

# FORUM

*A Discussion and Information  
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## ISL - YSL RELATIONS

There seems to be no dispute at present that there should be no ISL fraction of any kind in the YSL. Naturally the ISL as a (theoretically!) disciplined organization cannot renounce its right to assert discipline over its members in the YSL in some unforeseen future emergency. But at the present time all ISL'ers, for varying reasons, favor free spontaneous collaboration of all YSL members, regardless of other affiliations, as the method which will be most conducive to a healthy atmosphere in the organization.

However, there has been no formal decision by the ISL to lay down this policy of not having a policy, so to speak. This convention should adopt a motion, therefore, dealing with this problem, in order to clear up any possible misunderstandings.

Comrade Martin, the YSL Chairman, will forgive me, I think, for using him as an illustration. He admitted that he had in one or two instances in the YSL advocated an ISL position with which he disagreed, merely out of a feeling that all ISL members should support ISL positions. He states that Comrade Gates, when told of this, said that he was mistaken, and should have felt perfectly free to follow his individual beliefs on any question taken up by the YSL.

Obviously, if the National Chairman of the YSL could have a mistaken impression on this question, then even though he has been straightened out as to the ISL leadership's attitude, a formal resolution is needed to clear up the problem definitively.

The question of ISL and YSL perspectives in relation to each other is one on which, however, there is more disagreement. One might favor the YSL, at its next convention, voting to become the ISL's youth affiliate, or one might have the quite different perspective that I am going to outline below, and still agree on this business of not having any ISL fraction, caucus or organized tendency in the YSL. Nevertheless, if a difference in perspectives exists, which perspective one has will have a distinct effect on the attitudes of each individual ISL'er in the YSL.

For this reason it is important that the ISL discuss these perspectives in its own convention even though it does nothing to direct or bind its youth members.

Well -- what alternative perspective exists? The alternative is the gradual development from the YSL as it recruits and as its present members and future recruits get a bit older of an adult organization into which the ISL should dissolve. By this I don't mean mere window-dressing -- that is, the ISL as a cohesive group taking on a few remnants of ex-Yipsels and, incidentally, getting itself off the subversive list!

In numerical terms, even, my perspective is realistic. The ISL is today larger than the YSL, but it is not recruiting while the YSL is. The YSL already has several members who should have graduated from it, but remain active in it because they don't want

to join the ISL. There will be more such in the future, including people who are already really above youth age at the time that they are recruited to the YSL.

There are obvious reasons for this: The YSL is weak in terms of national apparatus and press, but its local units are much more attractive than the ISL units, in terms of militancy, eagerness for activity, lively discussion and elaboration of current problems. The YSL's activities bring it into contact with awakening radicals -- the ISL maintains contact with a circle that is not recruitable.

What then confronts a 25 or 26 year old unaffiliated socialist interested in building the forces of the third camp? On the one hand an organization which is formally Marxist, but which has a layer of tired veterans constantly moving to the right on the war question, and being sloughed off (Erber, McKinney, Howe, Judd, Garrett, etc., etc.) without any replacements, which labors under the burden of being on the subversive list, and under the burden of being considered (incorrectly) as a Trotskyist sect, and whose branches are relatively lifeless and inactive.

On the other hand we have an organization which is formally non-Marxist and non-Trotskyist, having religious pacifists among its members, but which is actually closer to unanimous in its devotion to the third camp position than is the ISL, and which is not on the subversive list, but is livelier, more militant and more active than the ISL!

Adding all these factors together, even if in 1955 we could get 51% of a YSL convention (or 75%, for that matter) to vote affiliation to the ISL, we would be signing the death-warrant of the organization.

An adult counterpart of the YSL is what is needed, but the ISL cannot become such a counterpart. If our attitude and perspective is correct, however, we can help greatly in bringing into existence such an organization.

Saul Berg

Amendment to the P.C. International Resolution

Delete passage starting two lines from the bottom of page 13 ("But this progressive basis....) and ending five lines from the bottom of page 14 ("... can be met militarily.")

Substitute the following :

Underlying the lack of a consistently anti-imperialist policy, whether with regard to the rights of Germans or of the colonial peoples is the fact that the socialist movement of Western Europe continues, under its traditional reformist bureaucratic leadership, to practice class collaboration in domestic politics. The failure of the social-democracy to lead the worker's fight against capitalism and its state apparatus in each country is the crucial factor in keeping the socialist movement from standing, in the eyes of the masses, for any constructive alternative in the present international situation.

In approaching the problem of an Independent Western Union, we must view this slogan within the framework of a program appealing to the workers, the class basically alienated under capitalist society. To the extent to which the working class acquires consciousness and solidarity as a result of its unique position in society, to that extent a revolutionary socialist movement can arise whose purpose is to lead the masses in their assault on the capitalist system that exploits and degrades them.

An Independent Western Union must, therefore, be viewed by revolutionary socialists as the climax of the class struggle carried on within each nation of Western Europe. The idea that a Socialist Western Europe (or, to say the same thing in the form of a transitional slogan, a "consistently democratic" Independent Western Europe) can defend itself effectively against Stalinist Russia is entirely valid, if it is realized that its defense will be effective primarily for non-military reasons, namely the disintegrating political effect on the peoples living under the Stalinist yoke of the appearance of an effective democratic socialist regime nearby. But an Independent Western Union, like any other political objective of socialists in Western Europe, can only be viewed secondarily in terms of its effectiveness as a weapon of defense against Stalinism, for, we repeat, if the working class exists under conditions which ready it to organize for a revolutionary struggle against capitalism, then such a revolutionary working class cannot and should not consider the existence of Stalinist barbarism in other countries as an enemy on the same plane as its own ruling class. It is an enemy on the same plane from a world viewpoint, but not from the standpoint of the basic class struggle that springs from the life of the exploited class in each country.

Indeed, in a country like France, where there is a history of bloody civil war (1793, 1830, 1848, 1871), it is the very class consciousness of the workers which tends to make them dismiss truthful reports about conditions under Stalinist rule as "capitalist propaganda." The French workers experience the exploitation of the French bourgeoisie, and they do not experience the Stalinist slave camps. They will in their great majority believe the truth about Stalinism, not as a result of formal education but only as a result of a rebirth of confidence in the socialist movement as the unconditional defender of their day-to-day interests. The Stalinists have to be exposed primarily through their failure to act consistently as the workers' champions, through their sacrifice of the workers on behalf of the latest bureaucratic directive or diplomatic maneuver, and through their ~~own~~ contempt for workers' democracy.

Once it is understood and accepted that the weakness of socialism in Western Europe today results primarily from reformism and class collaborationism; from failure to prosecute the class struggle, and not primarily from any lack of a socialist strategy against the menace of Stalinist conquest, then it may be admitted that socialism as the only viable alternative to the external menace of Stalinist conquest also occupies a place in the agitation and propaganda of the socialist movement. It is especially important among those peoples which have had direct experience with Stalinist occupation, such as Germany and Austria. Even in these countries, however, the main weakness of the Social Democracy lies in its politics of coalitionism (Austria) or in its attachment to a peaceful status quo in the economic sphere (Germany). The weight of the Social Democratic bureaucracy in curbing the class struggle is the main factor weakening the socialist movement's dynamism and power to attract all the disaffected groups of society, while its negative or sectarian position in regard to a Western Union is only secondary.

July 24, 1954

(Received in New York August 23, 1954, Ed.)

Saul Berg  
Jack Walker  
Jim Thompson

Some Comments on the International Resolution

After reading the amendment to the section of the international resolution that deals with the Independent Western Union and the German Social-Democracy, some comrades may react with the feeling that it is a didactic repetition of basic ideas that we all hold. Therefore, we will not seek to further explain the amendment directly--it is clear and straightforward enough--but shed light on its necessity by analyzing some of the formulations in the passage of the P.C. resolution that it is designed to replace.

"The lack of such an alternative (for the political organization of Western Europe and hence for its military defense) sterilizes the socialist opposition to EDC throughout Europe." This is completely false. What sterilizes socialist opposition to EDC or anything else is the social-democratic defense of the status quo, and the loss of faith in any alternative by workers faced with the existence of two powerful machines, one conservative (Social-Democratic), the other engaging in bureaucratic manipulations in behalf of a foreign power (Stalinism). Conversely, this is what gives Bevanism its strength. Programmatically it is sterile, confused and downright ignorant, but it is based on the desire of a big section of the British working class for "more socialism." Its strength comes from its militancy.

Now, if the resolution were to limit itself to saying that militant, class-struggle socialist tendencies within the European parties weaken their effectiveness by failing to offer a clear counter-program to EDC, this would be a correct statement. But to merely refer to "the socialist opposition to EDC" without any modification is clearly incorrect. It might also be said that this is an oversight that could be corrected by saying "the opposition to EDC of militant left socialists in Western Europe." But this would ignore the fact that throughout the whole section of the resolution there is absolutely no attempt to connect the international situation with the historic role of social-democratic reformism. There is a reaffirmation at the very end of the entire resolution of our traditional interpretation of the role of the social patriots, but where things are being analyzed concretely as in the section which we are amending, this role is forgotten.

Thus, on page 14 we are told that the European socialists vacillate between half-hearted support of NATO and half-hearted opposition to it "primarily (our emphasis) because they have not developed a program for a socialist Framework on the Continent." Is there a newcomer in our movement who does not know that their vacillation results primarily from their adaptation as a privileged caste within capitalist society and the whole set of coalitionist, class-collaborationist, national-chauvinist policies that accompany this adaptation and the preservation of their stake in the present system?

An outsider, reading this portion of the resolution, would come to the conclusion that we were criticizing the German Social-Democrats as a bunch of left sectarians. In any case he would certainly not get a correct appreciation of what divides us from the Social-Democratic leadership.

It may be said that previous International Resolutions of the ISL made this point clear. If so, then these resolutions conflict not with omissions in the present resolution but with such terms as sterilize, primarily, etc., which, if the English language is still used correctly, assign fundamental importance to Independent Western Union as the missing link in the Social-Democracy's political armor.

July 24, 1954

Saul Berg  
Jack Walker  
Jim Thompson

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Amendment to page 20 of the International Resolution

Delete the first sentence of the second half of the page, beginning: "The ISL reaffirms..." and ending "...into revolutionary socialist instruments of the working class."

Substitute the following:

The ISL affirms its position in favor of independent socialists who are reduced to small cadre organizations joining the Social Democratic parties in countries where the latter are mass working class political organizations in order to work within their ranks, alongside the worker militants, as a left wing seeking to revitalize these movements into revolutionary socialist instruments of the working class. In affirming this position we are recognizing the lesson that the workers' deep, conservative ~~the~~ attachment to the institutions which are the result of so many years of toil and suffering makes the construction of a revolutionary party a slow process not achievable by raids or maneuvers executed by small disciplined groups. We do not, however, presume to deny that there may be situations where the Social-Democracy, though still large, is discredited to the point where independent socialist forces must at least begin their regroupment outside the Social Democracy. Our general position, therefore, cannot be assumed to be universally applicable without careful examination of the specific circumstances in each country.

- - -Saul Berg, Jack Walker, Jim Thompson.

2646

Comments on the amendment to page 20

1- I am against the left-wingers in France entering the Socialist Party of France.

2- It would be ludicrous to waste the time of the ISL convention trying to discuss enough of the specific background of the French situation to ~~to~~ prove my case. (If all Francophiles would care to retire to a café one evening and have a discussion, O.K., but ~~please~~ please - not the whole organization!)

3- Why then must the resolution say that all independent socialists join these parties where they are serious ~~by~~ working class organizations? The amendment explains the general principles favoring such an orientation, leaves out the word all, and explains why there might be exceptions.

4- The POUM also has something of a case for not entering the Spanish S.P., which, even in exile, is a mass working-class organization (20,000 party members in exile in France, for example). I say it has a case. There are arguments for and against. In the absence of a detailed specific analysis, why, again, must the resolution say all?

5- I omit the word "loyal" in front of left wing. We are against raids, executed with military discipline, like the entry into the S.P. in 1936 complete with a secret national committee, secret discipline, etc. What is required is honest, spontaneous collaboration over a long period of time. Nevertheless fundamentally we still are not loyal to organizations that have done what the reformist parties have done. When the French S.P. was sitting in the Cabinet during the first three years of the Indochina war, we could not be loyal left-wingers in it. We would not necessarily leave the party, but neither would we necessarily go to any length to stay in it. The word loyal is not a correct description of the kind of left wing we favor.

Saul Berg

July 24, 1954

(All above documents were received in New York on August 23, 1954 G. Haskell)

2647

(7)

AN AMENDMENT TO THE DRAFT RESOLUTION ON THE  
POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE UNITED STATES

This amendment is to be inserted immediately after paragraph 6 of page 22. The Shachtman-Gates-Haskell amendment should come between paragraphs 5 and 6.

The ISL will give electoral support to such candidates if, and only if, their candidacy represents an actual break with the political representatives of American capitalism, the leaderships of the two major parties. Such a candidacy would of necessity be marked by two decisive characteristics:

1. Its political program would primarily be one of working-class demands.
2. It would represent a clear organizational split with, not merely the Democratic Party machine, but, most particularly, the Fair Deal wing of that machine.

Comment --

This amendment is clearly not in verbal contradiction to that proposed by Comrade Shachtman et al. Its political divergence, however, becomes clear if we place the Shachtman amendment in its correct position, immediately following paragraph 5 on page 22. (paragraph 5 is the one dealing with "labor" candidates in Democratic Party primaries, with which the prohibition adopted by the last convention dealt. Paragraph 6 discusses "labor" candidates on lines other than Democratic.)

It is now evident that, whereas the Shachtman amendment proposes (by implication -- its inexcusably sketchy character makes no other interpretation defensible) that the ISL support "labor" candidates inside the Democratic Party on the same terms that it has, in the past, supported such candidates outside of it, the amendment that I propose embodies an approach to this problem substantially different from that taken by the ISL in recent years. The two agree on one point: the impossibility of maintaining a double standard toward support of "labor" candidates, based on the formal and unreal distinction whether they are "inside" or "outside" the Democratic Party.

This can be established by a brief discussion of two unique and closely related aspects of American politics, the patronage party system and the open primary.

That American political parties are based primarily on patronage has many consequences of which only one concerns us here; the total lack of any unifying ideology or political program results in a complete decentralization and lack of discipline which make it commonplace for any politician with a sufficient local machine to be thoroughly and genuinely independent of the entire remainder of his "party".

The open primary, in which any qualified voter is entitled to participate by merely registering in the party of his choice,



has tended in fact if not in name, to become a kind of "second" general election. In fact, in many parts of the country (and not only the South); it is far more important than the general election.

It is therefore entirely arbitrary and unrealistic to draw principled distinctions between primary and general elections; exactly the same class forces and programs can find expression in both.

The foregoing is all preliminary to the vastly more important question of what a socialist attitude should be towards "independent" labor-backed candidates.

The position of the ISL (as I will demonstrate concretely further on) has been one of willingness to accept any candidate put up by the labor bureaucracy, no matter what his program, provided only that he run "independently" of the Democratic Party.

Before discussing this position let us analyze briefly the character of the labor bureaucracy in the present stage of the degeneration of capitalism in America.

Completely independent of their membership, due to the absolute lack of democracy in virtually all unions, the labor bureaucrats are continually drawn into closer dependence upon the state, whose role in the economy tends to increase steadily. This is much truer today than it was when Trotsky wrote "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay" (and it was true then). To maintain their position as a privileged caste on the back of the labor movement they look for the aid of the state, more particularly, to the aid of "reformist" and "liberal" elements within the imperialist state and ruling class. In return, they provide inestimable services to the state in suppressing all rank and file protest and preventing any show of militancy.

The conclusion that we draw from this, for purposes of the present discussion, is simple and elementary, but tremendously important. It is this: that there is absolutely no necessary similarity between the interests of the labor bureaucracy, and of their alliance with the "liberal" imperialists, and the interests of the labor movement.

To fail to recognize this is, for a socialist, to transform oneself into a caudal appendage of the labor bureaucracy, itself nothing more than a tail of imperialism. And this has been the consequence of the ISL's electoral policy.

Let us take as an example (either of the Halley campaigns would do as well, but this one is much clearer, and, in fact, more favorable to the viewpoint of the ISL policy, as it involved an actual leader of the Liberal Party) the New York Senatorial campaign of 1952. The major party candidates were Irving Ives, a liberal Republican, and John Cashmore, a conservative Democrat. The Liberal Party nominated one of its leaders, George S. Counts, a Columbia University professor.

The reason which led the Liberal Party leaders to nominate

Counts was not at all mysterious, and Rose, Berle et al, expressed it quite often in their speeches: to help elect Stevenson.

The situation was this: the presence of the Jim-Crow Senator Sparkman on the Democratic ticket had alienated large numbers of civil-rights-conscious voters. At the same time, the Republican candidate for Senator was more "liberal" than his Democratic opponent, and had authored the state's anti-discrimination law. The threat was clear: that many independent voters, apathetic as to the national contest, would vote for the ticket that included Ives (and Eisenhower), not for that which included Stevenson.

There could be no doubt, from the very beginning of the campaign, of Count's role as a Judas Goat for Stevenson. His campaign was exactly what was expected, that of a "liberal Democrat," vigorous in his denunciations of the Republicans and breathless in his praise for Truman, Stevenson, and the national Democratic Party.

Yet....the ISL supported him!

All the glib rationalizations about "a step toward a Labor Party" cannot conceal a frightening abandonment of socialist politics. (Let us remember that socialists do not support an action merely because it is less reactionary than those that preceded it. For example, when the A.F. of L. endorsed a presidential candidate for the first time in its history, the ISL hailed this as a step toward independent labor political action, yet this in no way weakened its opposition to Stevenson.)

The opposition to the Shactman amendment is aware of the consequences of this abandonment, though in a most unclear way. Draper has said that it would lead logically to support of Stevenson. Precisely! What Draper is unwilling to admit is that the ISL's present electoral policy (with which he agrees) is based on the same political logic. Shachtman has not advocated any change whatever in this approach; he merely asks that it be applied consistently within the Democratic Party as well as outside of it.

To be sure, no one advocates supporting a Stevenson now. The dispute is: shall we take a step along the road that leads to such support? Unfortunately, what is not recognized is that we are already on that road.

Certainly it is better to be an inconsistent revolutionist than a consistent opportunist. Yet the logic of opportunism is merciless. Whether the second step is taken now or later, the end of the road is the same. We should therefore recognize our mistake and reaffirm what is revolutionary in our politics, casting out that which is opportunistic.

The proposed amendment is designed to recast our electoral policy on a firm and principled socialist basis.

Henry Gale

2650

Amendment to the Resolution on the Political Situation in the U.S.

Insert on Page 22 after paragraph 5.

Moreover, in those instances where the participation of the trade unions in the Democratic Party has reached the point where their political activity dominates or controls the local functioning of that Party, it is incumbent on us to urge that labor run its own -- labor controlled -- slate of candidates in primary and general elections for both public and inner party office. By this means labor's active commitment to the Democratic Party can be turned into a progressive channel by projecting a struggle within that Party, a struggle which will highlight the present contradiction between ~~the~~ labor's domination of local Party functions and the utilization of that Party machinery for anti-labor ends. Such an independent stand, even while within the Democratic Party, will tend to split labor from its conservative, bourgeois and imperialist allies, and is a necessary step in sparking labor into an ~~Independent~~ Independent Labor Party course.

S. Bellas  
B. Arnold  
R. Green

Resolution Adopted by the San Francisco-Bay Area Branch

Be it resolved that the convention recommend to the incoming Political Committee that it publish as soon as technically possible a printed pamphlet on the ISL's case.

## The Labor Party Line and Some Related Tactics

A great deal has happened since the ISL formulated its Labor Party line some 17 years ago. Then the great masses of workers were in motion. The trades unions were growing by the millions. Socialists and Stalinists were leading the workers in militant class struggles and class consciousness was a growing thing. Along with the gigantic economic growth of working class organizations there was developing a political consciousness that threatened to destroy the old two-party system. It took the combined efforts of the old line politicians and the labor bureaucrats of the AFL and the CIO to channelize the Labor Party aspirations of the awakened working class into a docile appendage of the Democratic Party.

Today, the chances for the formation of a Labor Party seem more remote than ever. The leaders of the AFL and CIO are determined to get back into the governmental apparatus through the Democratic Party. From the rank and file comes no protest against such maneuverings. The ranks are passive and in a conservative mood.

Does this mean that we should abandon our Labor Party slogan? Hardly. We do not base our broad and long range perspectives on temporary moods of the masses. We are confident that given the present development of U.S. capitalism that there will be an awakening once more within the ranks of the working class and a great wave of class struggles will once more place on the immediate agenda the formation of a ~~the~~ Labor Party. Therefore the press and our members must never cease for one moment to propagate and agitate for the idea of a Labor Party.

But given the present moods of the workers, how do our comrades in mass organizations seek to synchronize their political ideas and actions with the day to day political struggles of the workers and their attempts to express in their own elementary way their working class aspirations? We cannot answer such problems by saying to the workers: "form a Labor Party," and if they do not heed our advice, stand disdainfully aside from their awkward political struggles. Such ultimatism will gain us nothing and certainly not their ears in the future.

If in given situations where Labor Party politics is ruled out in advance and we have the opportunity to put forward a genuine working class militant with genuine working class support on a good minimum program as a nominee in a mass political party, then we should do so and enter wholeheartedly into the campaign to win him the nomination.

In most cases such a candidate as I have described above will be vigorously opposed by the regular party machinery. In fighting to win the nomination he will have to build a completely new and different political machine, a machine most likely composed of his union allies, in effect a Labor Party machine. And if in going on to win office with the support of his union machine and working class allies he will then be beholden not to the old party machine which he fought and defeated but to the union apparatus which made his victory possible. Such may be the beginnings of local Labor Party branches.

In such a campaign our comrades must not stay on the sidelines but be in the midst of the struggle, working, educating and seeking to bring to the surface the real significance of such a struggle.

We had once hoped that a Labor Party would start in this country as the result of a great split between the labor bureaucracy and the Democratic Party bureaucracy. The strength and richness of American capitalism has at present rendered such a hope utopian. There is absolutely no telling at the present moment how a Labor Party will begin. A pure birth such as I have mentioned above seems excluded right now. Many small and diverse streams may spring up and it may be a long time ere they all meet and swell into a mighty torrent that will presage the birth of a new force, an independent working class political party.

Joe Arnold

2652

Motion on Dissent

1. The ISL welcomes the appearance of Dissent, as it would welcome the appearance of any new socialist voice, no matter how timid and conservative, in these days of the tinyness and isolation of the socialist movement and of socialist ideas.

2. Dissent has two aspects to it; a reactionary one and a progressive one. It is reactionary in so far as its ideology and tone is anti-organizational and anti-programmatic, espousing, as it does, the idea that socialist organization is unnecessary in these times and that an ethos, a feeling, can substitute for socialist program and politics. In addition, its leading editors and movers are for the support of American imperialism and lean in the direction of critical support to the Democratic Party and its candidates. Its pretense to be an organ for the reevaluation of socialist ideas is likewise a sham.

At the same time, however, Dissent has a progressive aspect and may be able to play a progressive role. Its format and tone indicate that it is aimed at an audience of students, intellectuals and those sections of the intellectual community who read Partisan Review, Commentary and "avant-garde" magazines. This audience it cannot convert from socialism to liberalism because it consists of those who never were socialists and those who have been converted to liberalism a long time ago. This audience is to the right of Dissent; to it the magazine appears as a voice from the left. On this audience its impact and influence will be a socialist one; people influenced by it will therefore be brought closer to us, not moved further away. The hysterical attacks on Dissent by Partisan Review and Commentary indicate that the editors of these organs realize this. Moreover, the policy of the editors makes it possible for our ideas to reach its audience in so far as ISL members will be ~~able~~ able to write for it.

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No one can predict whether or not Dissent has any viability in this period nor how large its influence will be. Large or small that influence will be a progressive one and this progressive aspect outweighs the reactionary aspect.

3. Therefore the convention revokes the motions adopted by the Political Committee on Dissent.

a. ISL members are free to and should write articles for Dissent. The League hopes that comrades will write on such topics as to put forth the ideas of the League and its contributions to socialist thought in that magazine. We also hope that no ISL member will write for Dissent without first fulfilling his literary obligations to the ISL press.

b. Labor Action shall enter into an exchange of ads with Dissent, if that is requested by the latter. It shall be understood that the appearance of an ad for Dissent in Labor Action does not constitute political endorsement of Dissent.

c. ISL branches and members may utilize Dissent in educational work and in reaching individuals with socialist ideas when this seems to be an effective method for spreading our socialist ideas.

Max Martin

2653

We Must Retrench to Survive!

The socialist movement in America is engaged in a holding operation. This has been true for at least six years, and will continue to hold true for a period ahead the duration of which is now wholly unpredictable. It has been true of every single socialist or socialistic organization in the country without exception, regardless of the particular program, tradition, size and social composition of membership or any other aspect of its make-up.

For the ISL, as for the rest, this holding operation has not meant that things have stood still, organizationally speaking. There has been a steady attrition of membership, sympathizing periphery, morale, and activity. To put it differently, a smaller membership finds itself more isolated from political contact with the working class (or any other segment of the population), finds less to do, and as a result of long experience with the meager results of activity, finds it more difficult to take advantage of even those rare opportunities for meaningful activity which present themselves.

The political conditions which have had this depressing effect on all sections of the American socialist movement have been discussed and described in the past. Every member of the movement is, or should be, amply familiar with them.

Further, the ISL has repeatedly pointed, in its resolutions, to elementary steps which should be taken by every branch and every member to make the most of those meager opportunities for socialist political life which are available. Specifically, we have urged our members to enter the labor movement, or for those whose occupation makes this impossible, to join those liberal political or quasi-political organizations in which it is possible to put forth our views in an educational manner to the most advanced political public in the country.

The desirability of such activity on the part of our members has been in no way reduced by the fact that far too few of them have paid heed to the good advice given them in the past. Those members who have immersed themselves in a political milieu, even though it be generally amorphous and unresponsive, have found that they could continue political life as socialists, despite all the difficulties placed in their way. The rest of the membership has continued such a life, but more in the form of passive members of a club rather than of active propagators of the socialist idea or the struggle for socialist democracy.

The ISL's holding operation has been, in effect, a long and painful retreat in every field except that of ideology. But the objective situation does not stand still either. During this whole period it has been getting worse consistently.

How long can this march of reaction last? No one knows for sure. There are certain signs which can lead one to believe that we are approaching a real turning point. But it is impossible to predict whether the ~~the~~ turning point is six months or three years ~~ahead~~ or more ahead of us. And it should be borne in mind that even a favorable shift in political ideology could well fail to have a measurable organizational effect on us for a goodly number of months after it had occurred.

For us, then, the present problem is to hang together politically as an organized body of socialists. Our best, most energetic and confident members will continue to spread our influence, under most difficult circumstances, in the labor and liberal movements. We hope that a few more will join them in this task. But all of us, from the most active to the most passive, recognize that the indispensable

condition for our continuation as an organization is the issuance of a regular press of a high political quality. In a sense it can be said that for the moment our chief activity and reason for existence as an organization is to issue our press, while at the same time the continued appearance of our press makes it possible for us to exist as a socialist organization rather than as a scattered group of socialistically inclined individuals. In a sense one can say that at the present time we have reached a point at which organization and press are both functions of each other.

In order to put out our press we have to have a staff which can put it out, some means of assuring it of at least a minimal circulation, and the money with which to put it out. All three of these are organizational tasks, they are all inter-related, and if any one of them is lacking it becomes impossible or meaningless to continue to issue our publications.

Perhaps the least self-evident of the conditions for getting out a socialist press is the need of a minimal circulation. Everyone knows that one does not need circulation to finance the press, as it is financed by the contributions of the members and friends of the organization. But once the circulation of any publication falls to the point where virtually no one reads it but those who write it, the effort of getting it out is no longer justified or possible. Publication is then for the record only. For a socialist movement, at least, such publication would be ridiculous.

It is true that the circulation of our publications is now dangerously low. Every member and every branch know how many subs they have got for the paper in the past five years. They also know that every publication has a turnover in its subscribers, and although ours is lower than most, when the addition of new subs falls close to zero the circulation is bound to decline.

It is true that the witchhunt makes it more difficult to get subs to our press today than it has been at any time in the past. Yet they must be got, and they can be. The only sure, and the most fruitful method of sub-getting is for the members who have contact with the outside world politically to get subs from their contacts. But in addition to this, there is a certain amount of promotional activity which can be carried on by the center. In our circumstances, such activity must be increased as the sub-getting by individual members meets more resistance. Otherwise, the day may arrive when our list of readers no longer justifies the issuance of anything but a bulletin.

We must have a press. But that fact, accepted by everyone, does not yet answer the question of what kind of a press it is possible for us to have.

Up till now we have had our weekly LABOR ACTION, and a bi-monthly NEW INTERNATIONAL. Although in recent years the type of material which has appeared in the two publications has been growing more homogeneous (that is, there has been a decreasing difference between the two publications), there is still a gap between them

It is my contention that we cannot continue to get out both of these publications without endangering the existence of a minimal press for the ISL, and hence our existence as an organization.

As everyone knows, the publication of our press has represented a financial miracle over the years. Never has an organization done so much with so little over so long a time.

But the contraction of the organization, in the terms stated above, has reduced our resources to a lower level than they have ever been before. Any member acquainted with our recent fund drive, or with the level of financial contributions in his own branch now as compared to any period in the past will know that this is true, and why it is true.

In the past, as our finances have contracted, we have managed to contract the expenses of the organization in such a way that the press was not endangered. Everything was sacrificed to our press. Assistance of the national organization to local units for organizers and headquarters rent went by the board. One functionary after another was taken off the payroll. Finally, all secretarial help in the national office was dispensed with, the remaining officers doing their own secretarial work. Now there is absolutely nothing more to cut in the way of personnel in any direction and by any standards.

Our total national staff now consists of two full-time and two part-time workers. In addition, we get the woman help, on a spare-time basis, of a few other comrades, and hope to add to this in the near future. Without either of the full-time workers, LABOR ACTION would grind to a halt within a few weeks. Our two part-time people are our national secretary and national chairman. The only change conceivably consistent with minimal organizational functioning would be to increase the time available for the performance of the duties of these comrades rather than cutting it further.

There is no "fat" in the overhead of the organization which can be cut. But our income is no longer sufficient to meet our budget, no matter how this budget may be considered. That is, if we forget all about what we owe now to functionaries in back wages and to other creditors, and if our income for the coming year remains the same as it has been for the past year, we will fall measurably short of being able to meet our minimal bills during the coming year.

But has it not been the case that over the years the socialist movement, and the ISL in particular, has functioned on a deficit basis? Is this a really new situation for us?

No, it is not true that in the past, on an annual basis, the ISL has always functioned with a deficit. The ~~proof~~ proof of this is simply that year after year, when the fund drive was over, we have been able to bring our debt ratio to a negligible figure. We have never defaulted on a debt. We have always managed to cut our ~~expenses~~ expenses in such a way when income declined that at the end of the fund drive we were more or less where we had been, financially, at the end of the previous fund drive.

The difference is that this year our debts at the end of the fund drive were significantly larger than last year, or two years ago, and that since then they have been increasing more rapidly than in past years. The difference is, in addition, that so far we have found no way of cutting expenses to meet the increase in debt, and to date no proposal has been made for any such cut.

But even if we agree that our annual deficit will grow somewhat, how will this endanger our ~~whole~~ ~~press~~ press program? After all, if and when it becomes absolutely impossible to publish both publications, will it not be possible then, when really pushed to the wall, to drop one of them without the other one being affected?

Let us say that our creditors, internal and external, would hold still for an accumulation of a certain debt through the next fund drive. Over the years they have become accustomed to the idea that sometimes they are not paid in full even at the end of a drive. But this time the debt would be about double what it was last time because of the hold-over of the debt from the last fund drive. And that would continue to grow during the following year so that by the following fund drive the debt would be about three times what it had been last year.



At some point, the weakest link in our credit structure would go. What this means is that either an additional functionary would have to be laid off and go to work elsewhere to make a living, or one of our printers would refuse to continue to put out our publications.

If the weakest link should prove to be a full-time functionary, there can be no doubt that the continued publication of LABOR ACTION would be endangered.

Although I do not intend to go into the whole question of our staff, at least this much must be said to make this point clear. No one is kept on the payroll to put out the NI, and thus reduction of the staff would not endanger the magazine. But it is also true that only two of our functionaries are involved in the regular production of LA. These are the two full-time people.

It is a miracle that with only ~~two~~ two full-time people we are able to produce a paper of the quality of LABOR ACTION. This is specially true when it is born in mind that the other two functionaries have no connection with the production of the paper from week to week. Neither of them writes for it with any regularity, nor do they have anything to do with the business management or any other aspect of the paper. In fact, it is my opinion that they are so divorced from the paper that they have only the vaguest idea of the editorial problem involved in publishing it.

It could be that if the present editor or business manager should become incapacitated for any reason, they could be replaced. But it is at least doubtful whether this could be accomplished. At any rate, there is no one on the staff now who could replace either of them.

Further, such is the concentration of the work-load on their shoulders that it would be impossible for either of them to continue to perform his functions if he had to work regularly to supplement his income because of the inability of the organization to continue to pay their meager wages, even on an annual basis.

If the weakest link in our credit structure should turn out to be an outside creditor, the same might very well be true.

Business concerns are willing to extend credit to old customers who have always paid. But if a ~~given~~ given customer's debts become markedly worse, and not just temporarily, but progressively, even the most lenient creditor begins to demand payment. At a certain point he is no longer willing to accept a slowing down of debt accumulation, but demands full payment for services rendered on a weekly basis, plus something on account. Otherwise he simply refuses to continue, preferring a loss on his present debt to the prospect of a greater loss in the future.

The NI is a relatively small item in our budget. And even if, at a certain point, a printer should refuse to carry the magazine further, it would probably be possible to dig up a new printer every two months to get out one pre-paid or partially paid issue.

But LA costs a lot of money, and one simply could not get out a weekly paper if one had to jump from printer to printer. Further, it would be impossible to finance the paper if we had to pay for it weekly. We absolutely have to maintain a credit relationship which ~~permits~~ permits us to build up a large debt and then pay it off, or at least pay off the vast bulk of it during fund drives.

Such a relationship, however, can only be built on the basis of many years of doing business with each other. Once it is broken, a new printer can only be counted on to carry us for a few weeks before he demands weekly payment in full.

All this is an attempt to show that we are so poor that we cannot afford our total annual debts to rise any higher without endangering the existence of our weekly paper. This means that we absolutely must cut expenses somewhere, unless someone can propose a scheme for increasing our income.

Since we cannot cut on salaries, the only place we can cut is in our press. What we have to decide is what part of our press is indispensable, or what kind of a press we should have which is within our means. Then we have to make the cut before it is absolutely forced upon us, that is, before our whole credit structure is wrecked by the attempt to over-extend it.

I propose that at the present time the simplest, most clearly indicated cut is to eliminate the NEW INTERNATIONAL. I will not even attempt to argue the merits of LA vs. the NI. The former is far more important to us.

But will abandoning the NI actually balance our budget, even on an annual basis? That is problematical. Comrades with much experience assure us that our income will drop much more than the truly negligible amount we get from the NI today. All that can be said here is that the rock-bottom amount it costs to put out six issues of the NI per year is pretty close to what I estimate our present annual deficit to be, but it is possible that the gap in our budget will be even greater than can be closed by dropping the NI.

But if it cannot be proved that dropping the NI will ~~not~~ solve our financial problem, why take such a drastic measure? Or, as others argue, why not then be logical and propose something which actually will close the gap?

The immediate problem, as I see it, is to reduce the magnitude of our annual deficit to some significant extent. The slower our debts to creditors of all kinds increase, the longer they can be expected to hold off any drastic action. As we go along, it will be easier to estimate whether a further reduction in the press is necessary. If on the basis of this cut we can hold out till a change in the objective situation or some unexpected financial windfall comes to our aid, well and good. If not, we will have to cut deeper. But reducing the speed with which our debt burden will grow will give us more time to estimate what our next move in retrenchment or expansion should be.

The argument against dropping the NI has been that it has not been demonstrated that we absolutely have to cut out the magazine to prevent a really dangerous financial crisis in the future, that if the time comes when we just can't pay to get the NI out that will be time enough to drop it, and no other consequences will follow.

This argument simply ignores the realities of our financial operation.

We have already lost  $2\frac{1}{2}$  functionaries due to inability to pay them, despite common agreement that we need them badly to insure our functioning. Can we afford to lose another functionary without endangering LABOR ACTION? But we cannot carry both publications and pay our present staff. And we are not talking here about paying them every week, or even two weeks out of each month, but rather of paying them on an annual basis.

Can anyone contend that we can continue to put out our publications regardless of how large our debt may grow to be? Can anyone contend that if we once destroy our present credit relationships we would be able to continue to get out a weekly paper? Can anyone contend that if our indebtedness continues to mount steadily, despite fund drives, our credit relationships will not be endangered?

Unless comrades are prepared seriously to argue for the above contentions, it is incumbent on them to make proposals which can assure us of uninterrupted operation

That is, it is incumbent on them to propose either a method of cutting expenses or of increasing income different from that of dropping the NI.

I realize the reluctance comrades have in voting for this proposal. The NI has a long and honorable tradition. Even if in recent years this tradition has been kept alive more in form than in content, it is hard to admit that even that has become beyond our means. But it is irresponsible for comrades to refuse to support necessary measures of retrenchment even if they can make no rational argument against them. It is irresponsible for comrades to sit and clench their teeth when the finances of the organization are discussed, but to refuse to vote for some policy which will make our existence possible from a financial point of view.

But what if abandoning the NI should not really close the gap? Then it may be necessary, in due course, to cut the number of pages in LA, or to reduce the frequency of its publication. That would be very bad, and it may be that we can avoid the necessity of doing it. In fact, we can be sure that we will not have to do it if the comrades do not accept the abandonment of the NI as a signal for relaxation, but rather understand that it is an indispensable dropping of valuable ballast, and that we must even increase our efforts at swimming against the stream so as to stay at the same place rather than decreasing them.

Will dropping the NI deprive the ISL of its only medium for the working out and presentation of the more general and theoretical problems of socialism?

This need not be so. Comrades who really have something to say in a form which is unsuitable even to the present LA, and which is of a nature which justifies wider circulation than is possible for a mimeographed bulletin can present manuscripts to the organization. It is an old truism of the movement that it is always possible to raise special funds for the publication of important theoretical contributions in pamphlet or other form. Such funds come from sources which are not available to us otherwise. Depending on their character, they could be put out as special LA pamphlets, or we could seek to put out a semi-annual or annual booklet containing a number of such articles.

I do not argue that giving up the NI will not hurt us at all. It is evident that no matter what alternative arrangements may be made, they will be less desirable than a regular theoretical magazine. Even though a part of what has appeared in the NI in recent years could equally well have appeared in LA, and another part was written as filler to make up for the absence of enough solid material, the fact remains that quite a bit of valuable material did appear which could not have appeared in LA, and part of which, at least, would most likely not have been written at all except for a feeling on the part of the authors of obligation to the magazine. *1/14* Just because something is written to meet a deadline does not mean that it is necessarily without value.

Even though the magazine has declined in quality as well as in liveliness and readability in recent years, it is still better than no magazine at all. But after all, I am arguing here for the necessity of retrenchment and not for some improvement in our literary work. Still, even though much that has appeared in recent years in NI was desirable, very little of it was indispensable either to our propagandist work, or to the theoretical development of our movement. In most cases, articles in the NI are simply longer than those in LA rather than more profound.

But it is worth repeating: we will always find a way to publish material which is really important for the thinking of our movement, and for the development of socialist thought internationally.

The above has been written with a good deal of reluctance, though the author would not try to conceal the fact that he has been for giving up or changing the frequency of the NI for several years. Comrade Shachtman, in discussing this question before a membership meeting in New York, as well as before the last plenum of the ISL's national committee has referred to the "enthusiasm" and "passion" with which comrades have "pushed" for the abandonment of the magazine.

Once one is convinced that it is necessary to retrench to safeguard the maximum press and possible effectiveness of the organization, it is quite natural that one should argue for such retrenchment with conviction. When other comrades disagree, and seek to hold the organization to a course which in the long run would be extremely harmful to it, the argument tends to become vigorous. A person of Shachtman's temperament should hardly object to the presentation of a view with "passion" by others.

In any event, the only argument we have heard from comrade Shachtman or any other opponent of this proposition against it has been based on a stubborn refusal to recognize the current financial condition of the organization, and an even more stubborn refusal to recognize the danger to our whole press of our present over-extension. At any rate, they have not sought to meet the arguments set forth above with ~~anything~~ anything but assertion that we can continue to carry our whole present publishing activity without endangering it all.

For obvious reasons, this article discusses the financial problem in general terms rather than in actual figures. The figures will be given the delegates at the convention. My purpose here is to alert the organization and its friends nationally to the kind of drastic decision this convention will be asked to take with regard to our press, and to prepare their thinking on the matter so that a fruitful discussion may take place at the convention.

Gordon Haskell