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October 12, 1973

TO ALL NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached is the English translation of the draft political resolution submitted by the IEC Majority Tendency at the September meeting of the United Secretariat.

It will not be published in the IIDB for several weeks as the IEC Majority Tendency requested that they be allowed to check the translation before it is printed. However, given the importance of the document we are sending you the "unofficial" translation in order to give you maximum time to study it.

A motion adopted by the majority at the September meeting of the United Secretariat set October 24 as the deadline for any comments, amendments or counter-resolutions. Needless to say, that deadline is unrealistic.

Please send us any thoughts or suggestions you have concerning the resolution immediately.

Comradely,

Ed Shaw (27)
Ed Shaw

Report on the October 12-14 Conference of the
Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee

by Fred Feldman

The Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) was initiated by Michael Harrington, former chairman of the Socialist Party (SP) after he split from that organization (now titled Social Democrats USA [SDUSA]). The fight in the SP revolved to some degree around the 1972 elections. While formally critically supporting McGovern, the SP actually tilted toward Meany's abstentionist stance. The dominant wing of the SP opposed McGovern because of his association with antiwar activists and his efforts to win support from radicalized youth. Harrington favored active involvement in the McGovern campaign. The division deepened when the SP/SDUSA became the guiding force in the Coalition for a Democratic Majority which is attempting to get the McGovernites out of leading posts in the Democratic Party and to assure the 1976 nomination to a Meany-backed candidate like Senator Henry Jackson.

The call for the DSOC conference was supported by Victor Reuther, former international affairs director of the UAW, David Selden, president of the AFT, and Pat Gorman, Ralph Helstein, and Hilton Hannah of the Meatcutters. In addition, a substantial sector of the Social Democratic intellectuals and academics like Irving Howe, the editor of Dissent, are backing the new group.

A news conference was held on October 12 by Harrington, Victor Reuther, Ralph Helstein, and David Lewis, the head of Canada's New Democratic Party (NDP). Lewis told the press that the SDUSA "are not happy about the fact that the new organization was formed...they formally asked me not to give my blessing to the new grouping." Lewis also noted that the group has applied for admission to the "Socialist International" (the second international) and said, "If the group does get established, I think we would consider seriously the admission of this group, not to the exclusion of the other group." At a public meeting held by DSOC that night attended by 350-400 people, he criticized the SDUSA's support for the war in Vietnam and again indicated his support for the admission of DSOC into the second international. Lewis addressed the conference itself the following day and spent much of his time warning against the nefarious activities of ultralefts (Trotskyists, Maoists) in the NDP.

Harrington says his new group has five hundred members while the SDUSA has 1,000. However, he stated that the active membership was about the same. More than two-thirds of the current membership of DSOC had not been in the social democracy previously.

The conference itself was attended by more than 400 persons, more than the organizers expected. (It was standing room only most of the time.) This included 150 people under thirty, by my estimate. Its youth contingent was thus larger than that gathered by YPSL at its Colorado convention. Most parts of the country were represented although New York and New England had the biggest contingents. There were 160 delegates and the conference was open to the public. I was present as a reporter for The Militant.

Greetings were received in person by representatives of the NDP, the Swedish Social Democratic party, and the Czech Social Democratic party. In addition, greetings were read from the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party, the Chilean Radical Party, the Spanish Socialist Party, and the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY). The IUSY greetings directly attacked the SDUSA.

A press packet handed out by an SDUSA observer reported that the Swedish and Finnish Social Democratic parties have been spearheading an attempt to kick the SDUSA out of the second international for the last few years. They almost succeeded at the last conference in Helsinki. Apparently, these groups find the SDUSA's prowar, anticommunist stance an embarrassment to their efforts to present a left face in their own countries.

In addition to Reuther, several other UAW leaders (Paul Silver, Carl Scheir among them) attended the meeting. Victor Gottbaum attended one session and another guest was introduced as "Comrade Allard Lowenstein."

The main political talk was given on Saturday October 13 by Harrington. He talked a lot about socialism but his main focus was that the group should function as an integral part of the Democratic Party, a public socialist caucus. "We're announcing to Mr. Strauss that you have got a socialist wing in your party." "As socialists," he went on, "we are part of the mass left, part of the liberal left, part of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.... We should not propose a socialist program for a liberal party. We should propose a liberal program for a liberal party" with the aim of making the Democrats "a liberal first party of a new American Majority."

To that end, he projected "reconstructing the liberal-labor coalition" since a liberal Democratic victory in 1976 is of "supreme importance." The goal is "reunification not only in the socialist left but in the mass democratic left as well." Since U.S. intervention in Vietnam is over, DSOC should recognize that "George Meany has a good point of view" on domestic issues, although DSOC is critical of him on foreign affairs. The only Democrat who was sharply criticized was, interestingly enough, Senator Henry M. Jackson.

Harrington hailed the women's movement as a "vital new movement in American life" and supported demands for affirmative action. There is a significant women's caucus in the group, dominated by women over 30 with a NOW/Women's Political Caucus orientation. The conference approved the "spirit" of a resolution endorsing the Equal Rights Amendment.

He praised a "decisive change taking place in Black America" typified by "an orientation toward the Black congressional caucus" and away from nationalism. He emphasized that all these movements were "in the liberal wing of the Democratic Party."

Harrington seems to be making a hard pitch for dissident CP members. The call to the conference had a vague third-camp tone, noting the bureaucratic and undemocratic character of the workers states. These were called "not socialist" but the usual expression of support for the "Democratic West" against the "totalitarian east" was missing here. Harrington refused to clarify this further, although some of his supporters would like a stronger anticommunist stance. (Howe told the audience later,

"we must be critical of our society and, still more, of totalitarian societies.") Harrington said that the Communist Party of Chile had played the role of a Social Democratic party in Chile and this might require some revisions in his opinion of them. Harrington has placed heavy blame on the U.S. for the Chilean coup, defends the Allende coalition as an example of the "peaceful road," and is distributing a petition against the junta.

The Middle East crisis was downplayed at the conference, occupying only a half hour in the weekend. A pro-Israel resolution, written by Reuther and Harrington, passed. It calls for arms to Israel and denounces the Egyptian-Syrian "attack." However, it never attacks the Soviet Union and there was virtually no ultra-Zionist, anti-Arab hysteria. A significant minority of the young people wanted to add a phrase about Palestinian self-determination and a few even opposed the sending of U.S. arms to Israel. There was no support for the Arabs in the war, however. It is curious to note that the only Jewish organization represented (of the many in the SDUSA) is the Bund which describes itself as pro-Israel and anti-Zionist. Yes, this is the same Bund that Lenin fought in 1903.

There was no denunciation of the detente and the Jackson amendment went unmentioned. There was general sympathy for Soviet dissidents but this does not yet appear to be a major focus for the group.

Harrington's pro-Democratic Party perspective was passed without opposition, although one young member had some questions about "sometimes" engaging in independent political action.

The Labor Workshop was one of six held that afternoon. The main speaker, David Selden, gave what I think is a good summary of the group's real objectives. He said that Meany's abstentionist policy would have been implemented even if McGovern had not been nominated, unless Humphrey or Jackson had gotten the nod. He charges that the "right wing socialists have sold out to the people who supported the war and who are now trying to nominate Scoop Jackson." He indicated that Jackson already has a well-oiled machine in operation and is the front runner. "We need more choice at the Democratic convention" in order to "move the country back on the course of liberalism. That is my main motivation at this time for being part of this organization." He then added that "I think Jackson would make a fairly good president, especially compared to Nixon." In other words the 1972 pre-convention fight which was often represented as a fight between "labor" and the "new politics" is beginning to shape up for 1976 as a fight between two wings of the union bureaucracy, in which each now has its very own socialist party to do the legwork. Selden and Reuther also fear that Meany may pull a repeat performance of his 1972 "neutrality" act, so they are starting now to get an alternative apparatus for lining up the labor vote for the Democrats into operation.

No youth group was formed at this meeting. A monthly newsletter has been coming out and will be maintained, but there was no discussion of putting out a newspaper.

Harrington was elected chairman of the group. Victor Reuther, Julius Bernstein, Ralph Helstein, and Debbie Meier were elected vice-chairpeople. Reuther and Harrington seem to be running the show.

This formation, with its socialist rhetoric, its "realistic" politics, and its verbal support for most of the expressions of the radicalization (except Black nationalism) has some potential to appeal to radicalizing youth. Unlike the Social Democrats USA, the DSOC sees the radicalization as a possible recruiting ground for the Democratic Party and the labor bureaucracy. As a result, we should pay close attention to this effort to revive social democracy in the U.S. In addition, we should take advantage of opportunities to discuss with young members of this group. They are not all hardened reformists and some may be recruitable to the party and/or YSA.