

**#5
5/82**

Bulletin

**International
Socialists**

The debate concerning our proposal to explore joining the DSA has led to exasperation on all sides. To some extent this is a result of the focus on the organizational question, rather than the politics that underlie it. We share part of the responsibility for that, since we first began raising the political questions in the context of an organizational conclusion. But our document was aimed at participating in a political discussion which will not end on Memorial Day weekend. Regardless of the organizational conclusions reached at the convention, the political issues remain. They include the crisis facing the IS and the left in general, the collapse of party building perspectives in the '70s and the need for an alternative conception of revolutionary organization until party building is possible, and the relevance of a revolutionary perspective to the issues and movements of the 1980s.

Be that as it may, the response to our document has almost entirely focussed on our organizational conclusion. That is what the Convention will vote on. And so we owe it to the organization to focus our response accordingly. For convenience, we have chosen to frame what follows as a response to Kim's document which while not the only contribution, raises most of the important questions.

Entry or Exploration?

Focusing the discussion merely around entry forces each side to argue as if it had enough information to make an intelligent decision. This is far from the case.

We have no intention of proposing to the Convention that the IS enter DSA. Rather we propose exploring this possibility because 1) we need more information, 2) the organization needs more discussion, 3) we need time to examine the results of the merger of DSOC/NAM, and 4) we believe that what we know already makes entry a serious proposition, though by no means a certain one.

However, it is not an open and shut case. If Kim was correct in his description of DSA, then we too would oppose entry. But is he? Should we base such a serious decision on admittedly impressionistic reports of what DSA is really like, what it does and does not do? We think not.

The Character of DSA

Many members cannot understand how we can dismiss the numerous criticisms of DSA as irrelevant to the discussion. Not all criticisms of DSA are irrelevant, but most that have been offered are. Kim, and others, have spent a great deal of time belaboring the obvious, that DSA was and remains a social democratic organization, and as such has the politics of class collaboration, social patriotism, top-down bureaucratic method of operation, etc., etc. We never doubted this for a second, but this is irrelevant to the discussion. For we are for considering joining a social democratic organization.

Kim's main objection, however, is not that it is a social democratic organization, but that it is moving to the right, or at least its growth is primarily the result of the left moving right -- there being no general left dynamic in the society. Some might also argue that DSA as a whole is moving to the right under the influence of the left trade union bureaucrats.

If this were true, there would be little point in entering DSA. But there is little evidence provided for this proposition, quotes from former NAM leaders aside. It should also be clear that the opposite is not the case

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either, that DSA as a whole is moving to the left. We never made such a claim. What we have argued is that a) as DSA has grown larger it has become more multi-tendenced, and b) that many people new to socialism (and therefore moving left) are joining DSA. How many? We don't know for sure. That is one of the things we would like to find out.

Kim reports that DSA policy in Detroit is to win broader social movements to support for the Democratic Party. That this should be the policy of some DSA locals should come as no surprise. But when Kim claims that no one questions the basic definition of DSA "as a left-wing within the Democratic Party" (p. 10) he is dead wrong. The merger statement does not include this view, and NAM leaders like Dorothy Healy and Joanie Rabinowitz were outraged by the Harrington interview in the Detroit Free Press which expressed this view.

Kim wants to argue that whatever else DSA does, it will be defined by its DP politics. This is, however, a static and one-sided view. For the DSA is and will be influenced by the movements around it. It seems to us that Kim presents no case for expecting both the rise of a movement for a labor party in this decade, and the continued hostility of all wings of DSA to that movement. We expect just the opposite. As left movements develop in this country, we expect them to find expression, and often leadership, in the DSA; and that this will provide openings for us.

Kim also asserts that presently there are no activities that DSA engages in that we would be interested in, or that would be the basis for joint work. Lacking such activities, we would be confined to being a despised minority of nay-sayers. Kim loads the question somewhat by arguing that none of the activities that are the lifeblood of the IS are also the lifeblood of DSA. Of course not; if so we would be in DSA. But DSA members do engage in a variety of activities, some of which we are interested in. E.g., in Washington, they have been active in: Solidarity Day, Poland (yes, they have done some things on Poland in Washington), strike support work, El Salvador, tenant issues, statehood for DC, and the nuclear freeze campaign.

The Search for an Operational Perspective

Kim argues that the crisis of the IS is the result of the collapse of an "operational perspective"--party building--that gave all members a common form of activity, which united all our work. We believe this is a symptom, rather than a cause of the crisis. It is no mistake that we lack such a perspective and are unlikely to find one in the near future, because it flows from the difficulty of relating a revolutionary perspective to today's movement and issues.

The problem is not that a particular party building strategy collapsed, but that all such strategies collapsed. That is why the left, worldwide, faces a similar problem. No one has yet been able to present a political perspective for the '80s upon which to base a strategy for building a revolutionary tendency. What do we expect to happen in the '80s? What will the major questions be? What forces will be set in motion by the continuing crisis? What does the left have to say about the major issues, and how can it relate to the forces in motion? Does what it says and does justify an independent perspective or organization? These are some of the questions that must be answered before such a unifying "operational perspective" can be developed. Instead, what we have is the resurrection of the regroupment perspective as a substitute for that discussion.

Three Components for a Perspective

Kim points out that any perspective needs three components: politics, constituency, and organization. He correctly criticizes our document for being

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vague in some of these areas. We freely admit these weaknesses. Quite frankly, we don't pretend to have all the answers, and hope to learn more from the discussion.

Having admitted this, it must be noted that Kim's comments represent overkill, and flow from his attitude that entry is unthinkable on any terms, rather than trying to weigh the pros and cons.

Here then, are some more ideas to consider.

Politics

The politics around which we would organize inside DSA must be viewed on two different levels. Most fundamentally, our tendency would be organized around the politics of revolutionary third camp socialism. This means placing special emphasis on a criticism of the DSA's class collaborationism and social patriotism. This tendency would be as broadly based as it is in our regroupment perspective. The "readers clubs" would be the vehicle for this.

There are also more specific issues that relate to the activities of DSA and the immediate questions of the day, such as nuclear disarmament, the labor party, etc. Whether we organize specific caucuses around these issues or whether we would function as part of a broader left caucus, we lack information to decide at this point.

Constituency

Part of our "fuzziness" on this point is due to our lack of information. Kim asks, "What new people?" We have some ideas, but need to find out more.

We know that the youth section has grown tremendously, it now claims 1,500 members. We don't know what the turnover has been, or what the politics of all these young people are, but we do know that the DSOC newsletter reports 40 campus chapters which are active in strike support work, anti-imperialist campaigns as well as electoral activity. We know that at the last DSOC Youth Conference in New York our views on Poland were well received as were Stanley Aronowitz's and Bill Smith's criticisms of the labor leadership and DSOC's relationship to it. Most importantly, we know that these young people are new to politics and that for them joining DSA is a step to the left. All this suggests that at least some of the youth might be open to our ideas.

Another constituency is individuals in the left caucus, both former members of DSOC and NAM. Many of them work with us on individual projects, support Labor Notes, and are open or close to many of our ideas.

Another element are those from the left who are now joining DSA because that is "where the action is." For some this is a step to the right, but others are joining with a view of intervention from the left. What the proportion is and how many will join in the near future remains to be seen.

Our "ultimate" constituency is, of course, the rank and file movement. At this point the vast majority of its activists are not ready to join a socialist organization of any stripe. Whether DSA can develop the momentum or the ability politically to attract some members is uncertain. But, it is not the case that we are giving up on this constituency by entering DSA.

Organization

Unfortunately, in this section Kim creates more confusion, not less. First, by our tendency we refer to revolutionary socialism. We certainly do not consider our tendency to be synonymous with the present IS organization. Rather we consider all those we want to regroup with as part of our tendency. We are for that tendency organizing inside DSA, as a tendency of DSA.

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Secondly, Kim criticizes our document for being vague on whether entry is to be permanent or temporary. Let us clear up the confusion. We have no timetable. We should remain members of DSA until such time as we decide it is no longer politically fruitful to do so. We have no crystal ball to tell us when or if that will occur. But we share no apocalyptic projections on the future of class relations in this society, of sudden massive shifts to the left by the US working class, of immediate revolutionary developments. We expect the 80s to be decade characterized by the growth of social democracy. Within that context the revolutionary left can grow also, but not to the same extent. Thus we expect to be a minority for the foreseeable future, until such time as the crisis, and the class struggle have clarified the political issues enough to lead to the development of a significant revolutionary wing of the working class movement. We simply lack a blueprint or roadmap to tell us and when that will occur.

It Never Worked Before

Kim tries to buttress his case by arguing that in the past entry has always had disastrous results. One could answer in kind that building independent revolutionary organizations has had similarly disastrous results. Since nothing has worked, we can all retire to the bar.

The more important point Kim makes (really only about the French turn) is that the reason for the lousy results was that entry diverted the organizations from relating to mass movements developing outside the reformist parties. The focus on entry, and the interminable faction fights, caused the organizations to miss out on the opportunities for significant growth presented by these new movements. This is a serious argument, made more attractive by the serendipitous development of a new anti-war movement today. But as comforting as it is, there is no real argument presented, no case developed, no analysis of the history of the thirties, what the alternatives were, what the resources were, etc. All we are told is that by entering the SP the Trots missed out on the CIO. Today, we will miss out on the new anti-war movement.

It is not that simple. While they were in the SP the Trotskyists continued their labor work. Can anyone say what they would have gained if they had given it their undivided attention? Nor is it the case that the Trotskyists made no gains for the time they spent in the SP. They left with the entire youth section.

New Movements

Kim places a lot of hope on the new anti-war movements to provide a context for developing a revolutionary left. We too are excited by what we see, but if these movements are indeed crucial, then we must admit that we are terribly positioned to take advantage of them. If that is where the action will be, then it is not a matter of strengthening our student contingent (say doubling its size from two to four). We would have to reorient the entire IS and make some tough decisions in order to capitalize on the opportunity. But while there is much talk about these prospects there is no plan for reprioritizing our activity.

What would we do? We would put our labor work on the back burner. As many members as possible would get active in the new movements. Our publications should orient toward this audience. Activity in these movements, in short, would not be one of many activities of the IS, but the major, dominant activity. The fact that the PC is not proposing such a reorientation makes us doubt their confidence in these new developments. We would guess that the PC doubts that this would accomplish little for we lack the human resources to make such a single focused intervention pay off.

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One could just as easily argue that rather than making the DSA option irrelevant, the new movements make it an even more pressing question. We have already touched on the problem of numbers, we won't belabor it. But isn't it possible, perhaps likely, that if these new anti-war movements do indeed become more radical that they will create a left pressure on DSA, one that will be most intensely felt by its youth? Are we in a position to discount the possibility out of hand?

No Investigation, No Serious Debate

Kim claims we have not made a case for joining DSA. We never claimed we did. The real question is whether or not we have provided enough of a reason to warrant further discussion and a serious, organized exploration. Quite frankly, we are disturbed at the willingness of many to reject a proposal out of hand without any serious investigation. The character of this discussion so far does not bode well for our ability to navigate the future twists and turns in policy that will be required.

We also recognized that it would be folly for us to consider entry even if we were able to win a majority at this time. For the simple fact remains that such a majority would be weak, undeveloped politically, and ill-equipped to carry out such a policy effectively. That is why we propose that a decision follow a thorough investigation of DSA. Such an investigation should be accompanied by more general perspectives discussions as well.

Unfortunately, we are rushing ahead, making decisions by an arbitrary timetable forced on us by the convention date. The level and lack of discussion so far on all questions, will probably undermine much of the value of the Convention.

Certainly there are no events forcing us to make immediate decisions, to decide up and down on certain questions once and for all. Certainly more investigation and discussion is preferable than making ill-thought out decisions. Our resolution presents a cautious, well-reasoned approach to resolving this question in a way that benefits the organization, improves its political perspectives, and strengthens its cadre.

RESOLUTION ON D.S.A.

MARK LEVITAN
MIKE URQUHART

I. Between now and the next Convention the I.S. will conduct an in depth and organized investigation as to whether the future of our tendency would be enhanced by membership in D.S.A.

II. The investigation process should include both gathering information and establishing an ongoing dialogue with D.S.A. members. Specifically, we would:

A. Conduct joint work.

B. Build a readership of D.S.A. members for "Changes" by carrying articles addressed to that audience and by inviting D.S.A. members to contribute to the magazine.

C. Attend and intervene at D.S.A. public meetings.

III. We will seek to involve our friends and cothinkers on the left in these activities and in our ongoing perspectives discussions.

IV. The P.C. will establish a committee to organize these activities and to prepare a report and recommendation to be submitted to the organization three months prior to our next convention.

V. Parallel to these efforts, the I.S. will conduct internal education on the politics of D.S.A. and the Socialist International. In addition we will continue a more general political discussion on the perspectives for revolutionary socialists in the 1980's.

Convention Resolution

The Movement for Nuclear Disarmament

Kim M.

A vast movement for nuclear disarmament has taken America by surprise. In the midst of a widely advertised drift to the right, countless thousands of Americans have voiced their opposition to the continuation and escalation of the nuclear arms race. There is no organization, political tendency or current that dominates or even characterizes this movement as yet. Bandwagon-hopping by scores of congresspeople has given this movement a certain mainstream character, but these politicians do not exercise any more (or probably as much) influence as the churches who back it. The current major demand and campaign of this movement is the nuclear freeze. But in its arguments, self-characterization, and nascent consciousness, it is a movement for disarmament.

The appeal of the freeze to the movement's organizers and activists is its acceptability, even respectability, to such broad sectors of American society. It is the "all-American", typically populist demand that attracts everyone, although it poses no solution to the very problem it addresses. Yet, the logic of the freeze and the arguments made for it, lead to the demand for nuclear disarmament--a fact that the organizers and many new activists seem aware of. The freeze campaign will reach its climax in November when it appears on the ballot in 34 states and when various politicians stake a claim for the votes of freeze supporters.

We are for universal nuclear disarmament, but we support the freeze campaign precisely because its logic leads to a disarmament position. Following the 1982 elections, we expect that the movement will begin to move on to a broader disarmament position and to a debate over what tactics and strategy for disarmament and for the movement. In the context of this discussion, we will put forth a socialist political orientation as the road forward for the disarmament movement in an educational manner. At this point in the development of the movement we do not believe it possible or constructive to impose our program or to fight for it in a way that isolates the socialists from the broader currents within the movement. However, we do believe that socialists have an educational and political responsibility to make our views known and to point out political directions for this new movement.

The IS position on nuclear disarmament includes the following ideas:

- 1) We are for universal, complete nuclear disarmament. We see the traditional "arms control" path as useless and self-defeating. While we support any real steps toward disarmament, post-WWII experience shows that "arms control" has been a substitute for any genuine de-escalation of the arms race.
- 2) We are for unilateral initiatives by all of the powers, East and West, toward complete disarmament. History shows that imperialist powers are incapable of negotiating any sort of disarmament on a multi-lateral basis, since such negotiations are inevitably directed at maintaining the power of the leading imperialist nations. While we don't oppose disarmament negotiations as such, we know no war has ever been prevented by multilateral negotiations. The hope is for mass movements in both power blocks that re-enforce each other by the demand for unilateral initiatives by their own nation. While we demand unilateral initiatives by all nuclear powers, our primary responsibility is building a movement for unilateral initiatives by the US government.
- 3) It is impossible and dangerous to separate the fight against nuclear war from that against conventional wars. In particular, we seek to make the links between the struggles against intervention in Central American and elsewhere by the US government. It is evident that any of the existing interventions by the US or other major imperialist powers could escalate

into nuclear war. We are not opposed to the use of arms by those struggling for national liberation or social justice. We are opposed to military intervention by imperialist powers--East or West--and particularly the US.

4) As socialists we see no contradiction between the fight for peace and the fight for human rights and social justice. In fact, given the oppressive nature of the nuclear balance of terror and the imperialist "super-power" domination of world politics that underlies it, we see the two struggles as interrelated. Disarmament activists should, we believe, not only oppose military intervention by the US or USSR or other imperialist powers, but should support the legitimate struggles for national liberation, democracy, freedom and social justice, whether they be in Central America, Poland, or other Eastern bloc nations.

5) While nuclear destruction threatens all social classes, the immediate effects of the vast arms budget that springs from the escalation of militarism that began under Carter and has increased under Reagan, effect the working class, the poor and minority communities drastically. We will make the link between the arms spending and the decline in working class living standards, the attack on the rights and living standard of minorities and women. These links should be part of the attempt to involve broad sections of the labor movement in the disarmament movement.

6) As socialists we understand that military conflict among imperialist powers is a product of the nature and structure of those societies. While nuclear weapons are unuseable as "politics by others means," ie, as a means of achieving any rational political goals (even those of an imperialist ruling class), the logic of imperialist military conflict makes their eventual use virtually inevitable so long as the material drive toward war exists. Hence, the movement against war must eventually become a movement for socialism if it is to end the threat of nuclear annihilation. We have no illusions, of course, that such a transformation of movement consciousness is inevitable, simple, or imminent.

At this early point in the development of the disarmament movement we do not seek to put these ideas up for a vote, to make the presence of speakers expressing these ideas a prerequisite for our support or participation in any event (although we may at times propose such speakers), or to otherwise engage in fruitless internal squabbles. We do, however, seek to put these ideas forth, not necessarily all at once or with equal priority (that will vary from situation to situation) in a comradely and educational manner. We support the formation of the proposed center in NY that would educationally make the links between the nuclear disarmament, anti-intervention and the relationship of social justice in both power blocks. The danger of nuclear war and the rise of the movement against it render our traditional differences over the use of force in the process of revolution secondary in nature at this time.

Because of our background and credentials in various unions and in the trade union left generally, the IS has a special responsibility to bring the ideas of nuclear disarmament and anti-intervention to the labor movement and to bring whatever forces within labor we can to the disarmament movement. We urge trade union activities to bring their locals, and where possible, internationals, central labor bodies, etc., into this movement by endorsing its goals and generally participating in the movement.

The disarmament movement is both new and diverse. It is impossible to predict its direction or effect on the political atmosphere--except that the later will be significant and positive in the context of Reaganism. The movement is to some degree "McGovernized" in that many of its activists look to

liberal politicians like Kennedy to "implement" the freeze. The movement, however, is certain to move beyond the freeze position, and hence beyond most liberals. This may mean a reversal of the early '70s process of cooptation by the Democratic Party, a sort of "de-McGovernization" at least by sections of the movement. Drawing from the literature of the European disarmament movement, whose ideas will influence sections of the American movement, we should argue for the political independence of the movement of any wing of establishment politics.

The evidence that is in points toward the fact that the liberals and social democrats will fight to keep the movement within the context of mainstream politics on the grounds that to ignore the Democratic Party is to render the movement apolitical. The politics of genuine disarmament are not those of American liberalism and much of social democracy which confine their approach to "arms control" (see the pages of Dissent and Socialist Review for confirmation of this). Thus, in spite of the apparently apolitical character of much of the movement today, there is and will be, a left/right division over strategy, tactics, and even goals for this movement. This can be seen in a confused and unproductive way in the infighting in the New York June 12 Rally Committee, but this division is certain to grow with time. Our positions, plus any alliances with other socialists and radical pacifists, will place us squarely on the left, whether or not we agree with the tactical approach of many of the left organizations. While we are not required to support every sectarian blunder made by various forces on the left, and in fact do not see one, unified left as likely (some groups have a "go it alone regardless" method of operation), we do seek to build a sane and broad left and to support those forces fighting for an orientation similar to ours. As previously stated, at the moment this is largely an educational task.

The IS supports the movement for nuclear disarmament. We will build this movement in a loyal and constructive manner, being aware that the dynamics of such a movement hold out the possibility that it, or much of it, will move beyond its currently liberal and apolitical stage. We see in the fact that the liberals, particularly once back in office after 1984, will not move beyond the most modest "arms control" approach as a source of potential radicalization for many movement activists. Thus, we put forward our ideas in an educational fashion in order to provide a direction for that radicalization.

CONVENTION RESOLUTION
ON THE LABOR PAPER

The IS sees the development of a left in the labor movement over the last decade as an important step forward. This left milieu in the unions has grown in maturity, political skills, and advancement to union office.

It has also grown in awareness of itself as a political phenomenon, in its willingness to work together, and in its potential for growth in the labor movement.

One vehicle for this development has been the labor paper and meetings and conferences sponsored by the labor paper.

The recent Boston conference of 600 was a positive demonstration not only of the size and vitality of this milieu, but also of its ability to work together on a project.

The IS should set as a goal for the coming year making further progress toward cohering a left in the labor movement. In the next period we see a more rapid coming together of the union left, and more activist-oriented projects and joint campaigns. Progress should be made toward the establishment of an activist center with a publication.

Some of the aspects of this work will be a continuation of the conferences that have been initiated, and spreading them to new areas.

However, a more active orientation toward organizing and outreach should be undertaken. The labor paper should have one or more organizers on the road, meeting with groups and individuals, establishing contacts and links and generally furthering the development of the union left.

The activist center should be based on a program along these general lines:

- * Revitalization of the labor movement, including support of progressive rank and file trends
- * Building anti-war presence in the labor movement
- * Building a more united anti-concession movement
- * Building solidarity campaigns where possible (PATCO, etc.)

In addition to a newsletter, publications useful in these various areas of work should be developed. Conferences should increasingly

orient toward these focuses (concessions, anti-war, etc.)

Development of local groups, however loose at this stage, should be encouraged. Especially one should be developed in Detroit where it is overdue and where it can help serve as a national center as well.

Local groups could hold forums, conferences, and rank and file educational programs of a wide variety of types, including leadership training sessions that reach beyond already-radical workers.

For the IS, adopting this perspective towards the union left means our strongest work, our trade union work, will have more of a political context; it will provide more of an arena of activity for our members and other activists. We should encourage our members to participate actively in this work and bring our politics into it.

Convention Resolution

Dues

I.S. Political Committee

The Political Committee proposes adoption of the following dues schedule to the national organization:

\$20/month--persons with good-paying jobs
\$10/month--persons employed, and members-at-large
\$10/year --students and unemployed

Motivation:

Dues is a requirement of membership in the I.S. Membership dues is used to run the national office, pay staff, subsidize Changes, put out Bulletins and mailings, and facilitate travel and communication to the branches. Dues is obviously necessary to maintain the organization. It is also a symbol of political commitment, and it is only in the context of this commitment that individuals are willing to make larger contributions. At the same time, we do not want dues to be a barrier to membership, and so we are proposing a \$10 membership fee for students and unemployed. Branches are free to also assess dues as they see fit.

AMENDMENT TO THE IS CONSTITUTION

The following amendment was submitted by the NY branch, where it was passed unanimously.

Where the constitution reads (under the rights of the majority):

We believe that political discipline - all members of the organization, minorities as well as majority, actively carrying out the decisions of the organization - is a necessary and important democratic tool.

Substitute:

We believe that political discipline - in which minorities may abstain but cannot publically oppose decisions of the organization - is a necessary and important democratic tool.

MOTIVATION

The reason for the proposed change is that the NY branch felt that the harder of two types of discipline was being proposed without any discussion and that in our experience our tendency has favored the discipline described above, which we feel is also more relevant to the current state of the IS and the current period.