

THE DISCUSSION OF THE CRISIS OF STALINISM
AT THE RECENT NEC MEETING

By Shanē Mage

The current crisis of the American CP and the attitude of the YSL in relation to it was discussed by the plenum under two distinct aspects--the question of whether and under what conditions the YSL should form United Fronts with Stalinist youth groups, and the question of what attitude the YSL should take toward the current factional division in the American Communist Party.

The first thing that we should recognize concerning this point is that the YSL Right Wing has made very considerable progress toward understanding the question of united fronts with Stalinists since the last convention and since the NEC plenum last September.

At the Convention, the basic line of the Right wing was one of violent opposition to the concept of united fronts between the YSL and Stalinist youth. Their stand on this was expressed in paragraph 13 of the "Tasks and Orientation" resolution (YSR, Vol.2, no.4, p.6) as follows: "We do not call for united fronts with the LYL or Stalinist-controlled organizations. Rather we seek to isolate them politically and organizationally."

Then, I and a few others argued that this was a terrible political mistake--that the nature of the Stalinist youth had changed enormously in the previous two years. We argued that they had virtually abandoned their virulent hostility toward independent revolutionary socialist youth, that they had attracted many sincere radical youth on a minimum program of peace and civil liberties, and that these youth were as yet relatively little corrupted by the Stalinist slanders against Trotskyism. We contended that the total effect of this opposition to united fronts would be, not to isolate the Stalinists (they were already quite well isolated, thanks to the witch hunt) but to isolate ourselves from the Stalinist youth, and to confirm, in their eyes, the Stalinist image of the YSL as a group mainly devoted to destroying and disrupting united activities by red-baiting attacks upon themselves. We succeeded in getting an amendment added to the resolution which stated that "It is not tactically excluded that local YSL may wish to call for a united front with either a Stalinist youth group (LYL, YPA) or a more limited Stalinist front group on occasion." Unfortunately, this modification of the basic line of the Right Wing remained on paper. In fact, nowhere was it applied in practice.

Five months after the convention, the twentieth party

congress of the CPSU took place. Then came the publication of Krushchev's "Secret" speech and the Poznań uprising. The Stalinist movement, youth and adult alike, was completely dis-oriented, the whole system of lies and slander which had immunized CPers from revolutionary socialist ideas lay in ruins, questions of a fundamental and probing nature were being raised in the open forum of the Daily Worker.

By August, some inkling that something was changing in the Stalinist movement had dawned on our Right-Wingers. A resolution adopted by the September NEC plenum on "Work in the Stalinist Arena" attempted to deal with the CP crisis. Alas, these comrades had yet to realize that some change in the YSL's attitude toward the Stalinist youth was now required. This resolution stated: "United Fronts: Our position here remains essentially the same. What needs to be added is a caution that the ability of the Stalinists to dis-semble themselves and the softness of their current line gives rise to illusions among liberal students about the possibility of working with Stalinists. "Thus, as late as last September the YSL Right Wing was talking in terms of hardening our "Isolate the Stalinists" line!

Again, Tim and I spoke out against this policy. We warned that the YSL was throwing away the finest chance in years to make real organizational gains from the stalinists. We urged that the YSL adopt a large -scale orientation toward the stalinist youth - to seek out joint discussions wherever possible and on all questions, to form united fronts wherever we could get in contact with LYL or YPA type groups, and to attempt to get YSL members to work inside LYL. We were answered with ridicule and charges of pro-stalinism.

By January, the Right Wing had learned something-- it was now no longer a matter of "our position remains essentially the same." Instead, the previous position was categorically repudiated: "We do not have a policy excluding Stalinist organizations from United Front activities..." True, we cannot claim that this improvement in the Right Wing's position has come about in response to our correct arguments. It was brought to pass by their own contact with harsh reality. The fact is, that what we of the Left Wing have consistently warned about has happened- the line of "Isolating the Stalinists" has completely isolated us from the Stalinists, so that the YSL has been totally unable to win over new members from the ranks of the LYL or YPA.

What more shocking evidence could there be than the report of the NEW York units activities (keep in mind that this unit is bigger than any three others in the YSL)? The reporter summed up the New York units "Work in the Stalinist Arena: roughly thus: "We have tried to get in contact with the LYL. We have been unable to find them." And indeed, how can these comrades be expected to "find" the LYL in a process of

disintegration when, while it was still relatively healthy, they were unwilling (and perhaps also unable) to establish any contacts with it of the sort that can only be formed by joint discussions, joint actions, close personal and social relationships?

On Political Responsibility

When a serious political tendency feels that it has to revise its stand on an important issue it has two choices -- it can either admit openly that its previous position has been mistaken, and try to understand the exact nature of this mistake in order to educate itself and to avoid similar errors in the future, or it can state that its previous position was correct under the objective conditions of the time, and show exactly what changes in that objective reality have made a different tactical or strategic approach necessary. Either approach may be justified -- what is indispensable is an honest exposition, to the membership as well as to the leadership, of the fact of a change as well as the reasons for it.

As we have seen, the YSL Right Wing has substantially changed its position on United Fronts with Stalinists -- to be sure, its new position, as we will show, is far, far from adequate in the present situation. But it has changed its line, and in the right direction. Unfortunately, you can look in vain through the NEC resolution on Stalinism to find any analysis of our previous line on United Fronts, either to justify it or to criticize it. Neither is there any examination of the practical results of that line, nor any reference to any "Work in the Stalinist Arena" carried out in pursuance of the resolution of the September NEC plenum. The NEC majority seems to want to pretend to itself that it has not had to make any serious or fundamental changes in its line, that its previous position had nothing wrong with it! When, during the plenum discussion on this subject, I discussed this change of line my words seemed to fall on deaf ears -- no answer, of any sort, was forthcoming from the Right Wing comrades!

The explanation for this does not necessarily lie in a bureaucratic self-defense mechanism. As I will show, the right wing has changed its political position without at all changing its basic attitude on this question, and this creates a grave danger that the new orientation will remain a purely literary one.

The failure of the Right Wing to act in a politically responsible fashion is shown even more clearly by the basic change it has introduced in its attitude towards the nature of American Stalinism. Only last September, the NEC resolution stated that "It goes without saying that we consider both the CP and LYL inherently incapable of becoming 'socialist' organizations." (ital. mine.)

In January, this is what the same Right-Wing NEC majority had to say about the Gates group, a faction with a real chance (according to the Right Wingers) to gain the majority of the CP: "The Gates tendency still has a long distance to travel before it has broken with all of its Stalinist politics, and democratic socialists should not preclude such a break and a democratic socialist development." (ital.

mine). Thus something that, in September the CP majority was "inherently incapable" of doing now, in January, should not be precluded.

Here there can be no question of a tactical adaptation to changed circumstances. If the present position is correct the previous one was wrong. But does the NEC resolution recognize that it has made any change at all on this score? Not by so much as a word! The new YSL member who does not know the previous position of the organization would conclude from this resolution that the YSL has always considered the CP capable of becoming a "democratic socialist" organization, just as a new YSL member would conclude from the NEC resolution on "Socialist Unity" that the YSL has always been in favor of organic unity between itself, the SP, and the SDF on the basis of the political program of the SDF.

Now this is not some unimportant and tertiary question -- it is actually loaded with theoretical dynamite! This article is not the place to discuss the class nature of the Stalinist parties, but the consequences of the new Right Wing stand on the American CP upon their own theoretical analysis should at least be made clear.

The Right Wing considers the CP's to be "bureaucratic-collectivist" parties, to have the class character of a ruling class party. The Right Wing now says that the American CP is capable of becoming "democratic socialist." This means that the CP's are either not "bureaucratic collectivist" parties but something else altogether, or else a ruling class party is capable of transforming itself into a working class party -- a proposition which does not merely involve throwing the entire Marxist class analysis out the window, but also justifies the proposition that the Democratic party is capable of becoming a labor party or people's party; exactly the analysis on which is based the present politics of both the labor bureaucracy and American Stalinism! We can understand why, faced with such a choice, the Right Wing prefers to play the Ostrich and pretend that no change has been made -- but that does not diminish their political irresponsibility, it accentuates it!

Two Steps Forward -- One and a Half Steps Back

As I have said, the formal recognition of the permissibility of United Front tactics toward the Stalinist youth represents definite progress toward a sensible and politically fruitful YSL approach to them. The grave danger, however, is that this new orientation will remain a purely formal one, that no effort will be made by the present national leadership to carry it out in any measure, let alone in the vigorous and imaginative fashion necessary to gain real result.

The approach of the Right Wing to the United Front question was so hesitant as to be almost shamefaced. Their major formulation was put in the weakest, most negative, way imaginable.-- ".. we do not have a policy of excluding Stalinist organizations from United Front activities; nor are we in favor of including these groups under all circumstances." "we do not have a policy.." Fine. But, comrades, what policy do we have on United Fronts? The answer is, that we do not have any policy at all!

Why is the Right Wing incapable of formulating a policy to replace their previous one? Their own failure to make any gains among the Stalinist youth, and their realization that a policy of excluding them from united fronts makes it impossible to approach these youth in the future brought the Right Wing to within an ace of a pro-United Front policy. But at this point they draw back in horror at the implications of their own thoughts, and rejected any clear proposal to adopt a united front tactic as an important approach to Stalinist youth.

The reason for this is not obscure -- it lies in the evident and proclaimed political orientation of the Right Wing. They want to influence youth in the process of breaking with Stalinism, it is true. But their main outlook is not toward these youth -- it is toward the American Social-Democracy. And this fact effectively paralyzes them when they think of making any real move toward the Stalinist youth.

The dead grip of this paralysis is well illustrated by the sentence of the NEC resolution following the ones already cited: "Due to the flexibility of the current situation and the broader consequences of activity in local areas, all units, fractions, and members at large must discuss with the N.O. all questions of their activity in respect to Stalinist youth organizations." Note -- well, this is the sole concrete guidance offered to the members of the YSL by the resolution -- "discuss with the N.O."

Of course it goes without saying that units of the YSL will discuss their functioning with the N.O. Why then this enormous emphasis on this point, on its compulsory nature? The key phrase of this vague and cryptic sentence is "the broader consequences of activity". Its meaning was not spelled out in the resolution itself, but in the discussion on the resolution by those members of the NAC who will have the responsibility of executing the new line. What they mean by the "broader consequences" is very simply the reaction of the SP-SDF national leadership to local actions of the YSL. They want to avoid, at all costs, any action which will give Thomas & co. a bad impression of their own political character. That this is the decisive and guiding consideration in all work with Stalinist youth was recognized by all the leading members of the right wing (interestingly enough, the two comrades most insistent on this point, most sectarian in their opposition to any cooperation with the Stalinist youth, were precisely the "left critics" of the NAC majority on SP-SDF unity, Bogdan and George! They made no effort at all to explain this lamentable inconsistency).

The desire of the YSL right wing to accommodate themselves to the leadership of the SP-SDF will serve to vitiate almost completely the new turn toward Stalinist youth. Remember that the SP-SDF has an ironbound sectarian hostility toward anything smacking of "Communism" which approaches a "Third Period" quality. It is virtually inconceivable that the SP-SDF will look with any favor on any united front between the YSL and LYL, anywhere. Thus the

decisive consideration weighing on the NAC will almost always lead it to prevent, perhaps against its real wishes, proposed United Fronts between us and the Stalinist youth.

Thus the good effects of the new line on United Fronts are likely to be restricted to the fact that local groups of the YSL will feel freer to approach local LYL type groups for joint discussions and united actions. This was, to a certain extent, already being done before the plenum by some units, notably our comrades in Los Angeles. It is a notable fact that the representative of the Los Angeles unit was the only other comrade to support the amendment introduced by Tim and myself to make a United Front approach the general tactic to be used by the YSL in relation to the Stalinist youth in this period.

The YSL, Gates, and Reformism

The discussion at the plenum on the YSL attitude toward the current factional lineup in the American CP was considered, rightly, a separate topic from the question of United Fronts with the LYL et. al. As a topic considered in itself, it is much less concrete, much less meaningful in terms of organizational activity than is the United Front tactic. However, as a symptom of the basic divergence within the YSL it should not be underrated.

At first glance, it might seem that there was not too much difference between the resolution I submitted and that of the NAC majority, since both expressed a preference for the Gates group as against the Fosterites. The essential differences between the tendencies in the NEC were over the specific criticisms to make of the Gates group and its current evolution.

The NEC resolution expressed its criticism of Gates in this manner: "The danger in considering the Gates tendency is not that it will evolve in a reformist direction, but that it will not proceed far or fast enough in ridding itself of Stalinist politics and attitudes." The resolution never states exactly what it means by "Stalinist politics," but from the context (counterposing "Stalinist politics" to "reformism") it is clear that this phrase means exclusively the Gates group's defense of and attachment to the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy.

The criticisms of Gates in my resolution were far clearer and more comprehensive. To begin with, I had a far lower opinion of the degree to which Gates had broken with Stalinist politics (in any sense) than did most of the Right-Wing comrades (their resolution stated, without any qualification, that the Gates tendency "can be characterized as the anti-Russian, pro-democratic grouping"). I believe that my belief that the Gates group had yet to break fundamentally with Stalinist politics, that its position was only "relatively to the left" of Foster, has been fully confirmed by the continued retreat of the Gatesites on the key question of Hungary, by their failure to make any sort of political fight on this point at the recent CP convention.

The key points on which I criticized Gates and the Right-Wing resolution did not were exactly those aspects of Stalinist politics that dealt with the country we, as well as Gates, live in, the U.S. Specifically, I stated: "equally important, they have made no move to break with the class-collaborationist, reformist, and co-existence aspects of Stalinist politics. In the recent election campaign the Daily Worker supported Stevenson openly and vigorously. The Gates group rejected the perspective of a labor party and proposed instead a 'peoples' anti-monopoly coalition' which would include sections of the capitalist class. New Deal type class-collaboration is similarly the real content of Gates' proposed 'American path to socialism' which is strictly parliamentary and reformist in form." The basic difference between the Left and Right wings in the YSL lies in the fact that we consider these points to be the very essence of socialist politics in America today, while the Right Wing comrades consider them absolutely inessential at present.

The basic rationale for this attitude toward the Stalinists (which appears, as we will see, as a function of a more fundamental attitude toward Social-Democracy) is that the movement of Stalinists in a reformist direction should not be criticized because social-democracy represents a step forward as against Stalinism. This proposition needs to be examined, because it has a solid kernel of truth -- the fact that, because of their subservience to totalitarianism, their readiness to execute any turn, no matter how harmful to the interests of the working class at a moment's notice on the orders of Moscow, their persecution (the foreign analogue, or supplement to, GPU murders) or revolutionists, and the general discredit they cast upon socialism, the Stalinist should be classed as furthest to the right of all tendencies claiming to play a role in the working class movement. But this true proposition becomes radically false in the use the YSL right-wing claims to make of it.

This is so because, in refusing to criticize social-democratic tendencies because they are preferable to Stalinism the Right-Wing comrades forget two vital things -- that we are not academic spectators of political evolution, but active participants representing a revolutionary socialist position that regards the politics of both Stalinism and Social-Democracy as anti-socialist, for one thing, and for another they forget the inter-relationships between Stalinist and Social-Democratic politics.

Thus the YSL Right Wing does not conceive of its primary task in relationship to the Stalinists as influencing them in the direction of their own, presumably revolutionary socialist ideas, but as influencing them to become social-democrats. Sonny defended this in the plenum discussion by postulating two distinct phases: "After they break with Stalinism you can discuss criticism of them within the socialist movement." Implicit in this approach is a division of political questions into two types -- those which are strictly subjects for dispute within the socialist movement, and those which differentiate socialism in general from other

tendencies. An example of the first type is the CP's support of the Democratic Party, of the second its apologies for bureaucratic despotism in Russia. What this neat, schematic approach misses is the class viewpoint. Support to the Democratic party, even if given by someone (like a Stalinist or Social-Democrat) who calls himself a socialist, is support of the political instrument of the capitalist class, and therefore an anti-socialist political act. More important, it represents an anti-socialist position on the most important question of American politics, the need for political independence of the working class. "Reformism" as such is an abstraction, a theory susceptible of academic discussion within the socialist movement. It becomes anti-socialist politics only when it is concretized in the form of class-collaboration such as support to the Democratic party. The underlying reason why our right-wingers fail to define this aspect of the CP's politics as anti-socialist is that they have refused to make such a definition of the essentially similar politics of the CP-SDF (see in particular the article by Debbie Meier "On Unity" in the current YSR. I will deal with this, and another, less honest article in the next YSR).

The key point in considering Stalinist politics, which the Right wing is absolutely incapable of understanding (judging from the recent discussion on the 1956 elections), is that support to capitalism and class-collaboration are an integral aspect of Stalinist politics. The Stalinist bureaucracy is an anti-working class social force. Its main fear, particularly today (though this has always been true), is that the workers under its rule will rise and annihilate it and its corrupt rule. The prerequisite for its continued domination over the workers of Russia (and now of East Europe) is the preservation of capitalism in the "West", for the victory of proletarian revolution in a single advanced country would signify its immediate doom. That is why Stalinism has everywhere sought to tie the workers to the national capitalists, to make a deal with every national bourgeoisie.

Stalinism has been the invaluable political support for social-democracy, the invaluable political support for capitalism. This has taken various forms: indirect -- the repugnance of many workers at Stalinist totalitarianism and their fear of Stalinist conquest have been invaluable to the Social-Democrats in making their pro-capitalist politics palatable to the advanced working classes of West Europe, and direct -- the political support of Stalinism to social-democracy has been expressed either through open support of Social-Democratic parties and governments, or through "ultra-left" sectarian policies which isolated Communist workers from their Social-Democratic class brothers and disrupted any possibility of united action of the working class.

The inter-relationship of Stalinist and Social-Democratic politics is best illustrated by France. Ever since the days of the "Popular Front" the SFIO has been able to exist and play its treacherous role only thanks to Thorez and Co. Within the past year, for instance, the Mollet social-democratic government received

the support of the French CP when it asked for "special powers" (such as the legal right to maintain concentration camps) to prosecute the Dirty War in Algeria. On several occasions since then, the last quite recent, Mollet has been able to remain in power only by CP votes in Parliament. What relevance does this have to the politics of the YSL Right Wing? In its own terms it illuminates the essential relationship between Stalinism and Social Democracy as world political currents, but the "French Question" also came up at the plenum in more direct form.

In the course of the discussion Mike asserted that "A Social Democracy is 100 times better than a Stalinist". In virtual unison, Tim and I interpellated "Does that go for Mollet?" As Harrington said yes Debbie intervened with the assertion that "Mollet isn't a Social Democrat" (and in her YSR article, Debbie even attempts to "develop" this idea, which will no doubt come as surprise to the other parties of the Second International, including the SP-SDF, which up to now have been under the misapprehension that they had a comrade in a "position of power" (a phrase for which we are indebted to none other than the supposed future official organ of our movement, the Call in France, and who have not, to date, manifested a notable eagerness to expel this "non-Social-Democrat" from the highest councils of International Social Democracy!) This lamentable exchange shows the political depths to which the pro-Social-Democratic line of the YSL Rights has led them - they are faced with the choice between whitewashing the butcher Mollet as "100 times better" than his supporter Thorez, or else whitewashing Social-Democracy by dissociating it from the crimes of one of its top leaders and representatives.

Thus we see the crippling effect of the Right Wing's political adaptation to Social-Democracy upon their criticism of Stalinist politics, just as we earlier saw the crippling effect of their maneuvers with the American Social-Democrats upon their hoped for new tactical orientation toward the American Stalinist youth. Only the Left Wing of the YSL has projected a fully effective political criticism of Stalinism, just as only the YSL Left Wing has an approach to regroupment capable of making a real appeal to youth in the process of breaking with Stalinism.

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SOME FURTHER COMMENTS ON THE UNITED FRONT
AND ON THE CP

By Tim Wohlforth

THE UNITED FRONT

Recently, we were able to see in reality the meaning of the NEC majority's position on the united front. At the most recent buisness meeting of the NY unit which is controlled by this "majority", concrete proposals for implementing the united front tactic were discussed. The first

was on Algeria. I proposed in the NY Exec that we call for a joint protest meeting of all radicals including the CP and the SP-SDF to protest the Algerian war and to raise money for the persecuted socialists in France. The Exec decided that such a meeting should be called by the American Committee on Africa and made it clear that for its part it was opposed to inviting the CP into such a venture.

Thus in order to preserve their purity and "respectability" in the eyes of the social democracy they are missing a golden opportunity to reach the CP rank and file on an issue on which many of them would respond warmly. This would give us an opportunity to test the CP leadership and expose them if they refused to cooperate with Socialists, Trotskyists, including as well as to reach the membership directly on an issue which could easily lead to their separation from stalinist politics once the line of the French CP was explained to them. Many of them are not aware of this line.

The next issue was even more clear in its implications and of much greater significance for the YSL as it involved the youth field. The Exec has been working on a proposed city-wide radical youth conference for several months. It has been trying to get the pacifists to arrange it. But as this didn't work out they suggested that the Debs club run the whole business and in that way the whole thing would be under our control. I suggested that if we were serious about the united front and therefore about building the YSL we should invite in all the radical youth in the city to take part in the symposium and in sponsoring it. I suggested the Los Angeles program as a model. This would be the only way to ensure the participation of the various ex-LYL clubs and would provide an excellent opportunity of getting into contact with these people. I reminded the comrades that the NY unit had admitted at the plenum that they could not find LYL oriented clubs which should be invited in. I asked the comrades just what they were afraid of as the LYL was in a state of dissolution and could only gain by such an approach. After a brief discussion my position was voted down by the supporters of the NEC majority.

Thus we see in reality the correctness of Shane's analysis on just who in the YSL is serious about recruiting the ex-LYLers and therefore who is really dedicated to building the YSL.

ON THE CP

I would like to make just a few brief comments on Comrade Shane's position on the Gates group. Before the plenum just on the basis of reading his resolution and not having a chance to discuss its real meaning with him I abstained from voting for it. At the plenum after hearing the real differences between Shane's position and the majority I voted for the resolution but with a statement. I did this because I felt that the basic line of Shane's document was

of a totally different nature than the majority's. It was written by a revolutionist whose main function in life is not to build the social democracy. His support of Gates was of highly critical nature and different in kind from the majority.

Still I felt and still feel Shane has made a mistake in formulating the conception of critical support to Gates. It seems clear to me that it is impossible to characterize Gates as to the left of Foster. In certain ways by partially breaking from his ties with the Kremlin bureaucracy and strengthening his ties with the Gomulka regime Gates did move somewhat. At the same time he moved even closer to the social democracy with his line to dissolve the party, etc. This I do not consider a leftward move in any significant sense of the term.

The main bulk of the decent element in the CP have been and remain tied to neither faction in the CP bureaucracy, this is a simple empirical fact known to all who know the CP. Our task is not to support either faction but to build some sort of broad rank and file caucus of those who are sick of stalinism but who are not willing to join the forces of American imperialism. Such a task is not easy but it remains the only way. Of course in the meantime we should urge that the CPers to vote in such a way at conventions so that neither faction gets solid control of the party and thus ensure a continuation of the discussion.

FROM OUT OF THE PAGES OF THE PAST---BY MAX SHACHTMAN

Neither Social-Democracy nor stalinist totalitarianism leads to socialism, The Second International of the Social-Democrats is bankrupt and in a state of collapse. The Third International of the Stalinists has been formally dissolved by decree. Revolutionary socialists everywhere work to rebuild the world-wide organization of social revolution, the Fourth International.

The road to freedom is marked out by the principles and program of revolutionary socialism, and no other road exists. The organization which proudly champions and fights for these principles and program in this country in the Workers Party.

---From the Fight For Socialism

AN OPEN LETTER TO COMRADES DRAPER AND HASKELL

Hal and Gordon

March 5th, 1957

Dear Comrades,

Recent developments in the YSL and ISL centering around the question of socialist unity have made mandatory a full and complete discussion of the issues involved.

As you know I am no longer a member of the ISL. In view, however, of the close relationship that has existed between the ISL and YSL and the fact that decisions made in the ISL have a considerable influence on the YSL, of which I am a member, I believe it perfectly proper to address you on matters concerning the ISL in an open and frank manner.

I address this letter to you specifically not because of any past association, personal or comradely, but because the two of you represent that which is best in the national leadership of the ISL. You are, the two of you, the real active national leadership of the ISL (one on LABOR ACTION, the other in the National Office) and at the same time have a history, admittedly mixed, of generally representing the more "left" political position on the ISL Political Committee.

Without going into any detail, or entering into a senseless discussion of what is "right" and what is "left", it is certainly fair to state that on various political and organizational questions you have at times been forced to play the role of a left minority on the P.C. in opposition to the Shachtman-Gates tendency.

You have seldom, if at all, however, carried these questions to the national membership of your organization, to the best of my knowledge, in a sharp fashion. That is, you have struggled for your views in minimal terms (mainly in committee, less often in the N.Y. Branch meetings, and still less often in national discussion articles) and have showed disinterest in organizing support for your positions on a national level.

The recent convention of the ISL bears this out. Though you have presented some of your views to the convention body you have not called for election of delegates on the basis of a division on your differences.

To sum it up simply, you have not, to date, made a real all-out struggle against the open reformist drift represented by the Shachtman-Gates tendency.

Perhaps you felt the issues involved were not of a vital or pressing nature or, and this was certainly sometimes the case, you lacked precise agreement between yourselves. Perhaps you were too immersed in your almost unbelievably heavy routine

day-to-day work load and just lacked the time and energy that an all out struggle would entail. Perhaps, also, you felt that such a struggle would result in the collapse of the ISL, since you viewed Shachtman's continued membership as essential in "holding the ISL together" and believed that if he were politically forced out LABOR ACTION, all that really counted, would cease to exist. Perhaps, finally, you felt bound by ISL "loyalty" and equated any attack on Shachtman with "creeping SWPism."

The truth probably lies in some combination of the above, rather than in one single factor, but this is unimportant. What is significant now is the unity question in all of its ramifications.

Shachtman has taken a stand. The logical political consequences of his position can only lead to the liquidation of the ISL into the SP-SDF.

This is not "phrase-mongering." His unity approach leads not to real unity but rather to the ISL dissolving with members entering the PS-SDF as individuals on the basis of the SP-SDF's current politics. You have admitted as much in your recent substitute "Motion on Socialist Unity."

I by no means agree with the stand you have taken. I think you err in singling out the SP-SDF (which, catch-phrases notwithstanding, is clearly lined up behind the U.S. State Dept.) for especial unity overtures, in positing the line of "an all-inclusive party" in this period, etc.

While we certainly should discuss these differences any intelligent reading of your recent document can only lead to the conclusion that you have far more in common with us than with Shachtman.

It is impossible to press upon you a discussion of our differences at this point though, despite your personal loyalties to Shachtman, you cannot, as serious socialists, avoid such a discussion in long-range terms.

What is apparent now, to the newest member of either of our organizations, is that it is mandatory that you now make an all out political and organizational struggle for your point of view. As responsible socialists you can do no less.

Previous considerations no longer apply. "Loyalty," "the SWP threat," "overwork," "holding the ISL together," etc., no longer have validity. If Shachtman's policy wins out there will be no ISL to be loyal to, hold together, work for, etc. The question now before the ISL is that of its continued existence as a political tendency. We know that Shachtman proposes to liquidate this political tendency into the SP-SDF and that we, despite our differences, oppose his efforts.

Your role in the past despite (or perhaps because of) your extensive individual contributions to the cause of socialism has been an unfortunate one, from your point of view. If there has been a tendency (and to the extent there has been I personally deplore it) of "left" elements in the ISL and YSL to move toward the SWP, the responsibility for this is largely yours. You, the most talented, best informed, able comrades have consistently failed to provide an alternative left leadership to the increasingly blatant reformist politics of the Shachtman-Gates tendency.

By default Shachtman is handed his "majority." He, Shachtman, is making a national tour to reinforce and strengthen his position on the unity question. Are you, Hal, going to make a national tour to posit your opposing point of view? Or, as in the past, are you going to wage a "part-time" struggle -- even though the question now involved is the very existence of the political point of view you've devoted your life to? And you, Gordon, are you going to go on literally working yourself to death keeping Shachtman's ISL functioning right up to the day he cuts the organization's throat?

You, Hal, how long are you going to continue to misrepresent the nature of the SP-SDF in the pages of the newspaper you edit? Lying by omission is still lying. You and I both attended a certain session of the last SP Convention in Chicago, and you and I both know (as do others who were there) that the "story" you printed in L.A. on this session was a "whitewash" job and had almost nothing in common with the reactions you verbally expressed during and after this session. Are you allowed to reprint the SP-SDF "Memorandum of Understanding" or must this be left to the YSL left wing while you sit gagged and, I trust, gagging?

These questions are not rhetorical or aimed at embarrassing either of you. I do not raise publicly my personal experiences as an ISL member, experiences you are both well aware of, and I have no interest in "hurting" the ISL to the benefit of the SWP. Contrary to the runours circulated by persons who obviously prefer to remain nameless I am still a third camp socialist (as are the majority in the YSL Left) and consider the continued existence of the ISL, as a third camp revolutionary socialist organization, of the utmost importance.

If I, and others, can no longer function in the ISL, and must oppose the Shachtmanite agents of the ISL in the YSL, it is because you have failed to oppose Shachtman's policies in a serious or meaningful fashion.

We of the YSL Left, and I'm sure I can speak for all of us on this, consider you comrades in the deepest sense. We have our differences, but they can be discussed in a frank and comradely fashion.... they are not the question before us.

The question we must jointly face reduces itself to one of revolutionary socialism, whatever its coloration, versus reformist opportunism. If you consider this formulation "sectarian" I ask only that you provide another.

I hope I shall receive an answer to this letter, publicly or privately, and trust that it will be your answer, not an answer dictated for you by Shachtman's artificial majority on the P.C.

Warmest comradely greetings,

Scott Arden

SOME COMMENTS BY COMRADE SHACHTMAN ON THE SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

They want socialism, but not the class struggle, which is the only road to socialism. They want capitalist democracy as the basis for socialism, but because they will not defend even democracy with the militant methods of the class struggle for fear of antagonizing their partners the "democratic capitalists", they soon find their democracy and their privileges disappearing. They fear the socialist revolution so much—because the Workers Government would end all special privileges, theirs included—that they find themselves attacking it on the side of the capitalist reaction.

In one country after another their theories have so drugged and paralyzed the working class that it proved ~~impossible~~ incapable of militant and effective resistance to reactionary assaults upon it. It had to pay for these theories and practices in the form of fascist dictatorship and indescribable agonies. The Social Democrats did not gain socialism and they cannot gain it. They did not even maintain capitalist democracy or their position in it—they lost both.

A number of groups and parties throughout the world try to take a position in between that of revolutionary socialism and social reformism. They endeavor to mix the two, which is like mixing fire and water. The result is the obscuring steam of confusion. In the United States, these "Centrist" parties, which are neither flesh nor fowl, nor good red herring, are represented by the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party in the United States is an especially confused and confusing example of "Centrism". It is a mixture of middle class pacifism, "Christian socialism", liberalism, "isolationism", hostility to revolutionary socialist theory and action, and hero-worship. It sometimes speaks more radically than the Social-Democracy, but it has even more bureaucratic leadership than they and differs less and less from them in practical policies and activities. All the experience of such in-between movements shows that if they do not adopt the program of revolutionary socialism, they degenerated completely to the Social-Democratic position. Or else they become stagnant, impotent sects which justify their separate existence mainly on the ground that they are not firm revolutionists and not complete Social-Democrats but only—in-betweeners.