

LABOR COMMITTEE UPHOLDS DEAL WITH SOCIALIST PARTY

At the 16 Feb. SDS Labor Committee meeting, I raised the question of Tony Papert's article in New America (22 Jan.). About 30 people, both members and supporters of the Labor Committee, were present. I presented the 3 motions which concluded my open letter of 13 Feb. and spoke quite briefly, repeating the arguments I made in my letter, adding that Papert's repeated ridiculing "the dictatorship of the proletariat" slogan hit not at PL but repudiated a fundamental of scientific Marxism; I added that we at least had no intention of belonging to a YPSL chapter. When I had finished my comments, 15-20 people indicated they wanted floor time to respond in discussion.

At this point, the railroading took over--an amazing performance for a group which habitually has 3-hour debates on trivia. The chairman, Paul Milkman, one of the few Labor Committee cadre who had had prior knowledge of the New America article before I circulated it, called on as the first commentator Bob Dillon, another leading member of the Committee. Dillon moved the discussion be closed (using the word "sectarian", a bete noire to the membership, several times in his comments to make the voting line clear to even the dullest member) and moved for an immediate vote on my motions. Attempts by Spartacist supporters and a few others to get the floor to protest were unavailing; the vote to cut off debate passed by about 2-to-1.

The vote on the motions themselves was equally revealing. Milkman, in high gear, told the members how to vote on motions 1 and 3 ("Anybody here doesn't want to vote against the right-wing enemies of SDS?"). Correctly singling out the second motion (to repudiate the New America article) as the key issue, he put this on the level of crude organizational loyalty--for or against Papert--and the vote predictably fell into line by overwhelming odds. As this closed any possible continuing relationship with the Committee, the Spartacist supporters left the meeting. As a peculiar footnote to a peculiar story, Wohlforth's Workers League (self-described as "revolutionary" and "Trotskyist" but unprincipled in practice) members and their supporters (including the notorious Harry Turner) abstained on the central vote. Undoubtedly they realized they did not dare support red-baiting SDS, but were unwilling to cut themselves off from the group on the basis of principles.

Faced with continual disappointments from the failures of their certain-to-succeed gimmicks and projects, Lynn Marcus' SDS Labor Committee has spiraled down into precisely the kind of "sect" they affect to despise. Just as their hostility to democratic centralism has led to an undemocratic clique-dominated group (precisely like national SDS), so their hostility to Leninism has made them into a tiny, cultish "anti-party party" (certainly not the first in history). The leadership has become more cynical and even more anti-Marxist; the turn to the virulently anti-communist Socialist Party is only a foretaste, but an accurate one, of their movement away from working-class politics.

Dave Cunningham
17 February 1969