroupment of the socialist forces in America.

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THE MEANING OF SHACHTMAN'S "SOCIALIST UNITY"

by Hal Draper

First of all, we should get clear what is in dispute and what isn't. The PC has published three resolutions, or statements or policy, around the question of unity and regroupment. The first two were adopted unanimously. The third and latest concretized the dispute which was latent behind the other two.

These differences of opinion in the PC were discussed in the committee from the very beginning--namely, early a year ago. There were obviously two (at least two) different conceptions of what it meant to favor unity with the SP, or what unity. For months it was hoped--or at any rate, to speak for myself, I hoped--that the difference could be legitimately resolved in the committee without breaking out into a racking dispute in the League over the fate of the organization. I expected, and expect, no good from such a dispute.

Thus, when it turned out that the first resolution on Unity with the SP (published in LA Nov. 5) was voted unanimously, it was communicated to the League with the note that there were differences of opinion on related matters that would come up later.

Resolution #2 (Proposed Statement of Policy on Socialist Regroupment) dealt with an entirely different side of the general question, namely, with the question of an all-in socialist regroupment which specifically concerned itself with the problem of how to bring together both "pro-Soviet" Stalinoids and democratic-socialists. This statement was not only adopted unanimously by the PC but was, if I am not mistaken, unanimously greeted with enthusiasm by the membership everywhere or virtually everywhere. It is this line, not the line on entry into the SP, which has also aroused deserved interest outside the ISL.

In the adoption of this statement, too, the differences showed themselves. The point involved was the relationship between Resolution #1 and Resolution #2.

Shachtman proposed the formulation that unity with the SP be regarded as the "main orientation." I opposed this. Shachtman then proposed the wording which appears in the Statement about not doing anything that "would impede" the unity envisaged in Resolution #1. I accepted this pointing out that it doesn't settle any questions that would naturally arise as to what does and what doesn't impede the kind of unity envisaged in Resolution #1. But at any rate, this made it possible to get the Statement out to the League, after too long delay.

Another passage in this statement did not come up for questioning at the time of adoption. This was the paragraph which actually did establish the relationship between the SP side of the regroupment and the "all-in" side. It was formulated in

terms of urging the "inclusion" of the SP in a socialist regroupment, urging its "participation." The idea was very clear that we thought that the SP should be one among the socialist tendencies regrouped in the manner proposed.

In his Jan. 18 speech at the public symposium "Can the Left Unite?" at the Great Northern Hotel in New York City, Shachtman first launched the line that the "all-in" socialist regroupment should take place within the framework of the SP; that is, the organizational road to this regroupment was presented as joining the SP.

Taken up ex post facto by the PC, this was embodied (somewhat fuzzed up) in the Resolution #3 of the PC Majority, along with some other articulations of some of Shachtman's conceptions of unity. Then the present Minority Resolution was written too.

Thus the differences proved irrepressible, and the dispute emerged from the PC. The differences, however, are not simply on this or that phrase or formulation but on the whole conception of what "unity with the SP" means and on the viability of the ISL. This has been perfectly clear in the PC for months. The League members cannot adequately decide on the question till they understand it just as clearly.

TO CALL A SPADE

The present dispute is tagged "socialist unity." It started out on that subject. However, the discussion in the League will not even start getting anywhere until it is realized that Shachtman's proposition is for a very distinctive and particular form of "socialist unity"—namely, it orients toward dissolution-and-entry into the SP.

I have no objection to calling by the name of "socialist unity" a program which means dissolution-and-entry. Nor am I concerned, in this connection with whether or not it is possible to convince the SP leadership to be so broadminded as to let ISLers join, after dissolution, if only through the back door; that is Shachtman's central concern right now; he may be successful. We have a different concept of socialist unity, that is, of the socialist unity which we favor.

A program aiming at dissolution-and-entry, like Shachtman's, may be considered good or bad -- a masterstroke of strategy, or the manifestation of a pitiful collapse -- or what-have-you; but at any rate comrades ought to look open-eyed at the different courses proposed, and understand what is at stake.

If a majority of the League, on reflection, wants to set a course toward dissolving the ISL into the SP, then so be it. What I would like to see even less, however, is a process whereby the League members back themselves into a position that turns out to mean dissolution-and-entry, without a majority having ever really envisaged it. This is not a good way of adopting a position, in spite of its extensive history. Unfortunately, it is also an easy thing to let happen.

FOR A HEALTHY UNITY

There is nothing wrong in itself with any proposal to dissolve the ISL, for some other form of organization. But certainly it is not one to be entertained or entered on, lightly. Those comrades to whom this is addressed will

not need any tub-thumping claims about the role which the ISL plays, modest though it be: namely as an ideological center of Third Camp politics and Marxist socialism, with its special appeal to those who do not wish to support either capitalism or Stalinism. All we need say right here is that this role is still needed. Before we are moved to abandon it, we need to have very firmly in mind--for what.

One can move to abandon any independent organization, or this independent organization, or any other form of organization -- that is not the central issue as long as the essential political role of the Third Camp socialist cadres can be maintained (or naturally, extended) wherever they may be.

The Minority Resolution proposes a unity with the SP which preserves that role. It spells out this proposal. It says that a healthy unity can be achieved only if there is prior agreement, openly arrived at, on an overall party platform so general that it can be loyally supported by, on the one hand, Third Camp revolutionary socialists and, on the other (say) right-wing social-democrats who are pro-American. Under such conditions, in such a party, the former could play their distinctive political role not only loyally but in such a way as to build the united movement.

If such a unity cannot be achieved, it will be because the SP turns it down; and that would be a pity. If such a unity can be achieved, then a real step of progress for the socialist movement will have been realized.

So we are for a unity with the SP which permits that political role, wherever we are; or at any rate if it is proposed that it be abandoned, we want to know: for what.

THIS IS NOT 1937

Can a program of dissolution-and-entry fulfill that political role or anything adequately like it?

On this, one thing has to be firmly understood by everybody: Shachtman's perspective is not for an entry like that of the Trotskyites in 1936.

The Trotskyist entry of 1936 was made with a divided soul on the part of the then Trotskyist leadership; but I emphasize that Shachtman's present perspective is different from either division of that soul. To be specific:

(1) One strain of thinking in the then Trotskyist group, at any rate never clearly rejected in advance, was the perspective that the entry would only serve to clean out all good left-wing elements in the SP, amalgamate them with the Trotskyist cadres and thus eventually permit the re-formation of an enlarged Trotskyist party. If this strain was at first submerged after the entry, it was virulently re-activated by Trotsky in 1937, and in fact set the pattern which was actually followed in the exit from the SP, with the help of the right-wing SPers who were anxious to expel them anyway.

In effect this was the perspective of a "commando raid," though it does not seem to have been clearly formulated in advanced by the Trotskyist leadership or all of them.

It goes without saying that a repetition of this disastrous course would be an unmitigated crime. Since this would be the strong opinion, I am sure, of every ISL member without exception (as distinct from the SWP), I mention this only to eliminate it from the picture.

(2) But leaving aside the "commando raid" strain in the Trotskyist entry, the "good" current in the Trotskyist perspective was that which envisioned them as a loyal left wing seeking to transform the SP by a normal majority vote into a revolutionary party. This was, of course, the open and avowed aim of the Trotskyist-led faction, the Appeal Group, accepted by all sides as legitimate, as indeed it was. Indeed, the then leadership of the SP around the "Militants" had itself been just recently a left-wing faction which had wrested the program and leadership of the party away from the "Old Guard." Open political debate in the party, open controversy, unreservedly conflict to see who could get a majority, may the best side win and take control of the National Committee or write the program of the party -- all this was accepted as normal, legitimate and responsible behavior for all concerned. And under the circumstances it was, or would have been. For the SP was alive, growing, stirring, a healthy political organism, a real arena in which this sort of political struggle had a meaning. That was the '30s.

Anyone who thinks that this is or can be the perspective of Shachtman's dissolution-and-entry line today simply does not understand what is going on. Two minutes thought, well applied, ought to show that such a perspective is out of the question for anybody. And in fact Shachtman does not hold it.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

It is precisely SP people who have expressed the fear that this is what an ISL entry today would mean. For as Norman Thomas quite frankly and vigorously explained at the SP convention last July; given what the SP is nowadays the ISLers would be able to take over the party without any trouble, and right away or just about. Other SPers at that time explained to me why they believed it: their reasons had to do with an estimation of the ISL's forces and quality that was flattering, at least in comparison with their estimation of the SP's. At the same convention, too, when the SP left wing's motion for a unity conference was defeated, A.J. Muste was likewise quoted as taking a dubious view of SP-ISL unity on this ground.

Whatever one may want to say about objections to socialist unity on such grounds, this much is clear: that if an entry were made on this basis, it would and could only lead to a split or the equivalent of a split. And any "unity" which leads to such an outcome would be a catastrophe--not just for the SP but for ourselves. It is bad enough that the Trotskyist movement has one such on its conscience.

But this is exactly the poser for anyone in the League who thinks that Shachtman's "unity" can be or should be made with the normal perspective that was in order in the '30s: namely, that revolutionists join the party in order to "revolutionize" it or change its political character. That is excluded today, under these circumstances. It is excluded for Shachtman. It is not his perspective and not his proposal.

For it might be only too easy for an influx of ISLers to "take over" the SP--if not organizationally, then politically--that is, at any rate change its political character in the direction of the ISL's. That's not because of our great strength but because of the SP's extreme weakness, and because of certain well-known inadequacies of the SP's general membership and functioning. And that goes even though by "take over" here, we mean take over entirely democratically and fairly both in letter and spirit.

THE DANGER OF SUCCESS

The problem is not merely that of eschewing the disastrous split perspective

(or whatever it was) of 1937; that's no problem for anybody in the ISL. The problem isn't that of 1937 in any respect. For the "danger" is that no matter how we might "take over" the SP, such "success" would be meaningless at best, but in fact worse than meaningless. We would "take over" only ourselves and bring about only a new division. This would be senseless.

But more than that: from the point of view which Shachtman holds, it would be a great error to change the rightwing politics of the SP. For Shachtman thinks of his "unity" perspective as setting up a movement, or a simulacrum of a movement, which appeals to the right. Part of the value of the SP, for Shachtman, is precisely its right-wing appeal. Insofar as the SP becomes ISL-ish, it loses part of the very reason why Shachtman is so enthusiastic about dissolving into it now. This is another and even more basic reason why (per Shachtman) the ISLers must guard against changing the rightwing political character of the SP.

It is consistent with this that Shachtman fervently stresses that as far as he is concerned, the SP-SDF Terms of Unity, the political bases there laid down, are entirely acceptable to him also as the platform for a united SP.

So this present proposal of Shachtman's for dissolution-and-entry is like no other entry proposal you have heard of before; nor like any other "unity" proposal you are likely to think of under that label. This isn't to condemn it for that reason. It is to emphasize that you have to understand what it is that is being put before the League.

THE MINORITY RESOLUTION'S SOLUTION

This same problem is, of course, also the reason for the form which the Minority Resolution takes; that is, the Minority Resolution proposes a different solution of the same problem.

If unity is to be possible, it says--and that is by no means sure--it can be a healthy organizational merger, one that can endure, only on the basis of a definite prior agreement.

In essence, the nature of the agreement suggested in the Minority Resolution is the acceptance by the united organization of something like the broad character that we have sketched out for an all-in socialist regroupment (in the PC Statement on Policy or Resolution #2). In that conception, different socialist tendencies could coexist in the same broad and loose movement only on the basis of a very broad and general platform on certain crucial divisive issues; a platform general enough to avoid a clash between incompatible programmatic conceptions; a platform general enough to be a "neutral" umbrella over points of view equally legitimate in the united organization.

Of course, in that Statement of Policy, the problem that was met was that of the spread between the "Stalinoid" tendencies and the democratic socialist, particularly on the question of Russia.

In the case of unity (or entry) of the ISL and SP, the spread is that between Third Camp revolutionary socialism on the one hand, and pro-American-camp social-democracy on the other. How shall these two tendencies be able to coexist in the same party -- not as warring Kilkenny cats, but in healthy and durable cooperation?

The Minority Resolution proposes the same type of solution. That is the meaning of the agreement which it proposes. If unity is possible, it is

possible only on this basis. And on such a basis, unity would be a healthy and progressive step forward for the socialist movement.

What this means is that we propose to come to an agreement with the SP people not on a common program (that is hardly possible) but on the type of organization in which we can live together. We do not propose to convince the SPers of our Third Camp politics; we do not propose that we concede to theirs. We propose that unity establish a kind of socialist organization in which these two politically disparate tendencies can coexist durably.

This in essence is precisely the proposal we make for "all-in" socialist regroupment. The Minority applies it also to the problem of the SP-ISL unity. This is the approach to be borne in mind in reading the Minority approach as it is detailed and elaborated in the resolution and in Comrade Haskell's article in this bulletin.

AN IMPORTANT CONFESSION

But, argues Shachtman, very vehemently as if making a decisive point, it is ridiculous to think that the SP will even be willing to talk about such an agreement for unity; he scouts the very idea as absurd; the SP won't listen ...Therefore, continues Shachtman, you of the Minority are "really against unity..."

What is important here is what Shachtman is confessing by making this argument, which is a very prominent part of his case.

He is saying, in next to so many words, that if you are "really" for unity, you must be for some proposal that the SP is willing to accept now or soon.

But why?

Shachtman's argument makes sense only for one who is convinced that "unity" must be consummated at any cost. And this does make sense in terms of Shachtman's perspective. But what if the only "unity" that the SP is willing to give ear to, especially to eloquent pleaders like Comrade Shachtman, is the kind of "unity" which is to be consummated by the ISL dissolving and applying for membership in the SP -- that is, not by any organizational merger such as the original PC resolution spoke of, but dissolution-and-entry, with the political prospect described?

So when Shachtman denounced the Minority Resolution because (as he claims) the SP wouldn't design even to discuss its proposal for unity, he is telling us a great deal about his views.

Is he indeed for dissolution at any cost? Well, no, naturally; we can all be sure that he would draw the line at a couple of things--like the "anti-Leninist loyalty oath" which some SP humorists have talked about, or any requirement that he repudiate his political views. These scruples of Shachtman are a great comfort, but in mentioning them by way of example, we also illustrate the scope of his dissolution-and-entry proposal.

THE BURY-THE-ISL SCHOOL.

This heart of the question was posed very well by a comrade at the New York discussion meeting of Feb. 20 who rose to support Shachtman's views. He gave a thoughtful and sober contribution to the discussion that notably helped it. "The position of Comrade Haskell [who had reported for the minority] is really against unity," he argued, echoing Shachtman here, for the

question is (he went on to say) "Do you want unity enough to take it on Max's terms?"

This was, and is, a faithful reflection of the thinking embodied in Shachtman's proposal. This same comrade went on to make other remarks, in the same spirit of thinking-aloud, which likewise cast light on the issues. "The question," he argued, "isn't propagating the Third Camp point of view, but how to get a movement that can propagate the Third Camp point of view..." And he ended with a bon mot from Dr. Johnson: "Marriage has a great many problems but celibacy has no pleasures." In fact, his contribution was not only wittier than Comrade Shachtman's report, but also a good deal more enlightening in essential respects.

What this points one's attention to is an issue on the fate of the ISL which lies just beneath the surface of the formal counterposition of resolution. This is an opinion which deserves serious confrontation, no matter how deplorable we think it is. The opinion is: that a Third Camp Marxist propaganda group is not viable today any longer as an independent organization. "An end has to be put to our sectarian existence" (meaning our existence as an independent group), say voices. "The day of sects is over," they say, "we ought to make clear that we're just looking for someplace to dissolve into," it goes.

We need not pause over the meaning of this as it might apply to entry into the mass social-democracies in other countries, for this is not involved here; our views on that point, unanimous or near-unanimous, have been established for years. These increasing murmurs are referring to the need of giving up the ISL as outlived in this country now; of dissolving not into a mass social-democratic movement of labor, but into a right-wing social-democratic sect which, it is claimed, is not "a sect like us" because it has, or can have, an attractive appeal to the right, thus allowing "an opening to the right," etc.

Now anyone who has come or will come to the conclusion in his own mind that the ISL must go, will hardly care to worry about the kind of conception that is embodied in the Minority Resolution; nor would I expect him to introduce a resolution stating "Resolved, that we should look for someplace to dissolve the ISL into," especially if he thinks that the SP is as good a receptacle as any and doesn't have to be looked for; and so this discussion may take place on more than one level of argumentation. All the more reason for bringing out this issue into the open, so that comrades can look at it. Every comrade will have to decide it in his own mind.

THE ISL'S ROLE

Now the ISL form of organization -- that is, to put it briefly, a Third Camp Marxist group as an independent group today -- is no sacred principled deduction from the precepts of Marxism. As Marx wrote: "If sects exist with a measure of historical justification for their existence, it but indicates that the working class has not yet ripened for an independent historic movement. But when the working class reaches maturity, all sects become a reactionary phenomenon." That is a basic thought for socialists. If the ISL exists with a "measure of historical justification," it is precisely because the American working class has not yet produced its independent political movement, because it is still a distance from this maturity.

By the same token, as long as this unfortunate situation is true, Marxists can not jump over their own heads. By the same token, the ISL has its "historical justification"--namely, in the political role which it plays, as

mentioned above.

It would be very easy, alas, to poke fun at this political role, for are we not tiny and ~~un~~influential? Yes, we have often "admitted" that. But there is no proposal before us which, by some brilliant road hitherto unthought-of, will ~~make~~ make us big and influential. There is only a proposal before us to dissolve into another tiny and uninfluential sect; sweetened with the argument that this other sect, because it is right-wing, has prospects denied to us.

For myself, I will only remark on this that it is just as dubious as would be the proposition that the ISL has prospects of growing from a sect into a mass party on its present basis. Neither the ISL nor the SP nor a combination of the two has any prospect under today's circumstances of making the qualitative leap from sect to socialist movement; that will become possible only when the American labor movement takes the field as an independent political force; and the prospect may well be that only in the womb of a labor party movement will a substantial socialist regroupment take place that can wed together disparate and antagonistic tendencies. (The proposal in the Minority Resolution could do it, I believe, but whether it will is quite another matter.) For it is the mass labor movement that, then, will act as the cement to hold together ideologically disparate currents and, indeed, subordinate ideological differences to the general class struggle. That, after all, is the "secret" of the heterogeneity of the British Labor Party as an "all-in socialist groupment."

As we decided to view ourselves in 1949 when we abandoned the "party" designation and recognized ourselves as a propaganda group, it is in anticipation of this "regroupment" that we wish to play our political role now. We look forward to being a Third Camp Marxist tendency inside a broad labor party; in this sense, truly we look forward eagerly to giving up our independent status, if (or insofar as) that will further the political role which is distinctively ours.

But this line of thought, well established among us, obviously cannot be carried over to a proposal to dissolve-and-enter into...the SP.

It is precisely the fact that we look forward to being a Third Camp Marxist tendency in a class-wide political movement, which we would seek to push to the left in an open democratic struggle of opinion, that confers that "historical justification" on our political role today as an independent center of the cadres of this Third Camp tendency of tomorrow.

WHAT YOU GET FOR WHAT YOU GIVE.

When therefore it is proposed that this independent Third Camp center be abandoned as untenable, and dissolved into the SP, what is decisive is a simple and old question: what you get for what you give...politically.

As for any comrade who thinks that a Third Camp Marxist center is not viable any more as an independent group anyway, why, obviously then he won't feel that he's giving up much in getting behind Shachtman's idea of dissolve-and-enter. He will be understandably impatient with anything that stands in the way of an early realization of the dissolution; for obviously an organization cannot long stand thus poised. He will ask, like the comrade at the New York meeting: "Do you want unity enough to

take in on Max's terms?" But this question, by its own momentum, leads next to another: "Do you want unity enough to take it on....whose terms?"

I am ready any day in the week to give up the independence of the ISL, but only for something that will better permit us to play our political role as a Third Camp Marxist tendency on the American political scene, however modestly, and wherever we may be. Shachtman's aim to dissolve and enter the SP will do the reverse.

Indeed, it is already showing that it will do the reverse. True, Comrade Shachtman becomes understandably vehement in arguing that his proposal does not mean "capitulation" to social-democracy. He becomes highly scientific and precise in his definition of "capitulation," laying it down that it means only repudiation of one's views, which of course is out of the question. Well, one could get up a short but amusing dossier on how Shachtman has used that hapless term "capitulation" in the course of his differences with opponents inside the socialist movement; but what would that prove? Certainly nothing to Comrade Shachtman. So we must not and will not say that his proposal entails "capitulation" of any kind whatsoever.

Let us instead use a very precise term. What the consequences of the Shachtman line entail is a systematic political adaptation to social-democracy.

This is what is foreshadowed by the Majority's reluctance, or refusal, to include any criticism of the SP-SDF terms of unity in the report which was written for Labor Action (Jan. 28). This is what is foreshadowed when Shachtman actually praises the SP-SDF Terms of Unity as a platform basis for his "unity." This is what is foreshadowed when Majority supporters are stirred to ask what's wrong with putting our ideas "on the shelf" for a while.

No, Shachtman has not the slightest intention of repudiating his views. But who will be so "sectarian" as to object if they are bent, fitted, filed, rubbed down, carved, trimmed or cold-stored so as to ingratiate us as good-dogs with the SP right wing?

The Majority thinks of this perspective as a means of "lying low" until the hoped for radicalization or politicalization of the mass labor movement -- that is, lying on the self, or in semi-hibernation -- after which (they maintain) the SP will blossom and flower since it has that indispensable right-wing appeal... This is what accounts, let us say in passing, for the peculiar combination in their argumentation of seemingly very optimistic predictions about coming radicalization and their immediate goal of dissolving the ISL, which would be an otherwise incomprehensible conclusion from expectations of an upturn.

This is the heart of the issue about the fate of the ISL which is presented to the League under the label of "socialist unity."

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