

## OUR PROBLEMS AND THEIRS: THE DSOC ENTRY PROPOSAL

By Kim Moody

### What Are We Discussing Here?

The document titled "A New Perspective for the 1980s" by Mark Levitan and Mike Urquhart proposes that the IS "explore joining DSOC." The arguments in the document are not simply those about exploration. The authors, in fact, have presented a case for joining DSOC and are in favor of doing so. They even believe it is inevitable that the IS will enter DSOC, or collapse as a political tendency. The proposal arises because in the author's view, the IS is in a state of decline. In their opinion "the IS is no longer an effective vehicle" for our politics. Obviously, such a state of affairs could not be overcome by exploring DSOC, the proposed cure lies in joining DSOC.

Since this is a serious convention discussion and not merely a Political Committee resolution to check something out, I propose to discuss the political meat, which is a proposal to enter DSOC. After all, this would not be much of a discussion if mere exploration were really what it's all about. To treat the proposal in a serious political fashion, we must understand it as what it actually is -- an entry proposal.

As to exploring DSOC, it is obvious that the authors have done their own exploring. It is also the case that other IS members, including people on the Political Committee, are exploring DSOC, though not from the same perspectives. This is all to the good, but hardly a convention debate in itself.

### The Problems of the IS

There is no question that the IS faces serious problems in the state of the organization, the development of political perspectives, isolation from new elements on the political scene, the disabilities of smallness. Whether the group is in decline, stagnant, or showing some signs of growth is debatable. My own opinion is that all three of these are true, depending on where you look in the organization. There is not much doubt that the roots of this situation lie in the failure of our regroupment perspectives of the last few years and in our inability to come up with a new perspective. On this score, I have no argument with Mark and Mike.

To understand the political problems of the IS, however, one must first understand something very fundamental about the group and its membership. The people who have stayed with the IS through these last few difficult years were recruited and trained to a political conception of socialist organization and politics from which they are not likely to break. That is, IS members, cadre, and leaders demand not only a broad set of politics -- say, our Third Camp views, or revolutionary socialism from below -- but an operational conclusion from those politics. This was true long before the "turn to agitation." ISers are accustomed to an operating perspective that allows them to intervene in the world. When

this perspective was "party building" it allowed the entire organization a common form of activity, carried out in a variety of arenas, that united us in a common purpose. Since the collapse of that perspective, the IS has lacked that sort of operating perspective for the group as a whole.

Neither of the two regroupment orientations adopted by the IS during and after 1978 provided such a perspective. Both versions, adequately described in Mark and Mike's document, were directed at milieus with which few of our members had any contact. They were carried out only by a small number of IS leaders -- who were in contact with a small number of leaders from other groups or milieus. Even if these regroupment perspectives had been right, which they weren't, they would not have provided the sort of operational perspective the group silently demanded.

The decomposition of a number of the branches, in spite of the political loyalty of the members, is the symptom of this. It is common to hear people say that they just don't see a purpose in meeting. After all, the trade union work doesn't really require branch meetings -- factions, or consultation can handle that at a local level. So, except for the occasional Poland forum or what have you, organization becomes network, and in some cases, people drift away.

The very nature of the IS precludes us becoming merely a Third Camp propaganda sect. The number of members who would stick around for that type of thing is miniscule.

Does Mike and Mark's proposal, taken on its own merits, actually present an operational perspective? Does it speak to the central political problem of the IS, which is not its broad definition as a tendency, but its lack of a set of operational politics that can be carried out in various ways by the whole organization? In particular, does the DSOC entry proposal present us with a politics that can build our tendency, or build any sort of revolutionary organization? To do these things a perspective must have: 1) a set of political ideas around which to organize, 2) a definite constituency, and 3) some organizational conclusions. I believe, even considered on its own turf, the DSOC entry proposal fails in all respects.

1. The Politics. The actual document presents no set of politics around which an intervention in DSOC could be conducted. In one place the document points toward the "potential of building our tendency and effectuating a revolutionary regroupment inside DSOC." I will describe later why I think such a notion is pure fantasy, but here I would note that nothing more is said of this intriguing idea in the document. Subsequently, in both Political Committee and Detroit branch meetings Mark has said, when asked about the political basis for our intervention in DSOC, that we would attempt to "sort out the left wing of DSOC." He says that the programmatic basis for building a left would be support for independent political action and the rank and file union movement.

Interestingly enough, a large part of Mark and Mike's document is devoted to the notion that these two altogether laudable points are not the basis for "building a socialist current" because they are not revolutionary ideas. They say quite sharply, "We disagree

that those ideas alone can be the basis for a distinct role for the revolutionary left." How then are we to effect "revolutionary regroupment inside DSOC" on that basis?

Another problem with IPA/rank and file movement as the political basis around which we would build a left wing in DSOC is that it does not solve the problem of how we reach the new generation of student activists. IPA, particularly understood as a labor party, and union reform are of little relevance to a student activist phenomenon.

Even leaving students aside, those members of DSOC who are actually active in the internal life of the group, with a few exceptions, have little or no relationship to the labor movement. They can do little more than debate these notions abstractly. The place for this debate is not in DSOC, but in the unions where it matters.

2. Constituency. The confusion about a political program for entry into DSOC flows, I suspect, from the confusion about -- or lack of -- a definite constituency for these ideas. Here, the document taken by itself is, if anything, even fuzzier. There are "new people" who are activists joining DSOC. What new people? The document doesn't disclose this, hence it cannot comment on whether we have reason to believe they are open to revolutionary ideas.

In meetings in Detroit, the identity of these people, who would be the basis for "sorting out a left wing," has been revealed by Mark. They are, for the most part, the former member of NAM. Two things need to be said about these people.

The first is that they were centerpiece of our first two unsuccessful regroupment schemes. When we began the orientation toward NAM in 1978 they were considerably to the left of where they are now. In the fight with NAM over the question of DSOC entry, the rejection of revolution was quite explicit. The revolutionary socialists, with perhaps a few individual exceptions, left NAM before it finally ratified the merger with DSOC. Why, if we got nowhere with this political milieu when it regarded itself as an independent revolutionary socialist trend, should we expect to get anywhere with them now?

The second thing is that the spectacular plunge to the right that characterized the last three years of NAM's history was a consequence of the nature of that organization. Once NAM abandoned its early orientation toward becoming the mass Debsian Socialist Party, it never had a common program of action, a common perspective for intervening in American life. It had no long term strategy for revolution, and it had no short term operational perspective. DSOC does. And it was attractive enough to the majority of NAM members to produce the merger process. For all the talk about preserving NAM's traditions as the inheritor of New Left activism, NAM has no plans to fight to change DSOC -- nor could it, since it lacks a common view of how to change anything. Since Mark and Mike lack that program as well, it is difficult to see what we would do with the former NAMers besides engage in endless discussion -- if they were interested.

Take a look at the last (March, 1982) issue of "Moving On," NAM's publication. There is very little politics in it considering it was published on the eve of merger and is about the merger.

One article notes that "NAM and DSOC are very different organizations." But what the author means is not politics, but geographical spread, age levels, and emphasis on local versus national organization. The few political words in this issue of "Moving On" come from NAM leader Roberta Lynch, who, in reviewing the history of NAM, presents a very interesting summary of its political direction. She writes:

"We began with exaggerated ideas about the possibilities for radical social change and our own role in things. Today, we have a much more complex and long-term view of how change will occur and a much more modest understanding of our part in it. We began with much talk of the working class, but with little understanding of the contemporary labor movement. Today our members are officers and activists in dozens of local unions and we have a much greater appreciation for the dilemmas that the labor movement faces. We began with an emphasis on "anti-imperialist" politics that often led us to useless rhetoric and sectarian left coalitions. Today we work against US involvement in El Salvador and the nuclear arms race with church groups and community organizations. We began with an almost extra-parliamentary approach to elections and a scorn for participation in any form in the Democratic Party. Today we are developing a working knowledge of the levers of political power and a progressive presence within existing arenas of electoral activity."

Roberta Lynch was one of the organizers of the move into DSOC and is one of NAM's most skilled and popular leaders. She is describing -- in the language of a "maturing process" -- a political trek from revolutionary socialist ("exaggerated") politics to reformist, permeationist ("progressive presence within") politics.

Granted, there are individuals in the NAM milieu who would not accept such a description of their political growth, but they do not exist as a coherent "left opposition" to the basic DSOC strategy that NAM has by and large accepted as their own. The relationship of NAMers who are to the left of Lynch to DSOC politics can be described as discomfort rather than dissent. There is simply no evidence anywhere that NAMers will fight to change DSOC or its politics. An orientation toward the NAM milieu as the basis for revolutionary regroupment inside DSOC, or as the basis for a caucus on IPA and rank and file unionism, is no more realistic than the earlier attempts to squeeze regroupment out of this rightward moving milieu.

3. Organization. Finally, on the question of organizational conclusions, the DSOC entry proposal is entirely vague. For example, does the notion of revolutionary regroupment inside DSOC imply an eventual split, an attempt to capture DSOC, or maintenance of a permanently embattled revolutionary wing of American social democracy? Since there is no assessment of the forces available for such a process, one cannot expect the authors to come up with an answer, but that only reveals another of the problems with the proposal.

Then there is the question of what sort of intermediate organization we should or could build in the early stages of entry. Are we seeking an open caucus, is it permanent, i.e., a faction, or just a biennial convention formation? Mark and Mike say we need to be in DSOC to come into contact with more people and new people, but what we are to do with these people is not specified. What are we to do in DSOC?

One thing that does seem fairly clear in the proposal is that the "readers clubs" are meant to be the organizations of our own tendency, the IS tendency, rather than vehicles for a broader regroupment or caucus. Mark says that the IS and ISers are to continue all our present work, all our interventions in the outside world. Are the readers clubs to organize our work in the unions, in the anti-war movement, the student movement? Why would anyone who is currently an inactive member of the IS be attracted to a readers club? Will our tendency's existing in the form of reader's clubs rather than as an organization increase the respect of other socialists or those we work with, have for us? Will being less of an organization help us in any of these arenas -- or in intervening in DSOC? I think it is evident that what is proposed in the DSOC entry proposal is a big organizational retreat.

In summary, the DSOC entry proposal, at least in its current form, does not solve any of the outstanding problems of our organization. Being "in" DSOC is not a perspective as long as the politics are left up in the air or changed as its advocates grasp at straws. It has no political analysis of the constituency for any intervention in DSOC. And finally, it proposes only an organizational retreat for the IS tendency.

We are told that the IS's entry into DSOC is "inevitable" because there is no role for an independent revolutionary organization in the US today. The DSOC proposal does not even come up with a role for a non-independent revolutionary tendency. The lack of a perspective on what we should do in DSOC, the lack of a constituency to orient towards, and the lack of any kind of viable organization for our tendency (not to mention the problems I will bring up in the second half of this document) would mean the rapid demoralization of our members and, I believe, the further unravelling of the IS as an organized tendency.

### The Problems of DSOC

So far, I have discussed the DSOC entry proposal on its own terms. In fact, however, I do not believe the terms in which the proposal is argued by Mark and Mike are realistic. That is, I do not believe the picture presented of DSOC and of the allegedly new organization to be born in the NAM-DSOC merger is accurate. Nor does the document or subsequent discussions that I am aware of deal with the actual politics of DSOC in such a way as to lead one to believe that there is the basis for a serious left or revolutionary wing in DSOC.

To begin with the last point, all of the previous entry schemes that the revolutionary left has attempted in the US have been based

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on the notion that some political element, usually a working class one at that, was moving to the left. In the 1936 entry of the Workers Party (Trotskyists) into the Socialist Party, it was alleged that young workers were moving to the left and joining the SP. In the 1958 merger of the ISL into the SP, it was thought that CPers who were leaving the CP in disgust after the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 could be attracted to a larger, multi-tendency socialist organization. While neither of these attempts worked in their own terms, the real point is that they had an analysis of some dynamic element that was moving left and open to revolutionary ideas. This sort of political analysis, usually at the basis of any entry perspective, is entirely missing in the DSOC entry proposal.

I believe that it is the lack of such an analysis that leads the authors to paint an unrealistically rosy and essentially apolitical picture of DSOC, and of NAM. I have dealt with the reality of NAM -- individual exceptions notwithstanding. Now let's examine DSOC.

Mark and Mike present DSOC as an open, multi-tendency broad socialist center in the making -- which is, of course, what DSOC likes to say about itself. This conception, combined with its growth figures, makes DSOC attractive to many people. But this PR view of DSOC is far from the reality. In the first place, DSOC as an organization is bureaucratic in its approach to internal political life.

What I mean specifically is that sharp political differences over those questions that count to the organized, core leadership of DSOC (Democratic Party, Zionism, Labor Bureaucracy, etc.) are suppressed bureaucratically rather than debated openly and clearly. An example of this was the handling of a motion favoring rank and file reform movements at the last convention (1981). The right went berserk. Harrington told the makers of the motion and their supporters that DSOC simply could not have a labor policy, and in particular not that one, or it would lose many of its most prominent members. A fudge motion was agreed to and no serious discussion of the issue occurred.

The NAM-DSOC merger is another example of how DSOC handles potentially hot issues that would embarrass liberal political and labor leaders. In particular, the issue of Zionism and the state of Israel was handled in a typically bureaucratic fashion. The price of admission for NAM was a loyalty oath (in the merger statement) to the state of Israel, a position not held by many or even most NAMers.

Another example of this method of politics was reported from a recent meeting of the Detroit DSOC local. Members who wanted DSOC to support Zoltan Ferency (a DSOC member and Dem. Party dissident) in the Democratic primary were ruled out of order. The reasoning was that DSOC couldn't support Ferency because it would alienate broader political forces, i.e., the labor bureaucracy, who were supporting another, more realistic candidate. This, of course, is typical of DSOC's approach to all political questions. Its ability to remain the "left wing of the possible," to use Harrington's phrase, depends on its ability not to alienate the big shots

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in labor and the Democratic Party upon whom DSOC's basic strategy depends.

Yet another example of this bureaucratic approach to political questions can be found in the way Harrington handled the 1980 elections. There was some support in DSOC for Barry Commoner. Rather than allow an open debate in DSOC on this question, much less take the chance that some locals would endorse Commoner, Harrington simply agreed that if they didn't pursue the question or endorse Commoner as DSOC, he, in turn, would not publicly endorse Carter. This cost him nothing, since his endorsement was of no importance in winning the election and since, in any case, everyone who "counts" knows where Harrington stands. He gave up nothing and another politically controversial question was glossed over.

Another example of the bureaucratic nature of DSOC is the fact that the vast majority of its members are paper members. They pay their \$25 and go about their business. In Detroit, for example, DSOC claims 250 members. Yet a typical monthly membership meeting attracts only 20-25 people. In Washington, DC the ratio is 30 to 400. Of these an even smaller group do most of the work and make most of the decisions.

What all of this means is that the bureaucracy has at its disposal a huge number of passive votes to manipulate when it becomes necessary. For the most part, of course, it has not come to that because sharp differences over embarrassing questions seldom get raised in the formal structure of DSOC, and so far have never gotten far.

The point is, of course, not that one could never raise controversial positions in DSOC, fight for democratic rights, organize a left or even a revolutionary faction. Presumably, if you put in the time and effort you could. However, you cannot do that without creating a rancorous, prolonged factional situation. The notion that the leadership of DSOC (right, center, and I believe most of its left as well) will simply sit by and watch a revolutionary faction, caucus, tendency or readers club organize successfully against everything they created DSOC for in the first place is ridiculous. They will fight and they will fight dirty.

This bureaucratic approach to political differences, and the dedication with which DSOC leaders will apply it, flow from the politics of DSOC, the politics that, in fact, define DSOC as an organization. That is, the strategy of turning the Democratic Party into a left liberal party of a more ideological type, through the building of broad coalitions around a minimal program of liberal reforms that everyone can agree on, in combination with a foreign policy that is consistent with the Western alliance (NATO) in the context of detente.

The coalitions on which the strategy are based are necessarily bureaucratic arrangements based on a lowest common denominator program and upon the unspoken agreement that no one does anything to embarrass anyone else. For DSOC to be accepted as the left wing of these coalitions, it must have politics and a public face that will not embarrass anyone, in particular the big shots with whom

they deal. The cornerstones of this public face are loyalty to the Democratic Party, loyalty to Israel, and a critical, but basically loyal attitude toward the west (though, obviously not towards Reagan's policies).

Individual members of DSOC are free to hold different positions and to engage in any sort of political activity as individuals. But as an organization, locally and nationally, DSOC cannot step outside these bounds if it is to remain a group that has the potential to influence people in positions of power or the course of current politics. To come out, as DSOC, for things like a labor party, Palestinian liberation, Barry Commoner, unilateral nuclear disarmament, or a variety of other ideas that fall outside the parameters of respectable coalition politics, would be to render DSOC just another ideological sect with limited contact to the real world of "the possible."

DSOC was formed around this strategy. The split of the SP in 1973 that produced DSOC was over this question. Often advertised as a split over the Vietnam War (which after all had been going on for eight years), it was more a split over the question of Democratic Party strategy. Harrington's opponents in that case were to the right of him and what became DSOC. The split was largely over whether or not to support George McGovern for president. The right wing, what is today the Social-Democrats-USA, opposed McGovern and opposed the whole notion of reforming the Democratic Party. They preferred to stick with George Meany and the power broker system. DSOC was formed around the idea of transforming the Democratic Party, which is still its strategy and political reason for being.

If DSOC were actually to become a group with a different strategy, or with no particular strategy, it would be useless to its leaders, most of its members, and to those it works with. That is why it is necessary for the leadership to suppress or bargain away, rather than encourage, open political discussion around controversial questions. And that is why an entry into DSOC with the intent of building a left-wing would involve a nasty, prolonged faction fight with the right and center of DSOC, with all the personal bitterness and energy draining activities that entails.

Of course, there are times and places when that is just what you have to do, like it or not. But there are consequences. There has never been a faction fight, in any group, that did not distort and harm the work of that group. The 1936 entry into the SP cost the Trotskyists any real involvement in the CIO. The faction fight that raged in the YPSL until it exploded (and disappeared) in 1964 were major factors isolating our tendency from the student movement of the 1960s -- in spite of the fact that the YPSL was larger than SDS in the early years. When your focus is inward, your ability to act in the world is impaired. The notion that we could intervene in DSOC without paying any price in other projects, like our union work, the anti-war movement, Labor Notes, etc., is false.

Finally, DSOC has only one activity that it pursues as a national organization-- the Democratic Agenda, and local DP work. While locals take on other projects from time to time (such as the Michigan DSOC's Debs-Thomas Dinner honoring UAW VP Ray Majerus) and



national DSOC holds educational conferences of various sorts, the sole project that all locals participate in or that is on-going in nature is the Democratic Agenda strategy. This means that we would be hard pressed to play any sort of constructive role in DSOC, nationally or locally.

Mark and Mike argue that the growth of DSOC and its commitment to build a mass "democratic socialist" organization "has created an organization which participates in other activities and movements besides reforming the Democratic Party: student and anti-war activity, the women's movement, strike support and Poland solidarity to name a few."

For the most part, such activity in those movements or events is carried out either by individuals or bureaucratically at the top. DSOC has done no Polish Solidarity support work. The IS has invited DSOC in New York and Detroit to join in existing support work, and got essentially no response. These things simply are not the life blood of any DSOC local we have ever heard of. It is not that DSOC is incapable of doing any of these things, or won't do them, as DSOC. None of the activities mentioned by Mark and Mike would embarrass DSOC. Yet, for the most part, they don't do them as an organization, and they don't do them consistently.

Far more important than whether DSOC locals actually carry out such work is the political orientation they have toward broader movements. This orientation was made explicit at a Detroit local meeting in February. The discussion was of the Democratic Agenda strategy -- not whether to have it, but how to implement it. The speaker urged DSOC members to go into the community to get active in community and movement groups. The purpose was to convince these groups to get active in the Democratic Agenda. That is, the role of DSOC members is to win broader social movements to activity in the Democratic Party. It is noteworthy that the Detroit NAMers were present at and participated in this discussion. There was no dissent!

In other words, even in arenas where it would be possible to work jointly with our new DSOC comrades, we would be at political odds over the goal of that work. It is simply naive to think that holding a DSOC card and working in the same movement, say the anti-war movement, means we will be working along the same lines. In most cases, we would be working at cross purposes: they would be on the DSOC program, we would be the wreckers.

Out of desperation for an alternative to the poor state of the IS, Mark and Mike have talked themselves into the notion that nobody who joins DSOC is recruited to the politics of that organization. All these new activists are without political thoughts and are just rushing to join DSOC because it appears everyone else is. The new members of DSOC, including the NAMers, deserve more credit. The leaders of DSOC should not be so badly underestimated.

DSOC influence in higher circles in American politics and in the labor movement are attractive to people who are joining. This includes most of the NAMers, right through those who are sympathetic to or even active in one or another rank and file movement. The ability of DSOC to put on events in which big time union leaders, liberal politicians, and even the heads of nations speak and hob nob with humble American socialists gives DSOC an

indisputable magnetism. Any analysis of the DSOC phenomenon, of its dynamism, that fails to take this into consideration is sheer nonsense. People are not joining DSOC simply because of its size. It is the "quality" of some of its members and others it is capable of bringing around that brought those numbers in the first place. The advantage DSOC has is that it appears to be positioned to get things done in American politics. Much of this is an illusion, but appearance is often enough. Inside or outside of DSOC we will have to learn how to contend with that fact of life. We and our strategy and politics will not have any of that attraction going for us simply because we have DSOC cards and go to DSOC meetings.

The magnetism of power, or its appearance, affects the left as much as anyone else. We, after all, respect radicals and socialists who win and hold union office. That magnetism was quite explicit at the NAM convention a couple years ago that voted to explore merger with DSOC, which resulted in the exit of most of the revolutionaries. The DSOC entry proposal put forth by Mark and Mike doesn't even recognize this as a problem let alone deal with it. If it can be dealt with, it is by building a revolutionary pole with its own links to power -- power that comes from roots in the working class, the militant, independent mobilization of students and others in the anti-war movements that are arising, the power of its ideas, etc. This cannot be done in an organization whose central purpose runs against this course in every detail and aspect. It cannot be done in an organization in which the balance of power weighs hopelessly against open discussion and independent organization. We will simply have to look elsewhere for the salvation of the IS.

The question is not whether DSOC is changing, or whether it now has members who hold dissident opinions more in line with some of our positions (it has always had such people). The question is, is DSOC changing in a way that is big enough to make it habitable to active, vocal revolutionaries who conduct work in the real world and who are not constrained in that work by the likes of Michael Harrington? There's not much of a case for this.

Even more important is whether there is any visible change in the basic political direction of DSOC. Is there any actual questioning of the Democratic Agenda strategy from any important section of the organization? Again, the answer is no. Even among the individuals who occasionally favor independent political action, as is the case with many NAMers, there is no questioning of the basic definition of DSOC as a left wing within the Democratic Party. From their own political point of view, these NAMers and others like them see no contradiction. Whatever their attitude toward the labor movement might be, their political method is essentially classless -- Marxist only in the abstract.

The truth is, in spite of a handful of examples of what individual DSOCers have done on this or that issue, Mark and Mike have failed to show that DSOC has changed its political orientation, or even produced any opposition to that direction. The older DSOC leadership has won most of the NAM leadership to its central political strategy. Those NAMers who have not been won to a consistent advocacy of the Democratic Agenda strategy simply see it as a tactical question not in contradiction to anything they are

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likely to do.

DSOC will remain an organization with a central political direction hostile to everything we stand for. In it, we would be hard pressed to find common ground with any significant sector of that organization. We would constantly be in the position of being nay-sayers, who refuse to take responsibility for most of the activities of the group. In all likelihood, people with whom we now have friendly relations would begin to view us hostilely, to see us as a threat to their organization. The solution to the problems of the IS does not lie in a state of siege within a larger, hostile organization.

### Leave the Driving to DSOC

Toward the end of their document, Mark and Mike state: "Being in DSOC will be more difficult, complicated and demanding than continuing the IS. We will have to sustain a higher level of activity than we have for several years."

In fact, a great many members of the IS sustain as high a level of activity as is possible. These are mostly the people doing trade union work. (Of course, it is true that many members have lowered their activity level since the height of the turn. But except for those who have become almost totally inactive, I don't think this is the real problem of the group.)

In spite of what Mark and Mike say, I do believe that some of the appeal of the DSOC entry proposal is precisely that it would seem to "leave the driving (or some of it) to DSOC." That is, one can imagine that we wouldn't have to do all the organizational work of building DSOC. As one ISer put it in a conversation with me, we wouldn't have to do all the leg work.

The truth is, however, that on this score Mark and Mike are absolutely correct. Everyone in the IS knows that faction fights, and that is what we would find ourselves in sooner or later, demand more of all those who participate in them. But still there is the temptation to believe that all we would have to do in DSOC is talk to the left wingers.

This temptation flows from the notion that DSOC is big and possesses an internal life that could end the isolation many ISers feel from the rest of the left. In fact, in spite of the thousands of paper members, the internal life of DSOC is a small, bland affair that is mostly concerned with implementing agreed upon programs -- mostly the DP work. DSOC holds conventions only every two years. Its conferences are, for the most part, highly staged affairs with a dazzling array of celebrities. The notion that life "inside" DSOC is some great marketplace of ideas in which grand debates over socialist strategy ignite the passions of the intellect is nonsense. A former ISer, now a loyal member of DSOC in Washington, reported to me that in the sense that we know it, there is simply no political discussion at all at the level of the locals. Meetings are small and limited to tactical implementation of existing programs.

If the political discussion imagined by some is to exist, we would have to create it, fight for it, take responsibility for it.

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Whether we could do that successfully in such a hostile atmosphere is doubtful. Whether we should do that in an organization that is isolated from the working class, situated in the midst of bourgeois (not just social democratic, but bourgeois) politics, devoid of any visible or vocal left-moving elements of any size, and largely paper in its membership seems obvious -- no!

### Well Then, What?

In my opinion, entry into DSOC would destroy the IS. I, therefore, would favor hanging on until real opportunities present themselves if there is, indeed, nothing else to do. I see from history that each time our political predecessors chose the course of entry into a social democratic organization (and for far better reasons than are now proposed) they missed out on something bigger and more important. In particular, I believe that the arguments for the DSOC entry proposal are almost entirely negative in nature. It would be basically an act of desperation by a group frustrated with stagnation and a seeming inability to make revolutionary ideas relevant to others. I, too, feel that frustration. But I also believe that we would do better to sit tight than to throw all of our accumulated experience, talent, and basically sound politics away in the hopes of a David and Goliath outcome.

It is my conviction, however, that we don't need to sit tight or continue stagnating. There is a perspective for reaching healthy, sizable constituencies in a relevant way, with both our full revolutionary Third Camp socialist politics that point toward the next steps for the American working class. There are differing constituencies that require a different emphasis on program, but who compose the living human resources for a revolutionary socialist movement in the '80s with roots in both the trade unions and the new generation of student activists.

This is not a perspective document and won't try to put down here what will appear in that document, which is now in preparation. But I believe that the short run dynamic element in US politics will be the new generation of student activists being drawn into the anti-war movements (those around Central America and nuclear disarmament). A mass radicalization of students will find a positive response in sections of the trade union movement -- in what we have been calling the trade union left. These unionists, too, are being drawn into the anti-war movements, as are other elements of the older generation of socialists and radicals.

In the next couple of years there is likely to be an exciting political explosion in this country -- not on the scale of Europe perhaps, but bigger than anything we've seen for a long time. Any perspective for the IS must involve steps to better position ourselves to build a revolutionary political trend within these movements. We are well positioned in the trade union left, less so in the student movement. Nevertheless, the beginning of our work in the Progressive Student Network points in the right direction.

We need to understand that in the context of the anti-war

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movements, our Third Camp ideas will be extremely relevant and attractive. For this reason, I propose strengthening the Third Camp tendency in the US by involving others who hold that outlook with us in popularizing these ideas in the movement. In New York and the Bay Area some steps have already been taken in that direction.

Finally, I believe that sections of all of the trends that will be dynamic in the coming years, including sections of the working class, can be drawn together in an entirely new type of regroupment process. Not merger negotiations between a few small groups, but an open process that begins as a broad political forum around the country and leads toward an entirely new, multi-tendency socialist organization, not just Third Camp, but including independents, M-L's, and those new to politics.

The existing left in America is too big for the emerging movements to have a single political center, an SDS phenomenon, as Mark and Mike imply. SDS filled a vacuum that the SP and CP of that day could not. Today's movements are certain to be multi-centered, because the political basis for different centers is there -- we have had no McCarthyism, etc. that created the sort of vacuum that existed in the early '60s. Furthermore, Mark and Mike's contender for that crown is the opposite of the early SDS. SDS literally had more activists than paid members, DSOC and DSOC youth are heavy on paper. Furthermore, there will be political wings in the anti-war movements -- unilateral versus negotiated disarmament, negotiations over El Salvador versus "US Out," etc. DSOC will be on the right-wing of these differences. In terms of the student milieu, the PSN offers more possibilities from our point of view.

Our goals over the next couple of years should be concerned with building a revolutionary socialist wing in these new movements, through our work with the trade union left, PSN, and initiatives toward an open regroupment process.