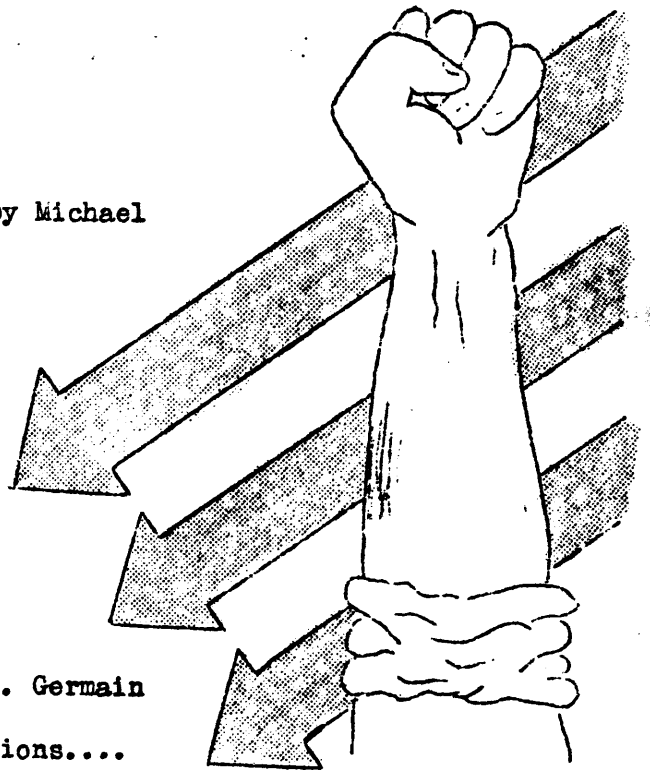


YOUNG SOCIALIST

REVIEW

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(1) New York (2) Chicago



vol 3, no 4

March 4
1957

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INFORMATION AND
DISCUSSION BULLETIN
OF

THE YOUNG SOCIALIST LEAGUE

What the YSR is

The Young Socialist Review is the information and discussion bulletin of the Young Socialist League. The YSR is prepared by the Chicago unit of the YSL.

The aim of the YSR is to constitute a forum for the expression of all points of view within the YSL. It is, therefore, completely open to any member who may wish to contribute his views -- and to any group of members. Contributions from non-members will be accepted, if of sufficiently high interest. (In the latter case the editor reserves the right to decide on inclusion of such articles.)

For obvious reasons it should be understood that articles signed by individuals do not represent necessarily the views of the YSL. Any material that is "official" will be clearly labelled as such.

It is the editor's intention, and that of the January 26-27, 1957 YSL National Executive Committee that YSR be published from now on at least once every other month. If necessary it will contain only a cover, a national report and unit reports. However, we assume that we will be able to put out not only a bi-monthly YSR, but on the contrary much more frequent issues. YSR will come out therefore whenever sufficient copy is available, but not less than bi-monthly. So, PLEASE SEND COPY AS SOON AS IT IS READY!

Copy should be sent to Debbie Meier, 1343 E. 50th Street, Chicago 15, Illinois. If at all possible, submit copy stencilled, single spaced. If this is not possible, then submit material typewritten, double spaced. Non-typewritten copy will not be accepted.

The circulation of YSR is not restricted to members of the YSL. Though issued primarily for members it is open to all friends and other interested individuals. Members should make every effort to get copies into the hands of this wider audience. Send in your bundle orders now.

This Issue

This issue follows up, in a sense, the previous special Plenum issue. Aside from several unit reports (unit organizers fell down on the job! where were the rest of the replies?) quite a number of articles are devoted to a discussion of the unity and regroupment question and dispute. I suspect a number of additional issues devoted primarily to this question will be forthcoming. In addition, however, there are several articles on other topics, and let's not forget about these in the coming months. In particular, in order that YSR can be useful to the units in their regular recruiting and educational activity we should have articles, outlines and bibliographies on basic socialist material. Units should assign members to submit such educational material to YSR.

The next issue will probably appear within about a month's time. So--send in material immediately! Within a few weeks I will be sending a report to all units and members as to the exact date of the next YSR.

--Debbie Meier, editor
Feb. 27, 1957

On the "Left-Wing" in the YSL

by Mike Harrington

With the formation of the "Left Wing Caucus", the YSL is confronted with an organized, sectarian tendency. But more than that, the politics of this grouping are not those of an ordinary, loyal faction: rather, they lead in the direction of a split toward the Cannonites.

So far, only a few comrades have been attracted to this newest manifestation of a phenomenon which has been persistent throughout the history of the YSL. Some of these have been attracted by a certain "radicalism," actually a sectarian attitude toward politics. That, however, is only the part of the ice-berg which is above water. For the two leading comrades of this caucus, both of them, have Cannonite politics, and their organizational orientation is also in the direction of the SWP. Thus we must deal with this caucus on several levels: first, in so far as it is openly sectarian, and this is at variance with our basic political conceptions; second, in that it represents the tendency toward a split and amalgamation with the Cannonites. In this brief discussion, these two themes will be treated in a summary fashion, and inter-twined. Clearly, much more discussion must deal in detail with considerations that are only mentioned in this article.

By sectarianism, we mean the rote repetition of "revolutionary" and "Marxistical" phrases, and the attempt to impose them upon reality. At the very bottom, the sectarian is more of a theologian than anything else. He has his dogmas, his purity of doctrine, and these are to be asserted without that confrontation of the actual reality in all of its complexity, which is the hallmark of the best in socialist, and particularly Marxist, thought. Now let us turn to this phenomenon as it manifests itself in the "Left-Wing Caucus."

The comrades of the "Left-Wing" Bulletin have offered us no analysis of American conditions and our relation to them. Instead, they put forth as their fundamental conception a schematic, inaccurate and dogmatic version of the law of combined and uneven development. From this general principle, they deduce historical development and tactics. As a result, there is no real room in their thinking for a transitional program, for orienting here and now, or in the foreseeable future, toward the American workingclass. There is only the doctrinally pure affirmation of "revolutionary socialism" as if we were living in October, 1917, in Russia.

To Comrade Shane in his article on the recent NEC meeting, the law of combined and uneven development means that the American workingclass will "skip" the stage of social democracy, or

of the labor party, and go from its present trade-union consciousness to a revolutionary consciousness with hardly a stop. This, of course, mis-states the law of combined and uneven development, which holds that under certain circumstances, given a certain relation of social forces and historical development, a particular kind of leap, whose nature develops out of the conditions which create it, will take place. Thus, in Russia in 1917: a decisive factor in the leap made by the October Revolution was the presence of a revolutionary party within the working class; another factor was the international situation; a third was the position of the peasantry; another was the social weight, under Russian conditions, of the workingclass, and so on.

But you will look in vain for an analysis of American conditions in comrade Shane's article. The only reference to reality in his discussion of his theory of stages is an assertion that the American workingclass is large, sluggish, not prone to action, and therefore will move swiftly once it takes the initiative. We have here a mechanical repetition of a point made by Trotsky in 1919 (cf. *The First Five Years*, vol 1, p 58) and that's about all. But nothing, nothing in the method of Marxism gives a warrant to Shane's conclusions. For example, shortly after Trotsky made the algebraic statement referred to, he examined America itself and came to the conclusion that the European Revolution would probably take place before the American (ibid., vol 2, p 316).

But this is not the place to argue the specifics of the theory. It is enough to point out that Shane's politics are based upon a conception of the American workingclass "skipping" a stage, and that the authority for this conclusion is a formula whose life has been ossified to a dogma. If Comrade Shane, and the "left-wing", seriously urge their interpretation of combined and uneven development as a tool for understanding America, let them develop it in relation to the American facts, by analysis, not by invoking the authority of abstractions. But these comrades are sectarians - and dogmas are more important than reality.

However, this dogmatic approach does not remain an academic question. For those comrades not only assert their "laws" and attempt to impose them upon reality, but they derive the tactics of the movement from them as well. Thus it is that they have no understanding of the transitional program.

For Shane, "To set this tremendous mass in motion (the American workingclass - mh), to produce such a revolutionary act as the break of the labor movement from socialist politics, requires the action of economic and social pressures of a tremendous force. (My emphasis)." In other words, until there is a "tremendous" break in American society, something which, presumably, will be on the order of the Thirties at a minimum, the labor movement remains tied to capitalist politics, there is little or nothing for the socialist movement to do except to keep its doctrine pure, its organization tight, and to wait. Then, according to this

view, there will come a moment of crisis which, by the automatic working of a "law" which Shane rests upon one reference to the American reality, there will be a leap forward: the workers will go from capitalist to revolutionary politics.

What is our view? First, that there is something that socialists can do today, that a cataclysm is not the precondition of movement on the part of the American workingclass. Who can predict the exact impact of the Civil Rights crisis on labor politics? Could such a crisis intensify in the coming years and precipitate strong tendencies toward political realignment in the absence of a Thirties-style depression? To answer these questions, to have a perspective of possible socialist action now, you do not go to a "law" which is handed from on high. You apply your theories, among them the law of combined and uneven development, to an analysis of the reality. You deal with the concrete situation.

In all of this, the question of perspective must be underscored. For Shane, there is no real possibility of meaningful socialist activity without a massive crisis of the system. For us, there are many possibilities, which must be concretely analyzed.

Secondly, how can Shane assume that a revolutionary development is guaranteed? The politics of independent socialism do not preclude the kind of process which Shane describes - that could come about due to the action of a whole host of circumstances and conditions. Our politics do reject the automatic schematism of Shane, the assumption that there is only one road of development, the consequent sectarian abstentionism, the waiting for cataclysm. Our politics would try to deal with new events within the framework of our analysis of the permanent war economy, an analysis of the American labor movement, etc. This Shane does not do, for his method is essentially and fundamentally sectarian, it is the deduction of reality from a "law."

But note the consequences in tactics which follow from all of this. We raise the demand for a labor party, that is the tactic which flows from our analysis, but not from that of the "left wing." We believe that in the specific and analyzed conditions of America today, that the next step for the American workingclass is a labor party, not a revolutionary party. And our politics are oriented accordingly. While maintaining ourselves as a tendency, we wish to adopt the tactics and organizational form best suited to bring us in contact with the workingclass and striving for a labor party.

Comrade Shane sees this orientation as "in complete contradiction to the expectation of a change which will violently alter the stage of consciousness" (Left Wing Bulletin, p 34, emphasis added). He is one hundred percent right. His politics, and those of the "left wing", follow from the expectation of a cataclysm and an immediate development of a revolutionary consciousness in the American workingclass. Our politics are more prosaic - and more real. In this America of 1957, cataclysm is not

around the corner, and if it were, it would not necessarily produce the kind of development of which Shane speaks. We are in a certain world context: a diminution of the cold war, a recession of the imminence of World War III; a permanent war economy; a political crisis developing around the Negro question; the possibility of substantial unemployment but not, in the immediate future, of a thorough-going internal crisis of the system. We can't afford to sit around and wait for cataclysm. There are too many possibilities.

Thus, we believe that transitional slogans are of the greatest importance today; thus we raise the demand for a labor party. As a sectarian, Comrade Shane clutches his abstract dogma about the violent alteration in consciousness and proposes to wait around in an organization with revolutionary purity.

But all of this is related to the question of unity. Given Shane's lack of a perspective for socialist activity short of a major crisis, he quite logically comes out for socialist regroupment on a "revolutionary" basis, i.e. some YSLers, the SWP, and those CPers who are neither Fosterite nor Gatesites, but revolutionary socialists. This, note, is quite consistent, for until the collapse of the system comes, Shane really doesn't have anything to offer other than the continuation of the sects. Our politics, on the other hand, are based on the conception that socialists can now turn toward the workingclass in a meaningful fashion, that certain opportunities are opening up for us. This is not to say that we anticipate a mass socialist party in the near future. It means that we project the necessity, and the possibility, of a break-out from our sectarian existence and toward the workers. It means that we do not exclude the possibility of political developments within the labor movement of a great significance, although the entire system doesn't come tumbling down. It is a question of perspective: the majority has one; comrades Shane and Tim, the "official" "left-wing" does not.

But more. This sectarianism is not simply that. For the leaders of the "left wing", for Tim and Shane, it is one further expression of their SWP politics. For comrade Tim has moved, and moved fast in a few months, and he is now in general political agreement with Shane. And take Shane's positions: the Cannonite position on Korea, Indochina, China, Russia, socialist regroupment, etc. In other words, these comrades are not simply turning toward an abstract sectarianism; they are turning toward the sectarianism of the SWP. Having characterized the organization as being composed of "Martinites", "centrists," and "revolutionaries", and then having come out for a "revolutionary regroupment", this can only mean a break in the YSL which, in their eyes, contains an unconscionable number of non-revolutionaries. The tendency of their politics is toward the creation of a new, sectarian youth movement.

We, on the other hand, are for developing the perspective which marked the creation of the YSL. At that time, we realized that we must build a broad youth organization, not officially

Marxist, open to Christian socialists, pacifists, etc., etc. We were for breaking out of a sectarian existence. We now propose to do this on a wider scale. And that is our orientation toward unity with the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation.

Comrades Shane and Tim, of course, do not share our orientation. Their politics would lead toward calling a mass labor party reformist: they are "revolutionary". But given our analysis of America, 1957, our conception of the social forces, our demand for a labor party as the next step, given all these, unity is clearly indicated. There are differences among the majority who voted for the unity perspective. These will be discussed, but they are not at issue here. The question is one of the perspective itself. Comrade Shane and comrade Tim don't have it, they are waiting for their cataclysm the rest of the organization, "left," "right" and "center," does, because the rest of the organization shares our basic independent socialist politics.

And that is what must be emphasized. "Social democracy," "reformism," etc., are not eternal phenomenon to be dealt with once and for all. The Marxist attitude toward Social Democracy is one thing in Petersburg in October 1917 and another in Berlin in 1932. To remind our sectarians of another formula: we define political reality in relation to the time, place and circumstance of the world around them. And today, here in America in 1957, unity would aid us greatly in working for our political demands of the here and now, of reaching the American workingclass with the slogan of a labor party. Since we have this slogan, and the analysis which goes with it, we are for unity; since Comrade Shane, and the "left-wing," do not, since they want to form a tight organization which will wait for the workers to leap, since they disdain laying out a perspective to reach the workers, even a few of them, they are against it.

In debating the question, let all of the comrades remember this: that whatever differences exist among those with a unity perspective, they have a perspective, one based on independent socialist politics; our sectarians of the "left" do not.

Take this point in the context of a recent event. The ISL pamphlet addressed to the Stalinists was quite successful; it reached them. And one central aspect of its success was that it was talking about America, that it offered the goal of a broad, socialist Party. But what would our sectarians have offered the CP? In this practical case, how would they have improved upon the ISL pamphlet? Would they have given the CPers their theory of the permanent revolution?

The above has been brief, and must be followed by discussion of the particulars. Yet it provides a basis for identification, and counterposing of two major tendencies within the YSL: the sectarians and the independent socialists.

The sectarians base themselves fundamentally on an inaccurate rendering of the theory of the permanent revolution which they ossify into dogma; from this "theory" they deduce the fact that the American workingclass cannot move forward without a fundamental crisis, and that when the crisis comes, they will automatically develop in a revolutionary direction.

The independent socialists base themselves on an analysis of America today. An essential part of that analysis involves the use of the law of combined and uneven development as a tool for the analysis of concrete events. From such an analysis, we see that the next step in America is a labor party.

Without a total crisis of the system, and a consequent, "automatic" revolutionary development of the masses, the sectarians have no perspective other than the maintenance of our current sectarian existence.

The independent socialists address the slogan of the labor party to the broad mass of the American workingclass, and the conception of a broad, socialist party to carry our agitation for a Labor Party among the advanced workers and socialist-minded individuals.

The sectarians are, on every practical point, for a narrow, tight SWP-oriented socialist regroupment.

The independent socialists seek to begin the arduous task of the reconstitution of the socialist movement through a broad party which will address itself to the workingclass.

The leading comrades of the sectarian tendency have Cannonite politics on almost every major political question.

The independent socialists maintain the politics of the independent socialist movement, that is, of the movement of which the YSL has been a part.

The sectarians define their attitude toward unity with the SP-SDF on the basis of schematic, un-Marxist statements about an abstract "social democracy" to which we are capitulating.

The independent socialists analyze the American social democracy in 1957 in relation to the America of 1957, and orient accordingly.

The sectarians are without perspective - except that of building a sectarian movement with the SWP; as a result, their politics lead toward a split.

The independent socialists offer a perspective to turn the American socialist movement, in a serious fashion, toward the American workingclass.

These are the issues. They require careful examination, and we hope that many comrades, particularly those outside of New York, will join in this work. The conflict is between a split-oriented sectarianism and an attempt to use the analytic tools of Marxism in that spirit of careful, concrete and scientific investigation which is the best heritage of the Marxian movement.

SOCIALIST UNITY AND THE BASIC QUESTIONS OF REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION

By Jim B.

Los Angeles, February 5, 1957

The discussion concerning the unification of the socialist movement now being conducted by all tendencies of that movement, including the YSL, heralds, I believe, the most fruitful opportunities for the development of American socialism that we have seen for many years. World-shattering events of the present period have now made it possible for us to project proposals for socialist unity that not too many months ago most of us (including the author) would have deemed utopian and fuzzy-headed. But as Marxists we realize that "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." We suddenly find our conditions of being so transformed by happenings of immense social import that our consciousness can entertain ideas that we would have scornfully rejected but a short time ago.

Although the prospects of the movement are brightening somewhat, the new reorientation towards unity is, like all important reorientations our movement has undergone, not without perils. And, as in our past experiences, these perils are manifested inside the movement by the twin scourges of opportunism and sectarianism. The potential for opportunist distortions of the unity prospect is only too obvious. I am not unaware of this danger and I combatted it as was manifested during the YSL's recent discussion of the electoral question - by supporting the move for a membership referendum and by endorsing Comrade Tussing's article on the question in which he points out some of the ways in which our unity perspective has been distorted in an opportunistic manner. (The YSL and the 1956 Election Campaign, YSR, Vol 3, No. 2)

Yes, unity is a dangerous business and I am the last one to deny it. But crossing a street is also a dangerous business, and, alas, so is just living. For as long as you stay alive there is always a danger that you might die, isn't there? But despite these facts, most people of my acquaintance have not yet begun to advocate the meeting of such dangers by not crossing streets, or mass suicide. In fact, even the sectarians that I know or have heard of haven't begun to advocate such things on a personal level, but on an organizational level - that's something different. For on the organizational level some seem to think that life is indeed too dangerous to endure. Their answer to the danger of opportunism is to transform our organization into a replica of certain other groupings which have at one time littered the field of socialist politics - groupings which were quite dead, although in some cases they stubbornly resisted a decent burial for a greater or lesser time.

I was delighted upon hearing of the amplification and development of the unity perspective expressed in the Fall issue of the New International (pp. 168-178) and Labor Action, issue of January 28, ("ISL Chairman Gives Plan for Socialist Regroupment.") The fuller development of the idea of socialist realignment given in these articles cuts off opportunist potentials which may have been present in the more undeveloped formulations of an earlier stage of the discussion. At the same time, the further elaboration which the unity program received cuts the ground out from under sectarian

attacks on that program. In short, I am most pleased to observe our attitude on unity achieve this greater clarity which renders it more consistent and more obviously defensible.

The further development and clarification of our unity perspective gave me grounds for hoping that those who had been opposing a program of socialist regroupment for the ISL-YSL would find at least some of their objectives answered by the new formulation and their views accordingly modified. But the latest document that I have had an opportunity to see from that tendency in the YSL which had been most violently opposed to the prospect of our unity with the SP (Tim Wohlforth, Unity for Unity, prepared for the YSL NEC Plenum of January 26-27) displays not the slightest sign of any change of attitude. Comrade Wohlforth seems as firmly committed as ever to saving the YSL from the dangers of life by getting it to lock itself firmly within a coffin of sectarianism. This document was apparently not published before Comrade Wohlforth became aware of the new and amplified unity program, but he appears unfazed. Indeed, the sole mention he makes of the new perspective is that, "We understand that the ISL wants to add a little spice to the brew in the form of Stalinoids who may still hold Russia to be a socialist state." It is difficult to decide which is the most striking aspect of this statement - the lack of serious response it shows to the ISL's line, or the amount of distortion which it inflicts on that line.

A large part of Comrade Wohlforth's document is taken up with various occasions of "boot-licking" by the leadership of the ISL and YSL in regard to the SP. I will not attempt any sort of detailed reply to these charges since, in some cases, I agree with the substance if not the form of Comrade Wohlforth's criticisms; in other cases I do not possess all the relevant facts; and in all cases (and I am astounded that Comrade Wohlforth does not recognize this) they are merely criticisms of method and not of policy. There is not one charge brought against the supporters of ISL-YSL-SP unity which, even if one-hundred per cent true, would necessarily lead one to reject the idea of such unity. Even accepting the accusations at face value it seems to me that the logical conclusion would be "they're doing it wrong," rather than rejection of unity. But before I proceed, it might be interesting to note that while Wohlforth boils with indignation at every incidence of "kid glove" handling of SP supporters, semi-supporters or quasi-supporters of Western imperialism in Algeria, Egypt or Guatemala, "kid gloves" are apparently not so odious to him when worn by a political co-thinker and applied to supporters and would-be supporters of Stalinist imperialism in Korea ("the struggle of the Korean people against U.S. imperialism and its agent Rhee",) or in China ("movement of hundreds of millions of millennially suppressed people which scourged imperialism and feudalism from the face of China," (Shane Mage, Socialist Policy and the 1956 Elections, YSR, Vol. 3, No. 2)

In referring to some of the political monstrosities which have served the SP as "positions" on various questions in recent years, Comrade Wohlforth gives the impression that he actually thinks of the SP as a party which has real politics and positions in the usual sense of the words. Now this may be a fine opinion to have about the SP, and it is contradicted only by the facts. But I think that any student of the matter would agree with Comrade Tussing's evaluation of the SP as a "politically amorphous," conglomeration, rather than a "party" as our movement understands that term. (Tussing, op. cit.)

While the New International and Labor Action articles to which I have referred do much to clarify our unity position and put it on a sound political basis, I believe that further clarification in one respect would be most helpful in the present discussion. That is the relation of our current unity perspective to the traditional views of our movement on Leninism, Bolshevism, and the whole question of the role of the party and of revolutionary organization. This would be most fruitful in the combatting of both opportunistic and sectarian reactions to our unity program. I do not intend here to undertake such an extensive study, but would like merely to set forth a few general views on the question.

Firstly, I think it is necessary to point out that no serious YSLer or ISLer can imagine that we are advocating a "unity" which would be a mere dissolution of all clarity and correctness of principle into an amorphous and "nondescript brew." Who maintains that revolutionaries should not preserve their cohesion and ideological clarity within the united movement and should not work diligently to advance their views within that movement? Of course it may be that there are some within the membership of the YSL or ISL who might succumb to reformist influences within a unified movement. That is regrettable, but what are we to do for these unfortunate creatures? We can't forever hide them, safe from harm, behind a hermetically sealed wall of sectarianism. In fact, if we do have some people who are so spineless and lacking in political intelligence, why should we be so anxious to keep them? Also, it is odd that the anti-unityites always seem to dwell on the idea that some members of revolutionary groupings will be won over to reformism in a united movement. You never hear about the possibility that by chance, perhaps, maybe, our politics may have just enough logic and value that there might be some reformists around in that united party who would be won over to revolutionary socialism. Of course, within the unified party, and in regard to those whom we now see as our future comrades within such a movement, we may not be sufficiently virulent in our criticisms to please those who look for "kid gloves" or "boot-licking" in every untwisted dagger and ever wound unrubbed with salt. Is it really so unprincipled and capitulatory to modify your methods of criticism (I say methods, not principles) in accord with your organizational outlook vis a vis the one being criticised? Do you accuse Lenin of "boot-licking" when, during his struggle with the Machists (whom he regarded as capitulators to idealism and "much less dangerous to democracy" than a "Catholic priest who violates young girls,") when he wrote to his sister, "I am agreed to the tone of my remarks being softened as far as Bazariv and Bogdanov (who just happened to be Bolshevik "Machists," --JB) are concerned. As to Yushkevich and Valentinov, (who happened to be Mensheviks, --JB) it is not worth altering what I have said...." (See Bertram Wolfe, Three Who Made a Revolution, pp. 508-09) And what are we to say when, a short time later, and with different organizational perspectives, Lenin wrote, "Please do not tone down the passages against Bogdanov... Our relations ...are completely ruptured. It is not worth while to modify the passages..." Of course Philistines accuse Lenin of being a Machiavellian and an unprincipled maneuverer, but what is unprincipled about talking, when you want unity, like you do! So when our perspective towards an organization is unity and not its destruction, we talk like it. I am sorry if it is such a unprincipled thing to occasionally allow one's thoughts to be expressed by one's manner of speaking.

Secondly, I am convinced that our present attitude in no way represents necessarily a rejection of the body of organizational views commonly referred to as "Leninism" or "Bolshevism," the cries of sectarian pseudo-Bolsheviks notwithstanding. The outstanding virtue of Lenin's organizational views was that they admirably corresponded to concrete conditions. Insofar as these conditions are reproduced in other times and places, we have many invaluable

lessons to learn from Lenin and his Party. These lessons are part of the heritage of revolutionary socialism and no revolutionary need have cause to abjure them now. But, on the other hand, to insist that a centralized and ideologically homogeneous party is a necessity or a desirability, always and everywhere, is the most un-Leninist and un-Marxist absurdity which I can think of. I doubt that even sectarians would openly hold to such an absurdity these days, but listening to them one cannot help but get the sneaking suspicion that it is floating around in the backs of their minds. The prospect of a broad "Debs type" socialist movement is not a rejection of Leninism, it is not a rejection of any revolutionary principle, it is the application of these principles to the concrete conditions of 1957 America. Comrade Wohlforth declares that "the days of the broad 'Debsian' movement are past." Well, it's a good to see it recognized that organizational forms bear some relations to concrete times and conditions of the times. But why is a "broad 'Debsian' movement" unsuited to the conditions of today? Why is it instead as Wohlforth insists, "that program is basic and programmatic agreement is necessary?" No serious or developed answers are to be found. The program of unity should not be seen as, and all our comrades should see that it not become, any sort of capitulation to reformism. Unity is not the road of opportunism, it is the road to a revitalized socialist movement. It is the policy for revolutionaries suited to the concrete necessities of the present period. In this sense, and in the best sense of the term, the program of unity is the Leninism of today.

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OUTLINE STATEMENT ON REGROUPMENT

by Charles Walker, Berkeley.

- 1) We are for an all-socialist regroupment of all people who are against capitalism and totalitarianism. It is all right for elements to believe that Russia or the satellites are "socialist" if they will support liberation struggles within the satellites or among the Russian people.
- 2) To us, this includes large section of the American CP - the Gatesites and possibly dissident Fosterites, Cannonites, Cochranites, Sweezyites, Dissentites, Bartellites, Liberation magazine supporters, etc.
- 3) We believe that unity drives exist in all tendencies and that all socialist regroupment must be pursued with all our energies until it is either consummated, or it fails.
- 4) Therefore, we oppose any and all attempts at bilateral unity between groups.
- 5) We stress the importance of democratic socialism and the Third Camp in this regroupment. The working class must create socialism. These are the points we push in the unity discussion.
- 6) We oppose any attitudes that seek to hold apart an all inclusive socialist regroupment. We believe that the political world is in transition, and that this transition will be fairly rapid, including in the minds of participants thereof. The political situation is driving people towards the Third Camp and democratic socialism.
- 7) Reform or revolution is ~~not~~ the immediate question, and it can't be solved now. Eventually, if the united movement has any success, this problem must be faced. If it is pursued today we will drive people to retain artificially their present politics (or lack of politics) and make it impossible for them to come to the correct position tomorrow.

February 24, 1957

ON UNITY, by Debbie Meier

The question of unity and regroupment has raised much hullabaloo in radical circles in general and in the YSL in particular. Most YSL members seem enthusiastically in favor of attempting some sort of socialist reunification and are agreed that the Socialist Party can play a key role in this development. There seems little doubt that at the moment the NEC resolution, which is now the policy of the YSL, is acceptable to most of the membership. However a number of side issues have been raised and much confusion exists about what such an orientation involves. A so-called "left-wing caucus" has even been formed--ostensibly over this issue, although as I shall point out later it's politics are really based on a disagreement with the past politics of the YSL (and of the ISL-SP since its inception). This article is an attempt to open the question to a more fruitful discussion among ourselves as to exactly what we are after and what the basis for our present position is. While I shall refer to some of the amazing articles in the new "Left-Wing Bulletin", I unfortunately just received it and have not at time to completely digest it yet--if it is digestible!

I. WHAT IS THE PRESENT SP-SDF.*

The nature of the SP--a detailed analysis that is--is really not of prime importance since it is not the present SP (plus the present ISL, and YSL) which we are concerned with--but rather the expectation that such a unity around the SP could be the basis for an invigorated, greatly enlarged socialist organization. However it would be a good thing to examine what the SP is today and what the implications of its nature are.

Organizationally it is weak, and like all the other socialist sects relatively lifeless and isolated. In the youth field it is practically non-existent. Ideologically and organizationally it has the additional fault of also being sectarian. In its political outlook it is predominantly social democratic. (One would have a hard time defining it programmatically, because (1) it is hard to find out what its program is and (2) its program is a hodge-podge.) It generally orients however toward reforming, rather than basically altering the capitalist structure--it lacks confidence in the ability of a revolutionary working class to participate actively in changing society; it has an elitest conception of both social change and socialism; etc, etc. This type of confused, vacillating and fundamentally nonrevolutionary approach and the related lack of understanding of the dynamics of social change and the class struggle lead the SP, like other social democratic organizations, into both foolish and disasterous paths. (What in times of social quietude are "foolish" paths may become disasterous in times of crisis.) To repeat, the SP has a predominantly social democratic outlook today. In terms even of its past politics the SP does not stand up well today. Despite Shane's accusation that they have been "pro-capitalist," "pro-imperialist" and "anti-socialist" since 1914, the SP in fact was at one time a far moreradical organization. (Debs, the self-proclaimed Bolshevik was even at one time its leader.) In the past 20 years or so it has moved step by step to the right, reflecting the general rightward drift of American politics and the paralysis which has gripped world social democracy in dealing with the rise of world Stalinism. The SP's position on the cold war has been akin to that of the average liberal--support of the western imperialist bloc (albeit critical)

*Hereafter the SP-SDF shall be referred to as the SP--in keeping with the fact that SPers refer to it in that manner, that in a year it will officially be called that again in all likelihood and because it's briefer --and not for any other deep machiavellian purpose as my "left wing" friends like to think.

as the only means of defeating Stalinism. (Although, like some of the European socialist movements, they point to socialism also as the eventual solution.) While the SP, like many left-wing liberals and laborites, advocate more economic aid to the underdeveloped countries, for example, they are unable or unwilling to understand that such aid from a capitalist America cannot be the harbinger of a democratic foreign policy. While they give lip service to the impact of the revolutionary upsurge in the underdeveloped parts of the world and amidst the colonial peoples, they have yet to grasp the real meaning of this for socialist policy. The SP at its convention in June 1956 passed what was a good third camp type of resolution. Yet few at the Convention appeared to understand what they were voting for and it has since been buried, never reaching the pages of the CALL or Party policy statements. The present merger between the SP and SDF (incidentally the SDF is not the publisher of the New Leader for those who've been laboring under this misconception) is even franker in disavowing any mildly 3rd camp approach to world politics.

On the domestic front the SP has sadly neglected the importance of the current struggles of the Negro people (in fact they spent more time on flouridation of the water, highway problems and educational t.v. than civil rights, the latter receiving a very dry and standard applause for the Supreme Court decision). On civil rights it has failed to be in the forefront of the struggle to maintain democratic rights over the past period. In the arena of academic freedom, for example, some of its leaders have defended the witchhunt against the CP and its conventions have skirted the issue entirely. While the SP is a strong supporter of organized labor, its approach has been directed entirely toward the present labor leadership. While revolutionary socialists also recognize the necessity of winning over sections of such leadership, we are oriented toward the rank-and-file and consider the development of a new leadership and of rank-and-file protest and pressure our major trade union task. The SP's electoral action approach also suffers from sectarianism (in fact this latter is more frequent than is its counterpart, the opportunistic pro-Democratic Party element). For example, while it officially favors a Labor Party, at campaign times it generally relegates this to the background and stresses the mere accretion of numbers and voters to the SP and the SP's influence in "important circles" as the means of achieving socialism.

In internal life the SP is, partially by design but primarily due to lack of understanding of democratic processes and its weakness and inefficiency, undemocratic in many important ways. To take a recent example, at the June 1956 SP convention not only did the membership have no opportunity prior to the session to see the resolutions but at the convention itself several important resolutions were never distributed to the delegates but simply read aloud to the body! Such an organization of internal discussion makes virtually impossible any meaningful revision or amendment of basic and important Party policy. More serious even is the frequent tendency of the SP national leadership to ignore the Convention resolutions and their implications altogether.

These are a few minimum criticisms which can be made of the SP today. However there are also positive things to be said. To begin with there does exist within the Socialist Party a sizeable left-wing tendency whose politics are similar to those of the YSL.* Secondly one must note also the existence

* Shane comments in a recent article, that he would be glad to welcome them into the YSL despite "important differences" with them. While Shane is a Leninist, Marxist and Trotskyite--and true-blue in each case--may I point out that on the basis of the YSL's politics, membership and origins not only would we welcome them but we DO NOT HAVE ANY IMPORTANT OR UNIMPORTANT DIFFERENCES WITH THEM. However Shane, like others in his caucus seem complete unaware of what organization they have been in during the last umpteen years! We do not urge them to leave the SP today because we want them to work for unity within the SP.

of many centrists, i.e. confused and vacillating elements, and some who have as yet gone no further in their political development than to be for "socialism"

Also, while the SP is organizationally undemocratic in comparison with the YSL, in terms of the average American organization, the best American trade union or the best European social democratic party, the SP is as good if not better than most. And many of its undemocratic features, like many of those within the YSL or any of the current American sects, stem primarily from apathy, inefficiency and lack of personnel and resources. The SP after all has an internal discussion bulletin, its press is open to the views of the minority, local bodies can and do publish leaflets and documents under their own names which disagree with national policy, tendencies have the right to exist and publish their views, debates do openly occur on the floor of conventions, the highest interim body does contain members of the minority viewpoint (although not proportional to their strength), etc. Its inadequacies, bureaucratic suppressions, lack of a fully democratic structure for inter-party discussion--these are all unfortunate commonplaces of both bourgeois and socialist organizational life. In a unified Socialist Party they would be the first thing which would need revisions and correction.

Even its political position, which we so correctly condemn, is no worse than the entire European socialist movement from its best (Britain and Germany) to its worst (France--if one can still classify the French SP as socialist--and Italy).^{*} This is not an excuse, but it should put the question in a perspective of the real world. (After all, there are very few individuals, not to mention organized groups in this world who would meet our criteria for revolutionary 3rd campers!) The SP stands, both in the world scene and especially in the U.S. on the EXTREME LEFT! Mollet in France is playing the role of a "socialist cover" for reactionary politics; he can be referred to as an "agent" of imperialism, etc. The American SP cannot. For (1) Mollet's politics and Program are that of the French right wing in terms of the crucial issues facing French internal political life and (2) only a so-called socialist could carry them out, i.e. he trades on his socialist reputation and on the votes of his party to carry out capitalist and imperialist politics. And when one is dealing with a class-conscious workingclass it means something to "trade on" one's socialist reputation. But to even speak of a socialist in America in 1957 giving the State Department or the organized labor movement a socialist "cover" is to be living on Mars. The American labor movement and the U.S. State Department are not looking for, and in fact DO NOT WANT a "socialist cover." For the American workers are not only non-socialist but anti-socialist. The American SP therefore cannot be spoken of as having "compromised" itself in the "eyes of the workingclass" for failing to live up to revolutionary ideals--this type of phraseology only has meaning in a country in which there exists a socialist-conscious workingclass. The SP is, to state a bald fact, highly critical of the present politics of U.S. labor and the U.S. State Department. Only highly critical!!! Yes, that's

^{*}I assume, by the way, that Shane-Tim, et al classify the British Labor Party as "anti-socialist," "pro-capitalist" and "pro-imperialist." For if the American SP is, then the BLP is 100 times more so since the British working class is more class conscious than the American and because the BLP's politics are in fact more conservative than the SPs. I will be attacked for this point on the grounds that these latter organizations are mass parties of the workingclass, etc, etc. However that is not what is being discussed here. Rather I am discussing the characterization made of the SP's political program.

all. But that's all the British Labor Party is also! (The BLP, including its Bevanite wing, is also for some sort of "international", U.N. supervised solution to the Suez crisis, etc.) While it's not saying a lot to contend that the American SP is not much better programmatically than the British Labor Party, it is saying something--when put against the background of the general conservatism and complacency of the American labor movement and the overall reaction of the country as a whole.

In other words, let's stop beating a dead horse! We are not dealing with a revolutionary socialist party--we all know it, we admit it, we give in--it's true! But we are not dealing with "social fascists" (I suspect that some of the members of the "left wing caucus" have something of that sort in mind), or "betrayers of the working class," or "objective anti-socialists" or "agents of Wall Street," etc. **NOR ARE WE DEALING WITH A REVOLUTIONARY OR RADICAL OR SOCIALIST-CONSCIOUS AMERICAN WORKING CLASS.** The SP today stands far to the left of the Reutherite type labor leadership and even farther to the left of the rank and file on EVERY QUESTION CONCEIVABLE.* The SP today stands far to the left--and that is why it too is a sect. The American labor leaders and their liberal allies are the ones who today play the role of social democracy (see the 1949 ISL resolution published in New International, April 1949, p. 119) and the SP plays the role of left-wing critic of liberalism, or left-wing critic of social democracy if you will, although they play this role with a confused, inconsistent and frequently ineffectual viewpoint and ideology. This is a pity. But the pity is not primarily the SP but the level of the class struggle and class consciousness in America.

II. WHAT KIND OF UNITED PARTY DO WE SEEK?

No, the present SP is not an organization worthy of attracting vigorous and alive young socialists. As long as there exists no chance of developing a new type of organization than the SP has nothing to offer a revolutionary socialist. It offers less than we do educationally and politically and not much more (and in the youth field less) organizationally. But we are entering upon a new period when slowly, not dramatically, there appears to be more and more breathing space for socialists. There exists a chance to rebuild the socialist movement. It lays shattered and practically nonexistent today; a new start must be made. The reasons for this are enumerated in the unity resolution--the CP crisis and decline in America, the crisis of world stalinism, its impact on social democracy and world labor, the lessening of the war hysteria**, the existence of a united and frustrated labor movement, the heroic

* There are a certain number of "left-wingers" who look aghast whenever one suggests that the trade-union rank and file are not more politically advanced than their leadership. Their glorification of the workingclass goes to all different kinds of extremes and reflects itself in many ways--e.g. Tim's reference to the fact that a certain individual he quotes is a "working class comrade" thereby increasing his political perspecacity I assume. Actually it is our trade union members who are most aware of the importance of unity precisely because they are best aware of the inadequacies and backwardness of the workingclass at present.

**Shane denies the existence of this fact and points to the Suez, et al as proof of the contrary, however there is simply no doubt that there exists far less fear today and far less expectation on the part of most Americans of a third world war.

Negro struggle, etc. In this framework we do not think we can afford to stand aside and say, "well nothing essentially new." The Hungarian revolution itself, the most epochal event since the Russian revolution should make such an approach inconceivable. Regroupment, reunification, unity are being talked about everywhere because the situation has arisen where its desirability is incontestable. Everyone seeks a way to approach it.

Various groups propose various criteria for unification. Some, while ignoring altogether the actual question of criteria, look for the formation of a generally Stalinoidal formation based on the Cochranites, Sweezyites, National Guardian followers and dissident Communists. Whatever the merits of such a formation might be, its possible future as a workingclass tendency would be immediately foreclosed. On such a basis it would be predominantly pro-Stalinist, or at best fuzzy on all questions relating to Russia or the Stalinist empire.* Others ask for unity on the basis, essentially of their own political programs. They may simplify their programs, strip it of its inessential details—but in essence they ask for a unity of those who genuinely agree with what they think are the essential elements of a correct socialist program. They use the words "minimum" and "genuine socialism" but they are calling for "unity" of those who essentially agree with them. In essence this is a propaganda gesture to appease the unity demand, a sort glamorized membership drive.

The present criteria for regroupment mentioned in the "Left Wing Bulletin" is a case in point. It is patterned after a series of criteria used by

- * For a moment I should like to deal with a question frequently raised at this point, and which should be dealt with in more detail by others. After all, it is said, why is it better to have a unity which is fuzzy on American imperialism and capitalism than one which is fuzzy on stalinism. In abstract both are equally bad, fallacious, etc. However if unity on a broader, less homogenous basis has any merit it is because it can serve as a bridge to the working-class and to other alienated individuals, and an organization fuzzy on Russia cannot serve such a purpose any longer and therefore such a tactic would be utterly pointless. Sharp disagreement with capitalist politics is a huge step left for the American labor movement, it immediately separates it from all other segments in the population. This general approach, of demanding above all else a clear-cut anti-Stalinist approach, has no kinship with chauvinism or pro-Westernism. In an historic period where two social systems contend for power such an approach is necessary, not only for workingclass tendencies within the capitalist orbit but equally so for those within the Stalinist orbit. An anti-CP, anti-government group in the Stalinist world, for example, might have a million and one fuzzy ideas about Stalinism, might capitulate here or there, might be very unclear as to the nature of its own social system. However it would be absolutely essential that it be unequivocally anti-capitalist because otherwise it would too easily be open to the charge of being simply the agents of a foreign power, restorationist, etc, and correctly so. The same holds true in the U.S. In both countries what is needed is a group which breaks itself off from the major ideology and separates itself organizationally from its strangehold, but which does so in the name of a new social system, of socialism not in the name of a new exploiting society. And the latter question is absolutely crucial to its success, its perspectives, etc. And it is the first question socialists ask when they read about or hear about an anti-Stalinist grouping in Stalinland, and is legitimately the first question an Hungarian worker should ask about an anti-capitalist grouping in the U.S.

Comrade Shane in his minority resolution on unity presented to the January Plenum. Shane's 4 criteria at that time were the major points of the YSL's excellent program with the exception of the one point upon which Shane disagrees with the YSL, or in other words the YSL program as Shane would like to have it revised! Now Shane and his fellow "caucus" members have simplified the criteria--"we are willing to unite with all socialist-minded youth on the basis of the minimum program of genuine socialism: independent political action of the working class and the oppressed peoples here and everywhere throughout the world, against both Stalinist and capitalist oppressors." As a plain old statement of unity it's not a bad rewording of the YSL position in a very snappy and militant formulation. It either means something, however, in which case it excludes everyone but the YSLers and those who should join us today as we are, or it includes everyone, particularly social democrats (who else for example would accept the world stalinist?). The problem with social democrats is not that they wouldn't be happy to sign such a statement but that they think that one is still aiding the oppressed when one gives critical support to Western imperialism, etc.

But for those who want a genuine proposal to unify with other groups who do not agree with us than more is needed. In fact the unity we want is closer in type to that being discussed in the Stalinoidal circles today than that discussed by Shane and co. (Shane and co. stand, firmly alongside the SWP and such, alone in the radical world for unifying only with themselves.) We want an organization which stands only in general for socialism--which asks no prior commitment to revolutionary socialism. This means a return to a "Debsian" type of Socialist Party. Such an organization must have appeal both to organized socialists, to disorganized and unorganized socialists, and to people who can and do exist in the peripheries of the present sects. And at the same time it must keep itself open to future growth by not cutting itself off from expansion into the ranks of the working class as its concern and interest in social change reawakens. (That means it can't be dominated with the taint of Stalinism and it should be broad and loose.)

The Socialist Party we envision would be several times larger than the combined organizations immediately. Overnight (if Chicago is typical) it would attract a host of people in the YSL, ISL and SP peripheries--trade union contacts, discouraged ex's who never quit or broke but drifted away out of boredom and weariness with the same faces, lectures and inactivity, long-time sympathizers and short-time sympathizers who for a variety of reasons could not personally face becoming involved in a primarily ideologically-oriented propaganda league. Aside from these, within a short time such an SP would attract numerous individuals and groups who have oriented in the past around the CP and who have or are now in the process of breaking from their pro-Stalinist approach. And finally there is the unestimatable attraction which this NEW organization would have to all those who began to look toward radical politics--who no longer turn to the CP, who do not want a not-so-reformed CP-type group, who are not yet ready to commit themselves to revolutionary 3rd camp politics and who are now faced with an alive, vigorous Socialist Party with an articulate left wing, with good educational literature from various tendencies, and at worst a more vigorous social democratic political program and leadership. Here they will find a center, where their own development can take place and where, at the same time, they can engage in activities on the American scene with the united support of all the tendencies (on the Negro struggle, on Labor Party propaganda in the unions, on support to striking workers, on protesting anti-civil libertarian laws, in campus activities for student rights, in opposition to UMT-type measures, in protesting a variety of local injustices and inequalities, etc.) In their branches there will be theoretical discussions and

educational alongside of concrete activities far more effective and therefore more effective than any can engage in today. There will be discussion bulletins. The Party press will contain occasional articles by members of the various organizations; there may well exist one or more independent socialist magazines of a non-Party nature. At conventions, as throughout the year, when current issues arise on which the Party or branch should take a stand, we, along with those who agree with us, would put forth a consistently democratic, militant and revolutionary position--on Suez, Hungary, NATO, Guatamalan-type crises, electoral action, etc. We would try and convince a majority of the organization to adopt this or that plank or statement. If we lost, we would still have had an educational effect. To be discouraged over defeat would be ludicrous. If the socialist movement grows in this country it will not accrue members only to its revolutionary wing, no matter how active, intelligent and perspicacious we might be. The right wing will grow equally fast, and in fact faster in all probability! And all but sectarians should applaud this, (unless they look upon right wing socialists as more reactionary than nonsocialists). The organization we hope to aid in creating would avoid resolutions or official documents on theoretical questions--relating either to the nature of the Russian state or for that matter the capitalist state. Of course, every writer and every speaker (and that goes for us too) would start with his own assumptions and would express his own viewpoint and in that sense the day to day politics would reflect the sentiments of the members on these issues--on Marxism, pacifism, nasty Bolshevism, etc. But all will be equally free to use whatever theoretical bases they wish. This type of Socialist Party CAN grow today; it can attract; it can become more involved in American life and reach the more articulate and sensitive individuals and groups who have been alienated from capitalist society and yet are also alienated (no matter how wrongly) from what they feel to be the futility of the ideological-educational sect, or from their own inability to fit into such a necessarily highly committed framework.

Yes, the unity we seek is to the right of us. Any other approach is based on some strange reconstruction of the American political scene. As I read some of the articles in the "Left Wing Bulletin" for example I get a feeling as though the authors see an America looking somewhat like this:

LEFT WING
("revolutionaries"--i.e.
"left wing caucus of the
YSL" and other like-minded,
maybe the SWP??)

CENTER
(left-wing of SP,
majority of YSL)

RIGHT WING
(Dulles, Thomas,
Reutherites, SP-SDF,
"Martinites," and
Shachtmanites)

The working class? Where do they fit in? (not to mention the rest of the American population) The more incredible place them on the left, wiggling to pry loose from the bureaucratic suppression of Reuther and Shachtman; the more sane just ignore them altogether. But all chorus: "unity to the left" and assume that that sounds radical and therefore good. But unity to the left of whom or what? To the left of the YSL? (In actuality a careful reading makes clear that they do mean, precisely, to the "left"--or what they think of as left--of the YSL, i.e. to the SWP and revolutionary vanguard parties, etc., etc.) The YSL majority however want a unity to the left of the working class and to the right of the YSL. A unity in which we will be a tendency representing revolutionary socialist politics. That means, I repeat, a unity to the right of the YSL, anything else would be utterly ridiculous. And, remember, when you move to the right tactically that doesn't mean "capitulation." (See Jim B's excellent article.)

Does it mean we have "changed?" In some senses of course we have, we continually reevaluate our various political traditions and positions and over the years we have changed our minds on a number of things. However the major change which lies behind this "tactical" move to the right is our analysis of what the coming period will be like and what type of organization is best suited to meet the needs of this coming period.

III. The BASIS FOR THE ABOVE TYPE OF ORIENTATION.

Does this new orientation towards a broad heterogeneous, loose organization mean that our present status is futile or that it has been a mistake? No. In the past such a unity would have been both impossible and probably disastrous. If we have misjudged the coming period it could well turn out that we are mistaken to shift our emphasis today. Some in the YSL argue this problem (none of these however are found within the "left wing caucus") and different estimates of exactly how much or little emphasis should be given to unity exist within the organization based on different analyses of the coming period. Where isolation is forced upon socialist sects their isolation from each other is often essential to prevent constant infighting and to permit the expression and propagandizing of their individual viewpoints to as wide a circle as possible. (That is the reason for socialist sects remaining homogeneous--not in order to maintain their purity as revolutionary vanguard parties, for we haven't had and couldn't have had one of these latter types around for quite a number of years.) When the isolation begins to "melt" one is obliged to take some risks to diminish "sectness." If our present gamble does not succeed, if unity is not accomplished no matter how much we desire it and work for it, it will be a disappointment and it will mean some wasted energy, but it will not be a total loss. We are organized today not merely for self-pleasure, not merely to clarify our pristine-pure ideas, but also to effect, to move others and to find a way of educating as many as possible towards an understanding of revolutionary politics.

Throughout all the discussion several questions are constantly raised, but rarely met squarely. Fortunately the latest efforts by the anti-unity caucus in the YSL have made crystal clear some of these questions, and finally lay bare the basis of their approach. For while they clamor that our present position is a capitulation they are in fact merely repeating the phrases, word for word, and the attacks that the SWP made 15 years ago and with exactly the same validity then as now. For the minority tendency is basing itself upon politics the YSL NEVER HELD, and incidentally politics the ISL-WP broke from many many years ago. It is not the unity section of the majority NEC resolution which they are attacking, but the "preamble" to it which dealt with the sect nature of all socialist organizations in America today, the inability of any to "lead" the working class, the need for a labor party and the nature of its formation and its political origins.

These are the real controversies; all those who read Shane's political articles (and those who don't also) would do well to reread some of the polemics of 15-20 years ago. Because while I shall deal with these questions briefly here I do not plan to give them the full treatment they "deserve."

Our task today, states Shane, is the building of a vanguard party (Frank McGowan of New York is even more explicit on this question). Martin is taken to task for not dealing with the when and where and how of the revolutionary vanguard party in the unity resolution. The proposed unity however does not mean giving up the immediate perspective of a vanguard party--that was

given up eons ago. Unlike Shane the YSL has always held that one cannot build a party today which can develop the structure, ideology and leadership personnel which can patiently wait until "the revolutionary crisis" appears and then step in and lead the workingclass away from the swamp of social democracy. Shane's article in the Left Wing Bulletin (see particularly p. 34 on "stages") is almost an exact duplication of a 1935 editorial in New International; interestingly enough however the 1935 article was an attack on the concept of a labor party as a necessary step in American development (the Trotskyist movement didn't advocate a labor party til 1938). For those interested in understanding the transition of this position another article will be needed. Historical circumstances and experiences have only further deepened our emphasis on a labor party since 1938 (by a labor party one obviously means a nonrevolutionary, nonmarxian and nonsocialist party). Soon after developing the labor party position, the WP-ISL tendency also underwent a gradual change in its concept of the vanguard party. Shane is correct when he says that Martin and the YSL majority put the question off til the indefinite future. However he is wrong when he implies that Martin did this quietly and underhandedly. It was done by the ISL quite openly, and the YSL has never held any other position on the question.

Why this change in our orientation towards the possibility of building today a vanguard-type party? To mention the least important first, we found that it was simply impossible to maintain a "revolutionary vanguard party" without hopelessly losing touch with the realities of American politics. But this "fact of life" has its roots, and they lay in our analysis of the role of the American trade union movement that emerged out of the late '30's and which waxed fat and conservative during the war years, the impact of the cold war upon the American economy and on the socialist and working class movements, the rise and successes of Stalinism, and the role of the permanent war economy in shoring up American capitalism. These are just a few of the "facts" of the post-war world which necessitated a revision in our approach to the road to socialism in America. Quite frankly any cursory glance at socialist literature of the pre-war and war-time period indicates that we were not prepared for these developments and therefore developed or maintained perspectives which soon became outmoded. Some have adjusted to these not entirely expected or welcome facts, some have remained blind and stubborn.

The position of the WP-ISL and of the SYL, YPSL and YSL on the road to socialism and the more immediate road toward a labor party are no secret from any member of the YSL. A labor party will occur, we have reiterated time and again, on the basis, in all likelihood, of an increasing antagonism between labor and its bourgeois "allies." Its actual founding will be undertaken "either upon the initiative or the leadership, that is, the control, of the labor leadership." (This quote is from the July-August NI reprint of (1951) an ISL resolution.) The YSL in various of its documents has pointed to the British Labor Party as the probable pattern of development in America, except that the U.S. Labor Party might well be less militant and socialist in its origins. We have stated time and again that we do not expect such a party to be socialist. However, its independence from the capitalist class, and its basis as a class party will force it eventually into socialist political action and understanding in order to defend its interests. The first face of such a movement will not be social democratic in the classic sense, but pure and simple capitalist reformism. Such ideological trappings will be a hindrance to this party and it is for that reason that it will be forced, willy nilly, to the left. How fast it will move, what all its stages will be cannot now be assessed. But while the labor party will be a revolutionary step forward, it will not create a revolutionary socialist party. New struggles, crises and alignments will take place before a revolutionary party is built.

With this in mind the tasks of revolutionary socialists become the following:

- * to develop leadership, human capital, capable of speeding, in however small a way, the impetus toward the development of a labor party and of influencing it in such a way as to make this party the healthiest possible--the most democratic, the most class conscious, etc.
- * to develop the leaders and ideas that will make easier the transition from reformism, to socialism to revolutionary politics.
- * to keep alive, in the meantime, the ideas of socialism themselves and their democratic and revolutionary application to contemporary life.

These are the tasks of the YSL at present. In our own modest way we think we do the best job possible today to carry them out. But all can be accomplished within the framework of a broad Socialist Party. However, in such a framework they will reach a broader audience, and in such a framework they will strengthen the general periphery upon which the future socialist movement will depend.

If the period ahead of us sees no sizeable awakening of social consciousness, then we may well be wiser to aschew any talk of unity and refuse to be swept into the present furor. And if the revolution, the final "collapse of capitalism" is just around the corner, if we are on the verge of a revolutionary working class struggle then it might also be foolish to involve ourselves with any "bridges" to the working class. But in the latter case we would also do well to scrap the YSL too because, incidentally we are NOT at present a "revolutionary Marxist youth organization" (Tim and his resolutions notwithstanding) and certainly a far cry from a vanguard party. But if neither of these prognosis are likely, and if we are correct in expecting a labor party development prior to a revolutionary change in the American scene, and if we are correct in viewing the present period as one providing a better and more prosperous arena for socialism, then we should and must become involved in the unity talk. If such is true, we should establish a name for ourselves as the one organization which came forth with a specific proposal for uniting socialists of all tendencies. This name will stand us in good stead if unity is achieved or not. The success of our perspective depends now on others. If our challenge is accepted a step forward will have been made. If not, we will all be the losers, the SP included. If the SP refuses to set itself up as the framework for a reorganized socialist movement we will continue the important task, which cannot be let up for one moment, of strengthening our own tendency, our own ideas, personnel, contacts, commitments and struggles so that we can, in whatever organizational framework we all find ourselves, best be able to work for and advance the cause of revolutionary socialism. And surely the way to do that is not to dissolve the YSL either into the SWP or into something akin to it--a tightly knit, Leninist youth organization or party. After all, this is America 1957--

WHO IS THE MAJORITY

by
Tim Wohlforth

We have just concluded a plenum which itself concluded nothing. Its main function was, simply, to raise questions and not to settle them.

There are three factors that must be considered when thinking of the plenum and evaluating the significance of votes on the crucial issues. First, the plenum was held without the benefit of a thorough membership discussion preceding it. The NAC majority documents were distributed so late, and the minority harassed in other ways, and the result was that not one unit in the YSL had a preplenum discussion on unity with counterposed documents of the majority and minority before it. Thus, in no sense of the word, can we have any confidence that the just-concluded plenum in any way represented the position of the membership.

Second, the plenum itself was unrepresentative to the extent that the entire West Coast was represented by a single person who did not, as I recall, even have voting status. Thus it was not really a nationally representative meeting.

Third, there is no reason at all to conclude that the present NEC (not to mention the NAC) represents the membership on the unity question, for the simple reason that it was elected at the last convention on the basis of our traditional politics -- the building of an independent revolutionary youth movement. But the present program of the right wing, endorsed by the NEC, calls for nothing less than the liquidation of our movement into social democracy, and violates the principles it was elected to carry out.

Furthermore, the recently concluded membership referendum gives us a clue to the degree to which the NEC majority has the "pulse" of the membership. Comrades, remember that the minority on the NEC is the real majority on the important electoral issue.

All this means that we have a leadership which--after a thorough discussion and two fat issues of the YSR--the membership has slapped in the face politically and warned to think twice before again acting as if it were the YSL. In this respect, recall the supreme confidence of the NAC majority that they would be upheld almost unanimously on this issue. They acted in the most brazen way to carry out their views, and not the membership's, on the electoral question. They specifically forbade YSL members to participate in any way in the campaign of the SWP. Thus they forbade the membership to carry out a part of what is now the policy of the organization.

Sad though it may be, we cannot now turn back the clock and right the wrongs committed by our unrepresentative leadership. However, there is one thing we must do. UNTIL A CONVENTION IS HELD WE PLACE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP OF THE YSL. This means that we urge the most thorough discussion of the unity question to be followed by a democratically elected convention as soon as is possible, so that the YSL can have a position on this question. Until such time we must be wary of any attempts of the leadership to act as if they have the mandate of the membership. For while the majority of the membership may not, at present, conceive of unity the way we do; on the other hand, from all appearances, they do not conceive of unity in the terms of Martin and

Harrington, either.

We, of course, aware of the nature and habits of the present leadership, expect that they will use the recent vote of the NEC supporting them to try to limit the thorough and democratic discussion of the issue by the minority. We would not at all be surprised if they denied us access to Challenge or to open forums. Furthermore, we assume that they will go their merry way oblivious of the membership, having their coffee with Friedman and Myers -- giving friendly advice to McReynolds, selling their Call and consoling themselves on their "Leftward-moving" New Leader. They will do all this with the serene confidence of all bureaucrats that they represent the true feelings of the membership until -- against their wills the matter is resolved democratically by the membership and then -- woe to them!

##

ON POLAND
BY
PAUL GERMAIN

We were particularly struck by a couple of passages in articles dealing with the current Polish and Hungarian upheavals that appeared in the October 29 issue of Labor Action. One by Hal Draper states that the nationalist revolt of the Polish C.P. regime against Moscow and the gathering forces of social discontent with the Polish regime itself have developed "...in virtually a straight line from Poznan to Gomulka's cold coup..."

Comrade Draper goes on to elaborate the thesis of the inextricable fusion of politics and economics in a rigid structure that is to be found in a bureaucratic collectivist state. It is this sort of phenomenon that can explain why a simple demand in a factory for a few Zlotys (Poznan) leads to an international political crisis of Stalinism "...all in one practically continuous sweep of three months..." (My emphasis — P.G.)

On page 5 of the same issue in the space utilized by the independently edited Young Socialist Challenge, Max Martin comments upon the heroic role of the Polish and Hungarian students and youth in the East European anti-Stalinist revolt as follows:

"In Poland student organizations and circles of young intellectuals have been the focal point of strength for independent tendencies in and around the Communist Party in the months between the Twentieth Congress of the Russian C. P. and the current meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish Stalinist party. Student organizations and student newspapers played an important part in the agitation for 'liberalization' of Polish Stalinist society and the break away from domination by the Kremlin." (My emphasis — P.G.)

These passages immediately caught and held our attention because they sort of put a dead focus on one persistent thought that has possessed us these past few weeks while reading Labor Action's accounts and interpretations of these rebellions. Namely, the deluge of portentous events that occurred during the aforementioned 3 months between the Poznan uprising and the current revolutionary eruptions in Poland and Hungary appear to have contradicted and belied an overwhelming amount of editorial comment and analysis about these regimes that have appeared in Labor Action and the New International, both before and somewhat after the commencement of this truly historic period.

More specifically, the line of our two publications, that the Poznan uprising and its immediate aftermath definitively established the limitations and boundaries on the range of permissible open debate and conflict between and among the different echelons of the Polish C.P. bureaucracy—the conflict between hards and softs over democratization of the whole country; the contention that Poznan finally and irrevocably destroyed the "myth" of democratization; the contention that, because of Poznan "...no one had a right to believe for one moment...that the line inaugurated by the 20th Congress in Moscow has brought any basic social change to the post-Stalin Stalinist regimes" — all of these contentions had been smashed to smithereens by the flesh and blood realities that had forced themselves upon the Eastern European scene for 3 months in "virtually a straight line" after Poznan to the rise of Gomulka.

Not to mention the astonishing and incomprehensible fact that most of this three-month period found the pages of Labor Action completely devoid of any recognition of the geographical existence of the Polish nation, a journalistic phenomenon that forced us to rely solely on the continuous daily flow of front page dispatches and weekly think pieces by the "Iron Curtain" staff of the New York Times.

It appeared at the time that the members of the New York Times editorial staff were somewhat less prudish than their counterparts on Labor Action concerning the formulation of value judgments to constitute "all the news that's fit to print."

But now, despite the fact that our press, in a veritable sneering fit, has piously stated that its line of reasoning has exposed and could only be doubted by "Western intellectuals, real and professed, ex-radicals, superannuated students, academicians, disillusioned nobodies" and a bankrupt hoary host of quasi-, semi-, crypto-, and just plain and simple Deutscherites -- despite all these fearful verbal odds, we shall attempt to support our allegations of the ISL's analytical "goof" -- by presenting a chronological documentation of same, with some comments of our own.

* * * * *

In the July 9 issue of Labor Action, one week after the outbreak of the Poznan riots, we were informed that the worker's rising had ripped through the "pretenses" of the Polish regimes's "showpiece" of "democratization" and "de-Stalinization." Too, the revolutionary outbreak took place in ~~the one~~ satellite regime among all the others in the Russian empire"...which had gone farthest in the much vaunted 'de-Stalinization'; whose government had gone ahead most rapidly in sloughing off the stupid and maniacal excesses...which had let down the bars most for a certain range of criticism; which was putting on the best show of reform-from-above." (Original emphasis -- P.G.)

Because of these aforementioned facts, the Polish regime, above all the others, "should have won popularity, loyalty and support -- if we have been wrong in our dim view of the 20th Congress turn." But it did not, because the victims of a tyranny instinctively understand that they are granted concessions by their masters only when the latter "feel shaky", a fact which leads them to strike out more boldly.

As for Poland, as soon as the Poznan riots were put down, the Warsaw regime unleashed a reign of terror, mass arrests, summary executions -- all under the direct supervision of Ochab and Cyrankiewicz, who were at the same time talking of making concessions to the workers valid demands.

Draper's conclusion: all the above is proof positive that there has been no basic social change in the satellite regimes since the 20th Congress, a scientifically proven fact doubted only by renegades from socialism, dupes, and some of the assorted types of scurvy scum listed a few paragraphs above.

The first thing we would like to do is offer a somewhat makeshift, though sufficient definition of what we mean by democratization. This is quite necessary because of Comrade Draper's petulantly incessant utilization of quotation marks around these terms -- the precise meaning of this method of expressing doubt and/or complete disbelief not always

being crystal clear. This is especially so since his choice of supposedly more scientifically orthodox terminology -- "easing up", or rather, easing up -- is, euphemistically speaking, not of much help.

Therefore, we shall offer our terms with the clear understanding that we are referring to what we consider any appreciable degree of relaxation of the tight control apparatus of the Stalinist state, together with further advances toward more freedom of the press, assembly and religion. Also, a de-emphasis (if not complete elimination) of the role of the secret police, wide-scale permission to criticize and reforms in education.

We have absolutely no argument with Comrade Draper when he insists that the Stalinist bureaucracy grants reforms and concessions, or liberalizes, or democratizes, or de-Stalinizes, or -- eases up, only when there is dissension within its ranks and it "feels shaky." We don't think that anyone within the ISL has argued with him on this score. The question is -- are there reforms? is there liberatization? and, if so, what is their political, social and economic nature? Are they basic? Draper appears to answer "no" to this, because the Polish working class, instead of supporting Cyrankiewicz and Ochab for vouchsafing them a few miserable mythical reforms from above, saw that the regime was torn with dissention over a hard and soft policy and decided to strike out even more boldly and pursue the myth to a greater qualitative and quantitative extent.

May we be so bold as to submit that when the Warsaw radio, prior to Poznan, carried discussions, however garbled, over the rights of trade unions to act as defenders of the workers' legitimate rights against bureaucratic incursions in even a so-called "workers' state", that this was a very formidable and basic advance in the process of democratization?

(We are now in receipt of a November 18 dispatch from Warsaw by the New York Times' Sydney Gruson which states that the Central Council of Polish Trade Unions has just "...swept aside its old leadership...and charged a new course. The unions dedicated themselves to what is a unique ideal in communist countries, 'the independence of the trade union movement from the state'."

May we be so bold as to submit that the new, refreshing free range of discussion and debate being utilized by the Polish intelligentsia -- especially the furore one year ago among Warsaw intellectuals over the poetry of Adam Wazyk -- are not mythical occurrences, or products of diseased Deutsche brain matter, but serious and portentous indications of the extent the government was willing and/or compelled to allow indictments of Stalinism's and Russia's impact on Polish intellectual life? Would you say that this was a basic reform in the realm of intellectual freedom, and not just a pretense or a show for dupes?

And Poznan? How well did the analysis and predictions of Labor Action and the New International fare after Poznan?

For this we refer to the truly remarkable article by A. Rudzienski in the August 6, 1956 issue of Labor Action, the first bit of comment on the post-Poznan events to appear in the paper in four weeks.

Entitled "Consequences of Poznan" the piece, in addition to Rudzienski's usual penchant for crystal ball gazing and the like, contains some very damaging observations on the previous month's happenings in Poland. Damaging, that is, to the foundations of Labor Action's line. From these observations he also offered some predictions that have proven truly admirable, to date, in their degree of accuracy. These, too, did their bit to undermine L. A.'s position.

We believe he merits some extensive quotation:

"The movement in Poznan will probably be liquidated by the police measures of terror...But this time it is not a question of simply 'liquidating' an opposition or of murdering 'enemies of the people'. It is a question of the working class itself, because the conflict revealed the open war between the working class and the Stalinist power...We shall not have to wait very long for the political consequences of this historic event. It will probably bring a halt to 'de-Stalinization' in Poland and a new sharpening of the totalitarian terror against the people.

"But this time, as mentioned, it is not a question of an internal fight against an artificially isolated opposition. The adversary is the majority of the working class backed by the entire Polish people. Therefore the police terror must be very cautious and very limited if it is not to provoke the rising of the entire nation against the government. (My emphasis -- P.G.)

"But after this period of a new 'frost' must come a new 'thaw', deeper and stronger, which will have to yield real concessions to the workers and peasants and not only to the upper layer of the bureaucracy. It must end with the reorganization of the government, with the punishment of those responsible for the repression used against the Poznan strikers, with new elections and a new government organized on a broader social basis. This means the end of the Stalinist regime in the present form and the establishment in Poland of a new type of government, perhaps like Finland's, or else the explosion of a new social revolution..." (My emphasis -- P.G.)

Observing events that had taken place during the previous weeks, Rudzienski's comments:

"After thousands of arrests in Poland and after big drives against Poznan refugees in the forests, the official organ Trybuna Ludu violently attacked the party organization in Poznan for its incorrect policy and its bureaucratic negligence. Perhaps this is a new scapegoat policy, but it is more likely that this attack on the Poznan organization stands for an attack on the leadership of the party, the Warsaw politburo, the Ochab leadership, the Cyrankiewicz government and maybe the Kremlin.

"For Trybuna Ludu was very violent in its attack on Stalinism, even more violent than Khrushchev himself. It led the 'thaw' tendency, as the organ of the intellectuals Nowa Kultura (publisher of Adam Wazyk's poetry) led the writer's criticism against the party. The inaugural speech by party chief Edward Ochab was directed against this tendency among the party's intellectuals, branding them a harmful anti-party tendency."

The only comment Draper had to make to all of this was a brief, diplomatic editorial note that "...we are aware of no evidence whatsoever to sustain the prospect he seems to depict for a transformed Polish regime...and his related discussion."

At any rate, between the publication of this article, on August 6, till the issue of October 29, there was not one single solidary article on Poland in our press.

During this period, the events in that land, one after the other, were demolishing Labor Action's previous line. We saw the ouster of Stalinists who were most closely associated with Stalin and Russia; Jacob Berman and Hilary Minc were dropped by the Polish party leadership. In Hungary, despite Russian protests and attempts at intervention, Rakosi got the heave-ho. Bulganin, worried about the fact that the mythical democratization was going too far, attacked Trybuna Ludu and the rest of the Polish press and asked for a clamp down. The latter thumbed their noses at Mr. B. Cyrankiewicz and Ochab were at odds over hard and soft policies, and both opposed the ultra-hard Natolin Stalinists. The Poznan trials were remarkably free — and the defendants all got comparatively light sentences. The softs had won again.

And then, the deluge, with Labor Action finally awakening from its rather embarrassingly long self-imposed slumber, and carrying on just as if nothing happened to put even the mildest damper on its previous statements on the immediate pre and post Poznan events.

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This discussion article was submitted to Labor Action in early December 1956 and was refused publication by the editors. It has been slightly revised for publication in Y.S.R.

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SOME TRIVIAL COMMENTS ON THE MEANING OF THE VOTING PROCESS, AND IN PARTICULAR OF AN "ABSTENTION" IN ORGANIZATIONAL AND DEMOCRATIC FUNCTIONING —
By Debbie Meier

January, 1957

When a crucial vote comes up in any unit, plenum or convention there are always a certain number of people who have a tendency to abstain. The abstainers frequently defend themselves on the grounds that "they weren't sure," or "they didn't know enough," or "they weren't in the room during the whole discussion." Some attack them for trying to avoid "taking sides." Others nod sympathetically, having toyed with doing the same. A few avoid it all by being recorded as "not voting" and no one, themselves included, knows what that means or how it differs from an abstention. In general, in other words, considerable confusion exists.

A vote is a way of having an effect—such a simple idea but one which is frequently lost sight of, especially by newer members and less experienced politicals. There are three types of votes which can be used to effect policy—a vote for, a vote against and an abstention. Each is equally a "positive" vote. Each must be weighed with the same care and consideration. And this is where the confusion rests: in assuming that an abstention is a less meaningful choice. It stems from a concept which a socialist, above all others, should forget—the idea that a vote is an individual act of conscience. Therefore one frequently hears abstainers lament—"I owed it to myself to be honest,—after all you wouldn't want me to vote on something I wasn't sure about?" However what is asked for at the moment when a vote is being taken is not an act of individual heroism or confession but an act of responsible weighing of consequences and a recognition that any choice made at this point has consequences.

All votes are informed guesses. When an individual feels he has a great deal of information or insight on a subject he may feel that he is SURE. But in most cases one is simply guessing, based on whatever information one has at the moment and whatever powers of reasoning one can sum up at the moment. It is legitimate, at the point at which one is forced to make a decision, to base one's choice on any information at all—INCLUDING WHO IS VOTING FOR AND AGAINST, HOW THE SIDES LINE UP, INTUITION, etc. People are often attacked for entering a room after the discussion has elapsed and raising their hands on the basis of a quick glance at how so-and-so is voting. The only irresponsibility involved here is that of not remaining in the room for the discussion. Once having done this they are actually acting responsibly when they refuse to abstain or "note vote." As long as they have at their command any information or any hint at all, which makes it possible for them to take a guess they are obligated to do so.

What then does an abstention mean? It means that upon careful weighing of all the facts, etc., the individual decides that it doesn't make any difference whether the motion passes or not, i.e. he decides that both the pro and the con position are equally dangerous, equally good, equally irrelevant, etc. In other words, it takes no more nor less information or understanding to abstain than to choose a "yea" or "nay" vote.

One does not choose any of the three alternatives simply on the basis of examining one's conscience or, for that matter, one's opinion as to what the motion, all by itself in a vacuum, means. What one must ask is the effect of the success or failure of the motion.

The recording of an individual as "not voting" is an entirely different question. It is intended for use when an individual while recorded as "present" at a meeting is simply unavailable at the moment when the vote

is counted. It can also be used if one is in the room at the time of the vote but for one reason or another is completely unaware of what is being voted on in any shape or manner, cannot obtain the slightest hint and therefore wants to indicate a complete absence of any opinion.

There is an exception to all of this--another type of voting process which occurs frequently in the average unit. The voting machinery is still used, but for a different function. For there are times when what is really being asked for is a "poll" of membership opinion. For such purposes one may divide membership opinion into various categories--agreement with a motion, disagreement and "in between" or "not sure." And in such cases the "in between" or "unsure" may be recorded as "abstaining." However this type of vote is in an entirely different category and the two should not be confused.

This may seem like a minor and irrelevant problem. However not only does it often cause considerable confusion and an inaccurate recording of membership opinion within the YSL, but it relates to something of broader significance also. For in effect what the abstainer is saying in many cases is "only those who know a lot should vote on this matter." Socialists have always said, on the other hand, that the ignorant, illiterate, etc. and the confused have an equal obligation and right to vote and to choose sides. (After all, who is to decide who knows enough, what they means, etc.?) The more "intellectual" or more informed voter or member may have a more generalized and clarified view of the meaning of the elections in which he participates, but the less educated and informed also have a general sentiment which is as vital and consequential. The less educated or informed take a greater risk of being "wrong", but abstaining doesn't increase their chances of being right! In essence, we have argued, all votes represent the individual's best calculation as to his own and his group's interest, and no one has the right to decide how one may arrive at this calculation. In class societies, the ruling class has much to gain by fostering sentiments of abstention and glorifying the "informed citizen," the "intelligent voter." As socialists we have an obligation, while doing our best to educate and inform, to clear away this myth and expose its consequences.

By the way, this discussion of the meaning of an abstention in voting applies to other spheres as well where the "well-intentioned abstainer" tries to avoid choosing sides. For socialists have pointed out that as long as one lives in society one cannot actually remove oneself from the political sphere and that therefore "to abstain" is not synonymous with "to avoid." The only thing it frequently means is "to avoid responsible action or decision."

An abstention can be an act of revolt, it can be revolutionary in consequences, it can be also reactionary or counter-revolution! But it always represents a political act with political consequences.

SUGGESTION: At one time, in the Chicago SYL, there existed a general practice of asking the abstainers to state their motivations. In general this is a good policy and, if practised by other YSL units, might help to clarify some of the questions raised here.

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R E P O R T S

Following are several reports on the functioning and activity of YSL units. All unit organizers should send in such reports regularly for the interest and information of other units and members. members in areas where there are no YSL units are also invited to write occasionally about the kind of activities they are engaged in, since members who are in similar circumstances would probably find it useful to get ideas and hints about arenas and means of carrying on socialist activity.

The reports that follow are based on the replies to a unit questionnaire sent to unit organizers. Unfortunately, only a few units replied.

Report of New York YSL Unit

February 1957

Arenas and Activities:

"The NY unit has fractions or members on three major campuses in the city. Both the campus fractions and the unit as a whole has been especially active in the civil rights arena—i.e. in Enroll for Freedom and In Friendship."

Individual members of the YSL are also active in such organizations as the Liberal Party in New York and the city NAACP.

The unit has also been selling Anvils, participating in Enroll for Freedom (collected about \$200), distributing the ISL's CP pamphlet by Benson to the CP convention.

Educational:

"We are concluding a class on 'Bureaucratic Collectivism' and on the 'development of the independent socialist movement.' Our next class series will be on 'World Politics' since World War I."

Special Problems:

"We have been attempting to establish contact with the LYL—or rather, the remnants of it. The N.Y. State LYL voted to dissolve itself and subsequently the non-political LYL'ers dropped out of politics entirely, while the others became hard to find. (They have held no public meetings since last May.) However, we have been able to talk to several of them and to get them to read the Benson pamphlet which has made an excellent impression on them. On the basis of the pamphlet, we are discussing the possibility of a private discussion group with them."

Meetings:

The NY unit holds one forum meeting and one class per week on a regular basis, and one business meeting a month.

Report of the Chicago YSL unit

February 22, 1957

Arenas: The Chicago YSL unit's primary arena is the University of Chicago campus. On the campus there is a YSL unit which holds public meetings on campus every second and fourth Thursday of the month. YSL members on campus concentrate their non-YSL functioning around the newly revived chapter of the NAACP. The campus NAACP was active in the campaign for Enroll for Freedom and is planning a variety of activities for the rest of the year.

Our members are also involved to varying degrees in the activities of several other campus clubs--the League for Civil Liberties which we helped to form several years ago and the Socialist Club, composed primarily of SP members and sympathizers. (Aside from the YSL, there are no other active or even semi-active campus political organizations--no SDA, no Young Dems, etc.

The nonstudent members of the unit are members of the Hyde Park chapter of the NAACP, and one YSL member plays a prominent leadership role in this interesting and militant chapter. Another YSL member is in a fruitful union situation in a UAW shop.

Other activities: We have been selling Anvils (not enough though) and the Benson pamphlet at meetings of a Stalinoid nature and concerts of various organizations; we have also been able to place Anvil and LA at several new newstands. The campus YSL held a concert to raise funds for the YSL. Our major public meetings are held in conjunction with the Socialist Party branch in Hyde Park and the ISL city branch through the Socialist Forum. For a variety of unfortunate reasons the forum hasn't held a meeting yet this winter. However we will be cosponsoring a symposium on "Socialism and Democracy" at the end of March--speakers to include Max Weiss of the CP, Shachtman for the ISL and Mulford Sibley for the SP.

Educationals: The unit has not been conducting any membership educationals recently. However we plan to begin holding some in conjunction with the ISL--the plan being to hold a discussion on social democracy, one on the question of the role and nature of the party, and a third, a debate on the question of the need for a vanguard party today with a speaker from the SWP defending the vanguard party orientation.

The unit holds two public-type educationals a month on campus: a discussion-debate on Algeria was the latest and one on "Socialism and Psychology" is coming up.

Special Problems: Our main problem is the preponderance of "old married couples" and small infants. This cuts down our social periphery and ability to circulate around campus, and engage in other small tasks so necessary for a lively unit and for recruiting activity.

Help! Of course, we could always use some young active types! And a few national tours! And more communication from the National Office!

Meetings: The unit meets weekly: twice a month on campus for public-educationals, and the other weeks we meet off campus to discuss unit business.

UNITY TO THE RIGHT: THE YSL-ISL POSITION

by
JOHN WORTH

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: The following article was stenciled and included after the YSR editor had left town; consequently, is not included in the table of contents.

1. With the topic of unity 'in the air' the executive committees of the YSL and ISL have taken the curious position that the left can most effectively unite under the aegis of the right--the SP-SDF. The reasoning behind this is fragmentary, but we believe we perceive the underlying political logic. The only militant, revolutionary socialist forces that are apt to regroup contain a heavy element which is described--by Max Shactman--as 'stalinoid'. By 'stalinoid' Shactman means organizations and theories ranging from those determined by Stalin, through Deutscher, Cochran, Cannon, and by inference, Trotsky himself. An organization which includes, thinks Shactman, a preponderance of elements in this "camp" will be compromised in advance before the American working class. Hence--the SP-SDF, where there is no such danger.

2. The reasoning is sound. Its basic premise--nonsense! Shactman, if we trust his statement to the symposium "Can the Left Unite?", has been fighting political battles on the "Russian question" for 40 years.¹ Furthermore, in his opinion, the rest of the left has too. The conclusion? Abandon the Russian question and regroup as we began--in the "Debsian" SP.

3. But is the SP-SDF neutral on the question? Only insofar as it is permitted to continue its support of the "Free world and its democratically established military agencies..." (Memorandum of Understanding, reprinted in The Militant, Jan. 28, 1957). Curiously Shactman hasn't said a word on the subject, except to assert that unity with the SDF was the first step to unity on the left. Nor has the YSL NAC, despite the fact that it had full knowledge of the conditions under which the SP and SDF united, commented on the political conditions entailed by the unity, nor the effect which the SP-SDF "Memorandum of Understanding" has on its own pro-unity position. Despite the fact that the political program of the united SP-SDF contradicts every fundamental element on which our politics are based, the NAC can present to a National Plenum of the YSL, and sustain, the position that we "unite with the Socialist Party as it stands today." That "the YSL should not and does not make changes in the program and leadership of the Socialist Party conditions for it." Without "underestimating" our differences on "the Third Camp, the role of American imperialism, the need to defend Civil liberties and academic freedom for ALL..." not one of these points should "be a bar to the formation of a broad, inclusive socialist organization."

1. This on the authority of Labor Action (Jan 28, 1957), and assuming that its report of Shactman's presentation is a cut above its 'factual' description of his opposition, or, to take another immediate question, the honest, unbiased, fullscale coverage of the SP-SDF unity convention. The main piece of information contained in Shactman's diagnosis is that "the isolation and fragmentation" of the American movement is strictly a function of the 40 year dispute on the "Russian question". Undoubtedly Shactman knows why he split -- at least, we aren't going to challenge his authority on the question -- but the solution proposed can hardly be taken seriously. The fact is that the American communists split from the broad "Debsian" SP to form an American section of the Third International, and

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4. This is the program, and these are the leaders, with which Shactman, Gates, Martin, Harrington, et. al. propose unity now. The program is indisputably a liberal pro-bourgeois program. It can be reversed, in the SP-SDF, only by political struggle. The only possible means of carrying on a struggle--supposing the prospect of unity to be valid--is unity with the SP left-wing, with which we are in political agreement. Without unity with the left-wing, and the victory of our program in the SP, there is absolutely no justification for even considering the move--unless we accept, here and now the present SP-SDF program and leadership as sufficient for a socialist party in America! Whether the right-wing of the YSL and ISL accept this program and leadership is determinable only by the fact that their resolutions commit us, in advance, to loyalty without struggle.

5. What political advantages accrue to unity on these terms? Exclusively the guarantee that the resultant unified "left" will not alter one whit its program of relentless opposition to Russian totalitarianism. But is the SP-SDF's opposition to stalinism equivalent to our own? Nonsense! The SP-SDF's position on stalinism, which it will not abandon, rests on opposition by alliance with the forces of the world bourgeoisie--the "democratically established agencies" of--what? Bourgeois imperialism--nothing less! Given a difference on Stalinism Shactman, Martin, and their supporters prefer relentless opposition to stalinism, to relentless opposition to our own ruling class.

6. Evaluate Shactman's program as you will--it is expressed perfectly in the YSL NEC Resolution on Socialist Realignment and Socialist Unity--there is absolutely no positive political program for unity except, outweigh the 'stalinoids' (a la Shactman, not Webster) at all costs; even at the expense of the revolutionary socialist program.

fortify its indisputably revolutionary position. Unless Shactman is denying that a workers' revolution occurred in October 1917, the "Russian question", meaning analysis of the class character of the USSR following the victory of Stalin, could scarcely have been a point "40 years" ago. But no subsequent split, excepting Shactman himself, could be attributed to the insidious complexities of the "Russian question", for the simple reason that, not a theory about the USSR, but the course of the world revolutionary movement was at stake. In a revolutionary epoch Social Democracy, both in Europe and the United States, lost its cadres because, in the moment of crisis, it refused to stand against the bourgeoisie. The Third International was built--not on the Russian Question--but because of the treachery of the Social Democratic leaders. The break with the Third International occurred only when it had been proven by events that Stalinism had assumed a counter-revolutionary role. And theories about Russia followed the event--not created it. Out of the fragments of revolutionary defeat Trotsky attempted to regroup the revolutionary leadership in the Fourth International--and failed. The Fourth International, in a period of reaction and world war, split on a number of subsidiary questions--demonstrating in the process a considerable irresponsibility in its leadership--but even this can hardly be analyzed in terms of the Russian Question. (Shactman, in the famous essay "Is Russia a Workers State", NI, Jan-Feb '52, reprinted from NI, Dec '40) admitted that his position on the class character of the Soviet Union hadn't developed until he had been freed "from the ugly atmosphere of baiting, ritualistic phrasemongering, pugnacious ignorance, and factional fury" which prevailed in the SWP.) The revolutionary movement which shattered the bourgeois calm after World War I, was not broken in the grip of the "Russian question"--but failed because of the failure of its vanguard cadres. Nonetheless, the fundamental question for all revolutionary
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7. To recapitulate: the National Executive of the YSL, Shactman and the ISL, are not proposing that we "negotiate" for unity; not that we have a common political base from which to work with the SP, but that we accept the leadership and policy of the SP-SDF as it stands. This is nothing less than capitulation on every point differentiating us from the class position of the SP-SDF.

Sectarianism and the Vanguard

8. That there exists no real socialist 'movement' in the US may be true, but the statement is worthless unless the characteristics of 'movements' and 'sects' are defined with political precision. No definition is proposed by the NEC document on either word, unless, by inference, the fact of isolation is distinctive of a sect. But isolation is generally held to follow from sectarianism, not to create it, and a radical party in periods of reaction is always in isolation, without by any means being sectarian. Can the YSL really "eliminate its own sect character", to say nothing of contributing "to the elimination of the general sect-like nature of all socialist organizations" until the political facts of sectarianism are pinned down. We want to know, not only who is sectarian, but why. The individuals who wrote the resolution have been sufficiently specific to identify all current organizations as sects. Why don't they provide, at first-hand, information on the real content of sectarianism? Alas! It is merely an "unpleasant truth" which they haven't "glossed over" -- whatever it happens to be.

9. Similarly, whether any of the "socialist sects" now in existence can 'lead' the workingclass or act as the 'vanguard' party for a workingclass struggle for power", would seem to depend on whether or not the 'sects' analysis expressed, in advance, the fundamental needs of working class action -- not capitulated to its mood of the moment. If neither needs nor orientation are determinable at the moment--what is? The revolutionary socialist movement takes as its point of departure the analysis of capitalist society in which, with the movement and degeneration of a system, class tensions reach the breaking point, and the conflict of classes erupts into open battle for control of the means of production. If the struggle for power, in this sense, is our end, then any socialist stands as a vanguard element by his prior apprehension of the line of motion of capitalist society, combined with the determination to create and fight with proletarian organization to the end. Whether it is possible to

socialist has been the struggle for international organization with genuine class struggle principles. Social Democracy, and the Stalinist International, were condemned for nothing but the refusal to take the field against the bourgeois rulers of society. Indisputably this failure stemmed from the class position of the leadership of these two internationals, and this must be interpreted by analysis of social structure based on a relation to the means of production. But the dominant note is class organization. Trotsky put the issue with absolute precision in "The USSR at War": "The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area...but rather the change in the consciousness and organization of the world proletariat...." Shactman's conversion of a struggle for revolutionary organization into a struggle about the sociology of the Russian state, is completely fatuous. The postulate that he draws--regroupment to the right--is preposterous. We are interested in the positive political premises of the new "revitalized" movement. Shactman, and his followers in the YSL, unfortunately, prefer not to present their own.

carry out a successful struggle by creating broad, loosely formed organizations, or whether society creates the need for a disciplined, combat party (democratic in structure—for those who have forgotten Lenin), depends, not on the political bias of their protagonists, but on the practical appraisal of the means of violence, vested in the bourgeois state, by which a ruling class defends its control of the means of production.

10. The specific method which the vanguard party assumes does not in the least affect its status as a vanguard. Vanguards, in these terms, depend on analysis and orientation — not on the size of the movement at their base. The task, at any given moment, is to intervene in the most effective possible manner. The task of socialists, working from a solid working class position, is to create an organization which can do so decisively!

SP UNITY: A TACTIC?

11. Unity with a political organization which is vitally defective, from our class point of view, can be justified exclusively by demonstrating that that organization, at this moment, is the center to which leftward moving elements are attracted — and it is exclusively the leftward moving section which holds our attention. In order to analyse a leftward movement, not only the fact of movement, but its social causes, must be understood. If social tensions which, in an era of relaxation of economic pressures produce a movement which is bounded by the right-wing SP-SDF, then this is a political fact—but it must be proven!

12. Clearly, by moving to the left, the individuals or groups involved, are seeking a radical solution to problems which, for them, really exist. Can the SP-SDF propose a radical solution? Since it cannot, what will hold a leftward moving element in the SP-SDF? Absolutely nothing but the presence, within the SP, of a left-wing which offers the possibility of winning the organization, and altering leadership and program. But if a left-wing program would be attractive in the SP-SDF—which has nothing in common with the class struggle politics of its founder, Debs—then why is it impossible for left elements, possessing a clear preponderance, taken in their whole, to create their own organization where it will not be affected by the right-wing obstructionist policies of the bureaucratic leadership of the SP-SDF? Why, in order to regroup the left, must we accept the program and politics of the SP as the standard under which we regroup. Is there any reason except the guarantee that the group will be 'anti-stalinist'—upon which Shactman depends? Can even this guarantee, hinging exclusively on the "Russian question" be regarded as an overwhelming political factor in regroupment, when the real need of the American left is an organization which can militantly, and effectively assault the American ruling class on its own ground? Is there any reason to decide the question in advance—when the real discussion on unity is just beginning? Must we close the question before its solution is really begun?

13. The present policy of the national leadership of the two 'independent socialist' organizations is nothing less than full capitulation to an organization which has no socialist principles at all. Socialism is nothing, if it is not a program for class struggle, and in class struggle we do not depend on the "moral force" of "our ideas" to win.

14. The American working class can depend upon nothing but itself to win. The task of revolutionary socialists is to form the organization within which it can fight. Working class organization cannot begin by allying itself with the bourgeoisie.

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