

THE NECROPHILIACS

By Richard DeHaan

The first question which an independent socialist should ask himself about the SWP-originated youth movement concerns his rôle vis-à-vis that party. It is unclear just what the purpose of the ideological confrontation currently being attempted is-- as it is unclear how the actual political development of the IBM movement should be related to that of the SWP, if any. The present discussion constitutes a mere extension of the internal party debate to a slightly larger arena, although there remain large segments of it open only to adepts of the faith. This being so, what are its objectives? Does the party wish tactical advice? In possession of the truth, it hardly requires it. Does it wish our opinion of itself? I should have thought that our opinion was already expressed in the fact that we are outside the party, viz., that it should drop dead. The first problem, then, is how independent socialists can intelligently engage in a dialogue, only half of which is visible to the naked eye.

The second problem has to do with the SWP's commission of the ancient dialectical fallacy of confusing genesis with evolution. It has succumbed to the charges of our enemies in believing, or pretending to believe, that, because the SWP was instrumental in initiating this movement, it is therefore similarly responsible for its development. I am told that there are areas of the country in which the IBM movement receives the unqualified backing of the SWP. Within my experience, however, the party's relation to the youth movement has ranged from toleration through rivalry to sabotage. In addition, the organizational incompetence of many of its self-styled "Bolsheviks" and leaders of the proletariat in our movement is so pathetic as to cause one to wonder whether they should be allowed to walk the streets unaccompanied.

The party has in general availed itself of one of two courses of action in its fractional work within the IBM movement. The first is a policy of picking off singly whatever individuals it can lay hands on, preferably rerouting their activities into party assignments, but if necessary allowing them to retain part-time commitments to the youth. During the early months of our movement, the party recruited, under this policy, a sizable number of our lukewarm youth contacts who to this day have difficulty in distinguishing between Trotskyism and a hole in the ground. Because there was a question as to whether this policy was doing more damage to the SWP than to the youth, it has recently turned to the second course. This policy is one of instructing such activists as it has allowed to remain in the youth movement to push the party line there for all it may be worth. It is expected that this policy will step by step move the youth movement en masse to the truth, there at last to find its home in the Una Sancta Ecclesia.

It is to this policy that I address myself in what follows. While party policy seems to be unified in this respect, the two areas of the periphery from which my information is drawn are those of the youth movement and the New York united ticket. It is especially in these two areas where a curious parallelism of party policy can be noted.

When faced with this line, as YSF readers have been unremittingly, one is first caused to wonder why a party of such theoretical poverty and galloping senescence makes bold to teach, rather than to learn. In YSF #3, for example, virtually every article is unstinting in the praise which the authors generously heap upon themselves as representatives of the true proletarian vanguard. Now, what is this policy of "revolutionary socialism" over which they are all so rapturous?

As expressed by one of its more moderate spokesmen, James P. Cannon, it is the regroupment of "the scattered socialist forces...together in one common party organization." But what was only implicit in Cannon's remarks, the notion that this

party should consist of the SWP and the remains of the CP (primarily the old PP and ALP), has now been made explicit in many statements and actions of the party leadership. The amorous inclinations harbored by the SWP-PC towards this corpse have been announced in a series of doctrinal retreats, by the formation of several intra-party oppositional groups, by the disaffection of many individual members, and above all by its tactics in the regroupment arena. While a catalogue of these internal difficulties would, I am sure, be most interesting, the most important effect of this policy, that which affects the youth movement most strongly, is the tactical one.

Again, a lengthy catalogue of the party's tactical retreats could be given, but a few examples must suffice. I have been serving on what is now known as the State Committee of the Independent-Socialist Party, the governing body of that party. In conjunction with several other members of the committee, I have been forced time and time again in the last several months to oppose the SWP's conciliation of the Stalinoids there. (As a result of this bloc against the SWP, George Stryker, an ex-SPer from Long Island who is also on the committee, has been recruited to the YSA, and numerous other supporters of an independent revolutionary socialist position have been organized.) While each of these issues has been a lesson in united front politics in itself, perhaps the most instructive was that of the candidates.

Originally, a candidate of the stature of Myra Weiss for one of the top offices was discussed by the SWP leadership as being appropriate for the party's representation on the ticket. The party eventually watered this down to the suggestion of an unknown SWPer for the most minor place on the ticket. Yet, when the time came to push for this minimal position, the party leadership simply folded up. It refused even to put the proposal in the form of a motion so that it could be voted. The leadership concedes that a majority of the State Committee would support such a candidacy. Nevertheless it refuses to push this, or any other independent candidacy, preferring instead a slate composed entirely of former ALP candidates.

After opposing this move in the State Committee, I went back to the YSA for a ratification of my position. The YSA endorsed unanimously the policy of tendency representation, and the following evening the YS Editorial Board did the same. The party still refused to budge. The most it could do in the interests of democracy was to issue dark warnings that I would likely find myself without support if I persisted in my deviationist tactics. Where it had previously said that a ticket without SWP representation would get only critical support from the party, it now gushed, in response to Worker attack, that its surrender simply proved how "pro-Soviet" it had been all the time. Every challenge to these conciliationist policies has been met with the traditional responses of demagogues everywhere: ominous remarks about upsetting the apple-cart, about the political life-expectancy of those unable to see "the big picture" (sic), and about the psychic quirks of those who foolishly insist on playing an independent rôle.

These tactics continue up to the present. Only last week neighborhood petition rallies were convened excluding SWPers and similar "anti-Soviet" types--this with the knowledge and consent of the SWP tops. The party has also announced its final surrender of those planks in its original Guardian ad calling for defense of civil liberties everywhere.

The tragedy of these tactics is that they are not even necessary to accomplish what it is that the party wants to accomplish. At the June 13-15 conference, it was voted by an overwhelming majority to repudiate further attempts by the Convening Committee (forerunner of the State Committee) to negotiate issues of substance with the CP. Nevertheless, the SWP tops fought a resolution introduced by Comrade Stryker, myself and several others, binding the Committee to this mandate. Similarly, the

old ALP rank and file have shown themselves far advanced over their self-styled leaders in their disinclination to get involved in a repetition of the ALP. Comrade Stryker and I have had comments from literally dozens of these people endorsing our policies in attempting to preserve this as a truly united and democratic party.

The irony of these tactics is that, far from appeasing these people, they even tend to exclude them. Former top ALP leaders have stayed out of this ticket because of its close identification with those who did the hatchet job for the CP on the old ALP. In addition, many independents, such as Dr. Otto Nathan and Conrad Lynn, have steered clear because of the Stalinoid atmosphere. This is not to mention the many left-wing social democrats, third campers, pacifists and other independent socialists who are being frozen out by the SWP's conciliationist policies. Above all, however, the lack of a clear position on civil liberties, the Soviet Union, etc., renders it extremely difficult to appeal to innocents becoming interested in socialism for the first time. This absolutely fundamental task of the movement is being short-changed in favor of pacifying a pitifully few Stalinoids. The ticket has been subjected to attacks by both capitalist and socialist press for its silence on these crucial issues--for example, Hungary--and has not had a word to say in its defense.

The SWP conceives its amours with the corpse of the CP to be still in the negotiation stage. It therefore refuses to let the "bloc" become a democratic organ, despite the demands of the rank and file. Consequently, when an independent majority could be got for decent actions, the SWP demurs for fear of driving out the Stalinoid minority. It systematically ignores the facts of recent political life: (1) that the CP can no longer control its periphery, as demonstrated in the Flynn-Dowley campaign and at the June conference, (2) that there is no real danger of a split anyway, since the minority swallowed a much more bitter pill at that conference, a repudiation by the vast majority, and still came back, (3) that there is not enough left to raid, and (4) that it is largely itself and the YSA which constitutes the backbone of the actual campaign work.

Because the SWP and the Stalinoids consider this party to be fundamentally a bloc between themselves rather than the establishment of a truly independent socialist party, they have restricted the policy machinery to themselves. Platform, candidacies, finances, etc., have all been decided by negotiation between the SWP and ALP tops, usually without the matter ever being submitted to the State Committee. Just this week, for example, the SWP united with the ALP to beat down a proposal to that committee by Comrade Stryker and myself that major policy statements and decisions be approved by it.

Now, this conciliationist line is being carried over fundamentally intact to the youth movement. All criticism of the line in the youth is countered by magisterial pronouncements that the ticket is of too great importance to be carping about. Here, too, a truly democratic structure has yet to be erected in place of the "bloc." Here, too, the conceit is harbored that a new movement can be built by reshuffling the remains of the SWP and CP--although in this case, they are the second-generation brats thereof in whom hope for the future of socialism is lodged. Here, too, a Stalinoid minority (but no other kind) can blackmail the majority. Here, too, the SWP majorityites line is negotiation with the corpse of the CP. That this line is being exported to the youth movement is evident from the policies which the SWP majorityites have been pushing for the forthcoming conference. Just as in the I-SP, while they do not particularly desire to exclude third camp and independent socialists, they are nevertheless ready to sacrifice them if that be required in order to get into bed with the LYlers. This is made clear above all by Comrade Lambrecht's line on the defense of the Soviet Union; an insistence that this one aspect of the total SWP position be singled out as a minimal condition of participation in the new national movement.

To exclude independent socialists from such a movement, to make the IBM movement an SWP tail, to follow the SWP in its disastrous course of organizational unity with the remains of the CP--this way lies madness and a repetition of the tragedies which have already reduced the movement to impotence. In a youth movement left free to criticize, in one dedicated wholeheartedly to the fight for socialism everywhere, in one uncompromised by suicidal liaisons with the discredited Fosterite hangers-on, in one oriented not towards negotiation but towards recruitment--here is the future of the socialist youth movement.

I have not meant to impugn, in what was said above, the sincerity and good will of the many individual SWP members who have supported the youth movement and the cause of independent socialism to the full extent of their abilities. Indeed, it is only the fact that so very many of them have forthrightly expressed themselves as opposed to the present policies of their leaders that gives me any hope for this alliance.

As SWP members, our SWP youth comrades are concerned with their party's fortunes. It so happens that the fortunes of the party at the present are tied, through the actions of its leaders, to the prospect of leading the Fosterite hangers-on into the paths of righteousness, i.e. of capturing them for the party. That is their business, and it may even be a legitimate project for them. But they can hardly expect others to share their pedagogical ambitions. What is illegitimate is the attempt to make the youth movement an offspring of this marriage of convenience. Independent socialists will fight that policy to its death.

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