

## DON HARRIS AND HIS EPOCH

By Tim Wohlforth

Menshevism is something more than a particular evaluation of the Russian Revolution. It involves a whole approach to Marxism and with it a whole method of analysis and thought about politics and history which is the antithesis of the dialectical method, the mainspring of Marxism.

Here I do not intend to dwell on the pros and cons of the Menshevik theory of the Russian Revolution whether as expounded by a Martov or by a Plekhanov or a Dan. Instead I wish to focus on Menshevik methodology. The basis of all Menshevik thinking is a certain static conception of Marxism, not as a dialectical interrelation of many factors developing at different tempos and each in turn influencing the development of the others, but rather a view of history as a series of necessary and absolute stages applicable to all places and times. Thus the Mensheviks in Russia insisted that Russia must go through all the stages of development in the same general way as did the German social democracy.

This general view Trotsky exploded with his general law of combined and uneven development (see the January Labour Review for an excellent treatment of this) and the specific application of this law to underdeveloped countries in our epoch, the theory of permanent revolution. This general view was based on the supposition that stages are sometimes skipped and that the working class in one country never has to repeat in exactly the same way the stages gone through by the working class of another country. The working class can take advantage of the lessons of the class struggle in other countries, just as the capitalist class in, say, Japan can take advantage of the techniques of modern capitalist development so as to race through a whole stage in its development.

However there is a second and highly significant element in Menshevik thought. This element is in fact the most basic of all. It is that in any given historical period the Menshevik discovers one reason or another why the working class cannot carry out its tasks and why we must support other and alien class forces (critically, of course). The classic example of this is found in the Menshevik approach to the Russian Revolution, where they critically supported the liberal bourgeoisie and ended up in this camp instead of the camp of the working class.

These two basic conceptions of Menshevik thought have nothing in common with Marxism even though the Menshevik relies on a schematic conception of Marxism to justify his position. In fact the Menshevik will tell you -- as he did in 1917 -- that he and only he is a genuine Marxist and that his Bolshevik opponents are sectarian and the like.

The Menshevik mode of thought, alas, did not pass away with the passing of the Russian Mensheviks and has a significance in many areas. An excellent example of this has been furnished in

our movement by Don Harris. For months now the ISL and its supporters in the YSL have been talking about unity with the Social Democrats, about joining the SP-SDF with its present leadership as loyal members, and about the role of this SP-SDF in the regroupment process today and in the future of the American working class. However most of this talk has been on the pure tactical level and very little of it has probed into the theoretical questions involved. Comrade Harris deserves the commendation of the whole movement for clarifying the discussion by placing it on the theoretical plane.

He and he alone has offered the only theoretical justification for the present unity move. That the majority realises this is well illustrated by the way in which they immediately defended Comrade Harris's approach and by the way in which many ideas similar to Comrade Harris's have sneaked half-baked into a number of articles written by the supporters of unity.

Comrade Harris's basic views can be summed up in the following manner: 1. We are living in the epoch of the social democracy; 2. The task of Marxists for the next historical period is therefore to build a mass social-democratic movement; 3. With the help of this movement and under the impetus of the labor bureaucracy (which is to the left of the working class) a labor party will be formed; 4. Within this labor party the social democrats, with our aid, will struggle against the liberals for control of the party; 5. After the socialist labor party is formed under the leadership of the social democracy and only then will the difference between social democrats and revolutionaries be of any significance; 6. Sometime after this (we must be in the middle of the 21st Century by now!) the epoch of the social democracy will close and the epoch of revolutions and wars announced falsely by Lenin and Trotsky a century or two earlier will be ushered in.

This grandiose and detailed map of the stages through which the working class must pass is obviously a Menshevik method of analysis. Here we find all the characteristics of the earliest Menshevism. Marxism is reduced to a dead schema. We in America must pass through the identical stages passed through by the British working class. Other comrades with a similar mode of thought blithely talk of the revival of the "Debsian" party (minus all that Debs stood for, of course). A second characteristic found in this theory is the familiar one of handing history to someone else. In this case Harris hands the epoch to the SP-SDF even though it seems to have little interest in accepting this gift, nor does it show any sign of being capable of carrying out the historic tasks laid out for it so magnificently by Harris. Thus the development of socialism, at least for the next epoch, is placed not in the hands of the working class but in the hands of the privileged labor bureaucracy and its lieutenants in the socialist movement, the SP-SDF.

As a concomitant of this Harris feels he must critically support and build, not an independent working-class movement, but the social democracy which supports the capitalist class. This



is similar to the Menshevik support of the liberal bourgeoisie to which they also handed the next stage of the development of the working class.

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Thus we see/the mode of thought symbolized by Harris and adopted in a half-baked way by the right wing is essentially a Menshevik one. However to label it so does not prove it to be incorrect. I believe Menshevism is just as fallacious in this period as it was in 1917. Let's look at reality. The first important factor ignored by Harris is the development of American capitalism. America is no longer the country it was in 1900. Capitalism is more highly developed, the working class infinitely larger and potentially more powerful, and America is the major world imperialist power.

This presents an entirely different situation for the development of the American working class. The workers are more highly organized and when they move, they will undoubtedly move more swiftly and with much more force than was true in 1900 when the capitalist system still had some capacity for reform.

When the present crisis of U.S. capitalism which expresses itself in the need for massive subsidization of the economy -- primarily for military objectives, in the hope of survival -- exhausts the present and future resources of labor either absolutely or relatively the class struggle will be sharpened on a plane much higher than in the Thirties. Furthermore, considering the international situation its significance will be even greater.

Thus to postulate a whole epoch for social democracy is to state that American capitalism can not only survive for an epoch but also that it can afford the luxury of reformism. Such a supposition can only be substantiated by claiming, in chorus with the liberals, that American capitalism has solved its contradictions at least for the next epoch. If this is your view state so honestly and present us with an alternative view of capitalist development than that furnished by Marx and developed since his time by the Marxist movement.

Also to postulate such an epoch, one must be blind to what is going on throughout the world. Trotsky and Lenin characterized our epoch as the epoch of "wars and revolution" -- the epoch of imperialist decay. When we look at the world we see Trotsky's and not Harris's view confirmed. We see the masses in motion -- in the colonial areas against imperialism and in the Stalinist empire itself. We do not see the social democracy holding out anywhere except in Western Europe where it lives off American aid and military support. The future of these social democrats is likewise bound up in the stability of American capitalism.

Thus we see that all evidence tends to disprove Comrade Harris's theory. However, I for one am not willing to exclude any particular variant suggested as the possible course of the American working class. But I do reject out of hand Comrade Harris's theory that the working class must develop only in the

way he describes.

I think the development will be more radical and that certain of the stages (namely the SP-SDF) will be skipped over. I am open to the suggestion that maybe the working class will go first to the SP-SDF before it comes to revolutionaries. But before I base a move such as the dissolution of our movement on this gamble I insist upon evidence. Namely, I insist that the right wing present evidence of such a movement on the part of the working class. So far it has not done so. And as I have stated, all the evidence seems to point in the other direction.

In order to facilitate the discussion I hope the right-wing comrades will state their feelings on this matter. Do they or do they not agree with Harris's theory? If they do not, what theory do they offer as a substitute?

Also, and this goes particularly for Harrington, I hope they will answer the arguments we raise and not distortions of these arguments. Comrade Harrington please note: I do not exclude a moderate evolutionary development. I just have my doubts about it and demand evidence. Furthermore I do not say that today is the same as 1917. In fact an important part of the argumentation is that it is not, and that is one reason why the rebirth of a "Debsian" movement is at least questionable.

However, no matter which way a labor party is formed (Comrade Harrington, we are FOR a labor party) I do reject out of hand the notion that it will be the bureaucracy that forms it as a force to the left of the working class. The bureaucracy will break from capitalist politics only if forced to in the interests of keeping its privileged position. As a Marxist, I feel that such a basic change as the formation of a labor party can only grow out of the class struggle -- that is, the struggle of the working class for its own interests -- interests which conflict with the bureaucracy as well as the capitalist class. Thus no matter how the labor party is formed, those who are closest to the working class and at the same time furthest away from the bureaucracy will play the greatest role in its formation.

The SP-SDF represents in its ideology the labor bureaucracy. Today the labor bureaucracy is not social-democratic. The day it becomes social-democratic will be the day when it needs to do so as a protection against the militant pressure of the working class, to prevent it from taking power. To hold otherwise is to deny the whole history of the development of the social democrats as well as to deny Marxism which sees as the motive force in our epoch the working class, not a privileged stratum which, while part of the working class, uses its apparatus in order to protect its separate interests from the workers and in order to defend the bourgeois order to which it is inextricably tied.

Those who enter the SP-SDF are entering the camp of the labor bureaucrats and will find their hands tied in the struggle for a labor party which will be in part a struggle against this very same labor bureaucracy. This is the proposition before us and it is this that Comrade Harris is trying to find a theoretical justification for in his Menshevik theory.

THE SHAMAN AND THE SWAMP

By S. Aesop

Once upon a daydream, not too long ago, in a mighty nation, not too far away, there lived two groups of people, very far apart.

One was called the Redmen, no one quite knew why; the others were called the Others, because they were. The Redmen were very very few but there were lots and lots of Others. This was not always the case, it was said, and the tribal tablets told of a time when lots (but never lots and lots) of Others were Redmen. This was long ago.

The Redmen were a quarrelsome lot, few as they were, and did not live together. They lived in separate tribes, each being the True Redmen tribe, and when Redmen from two tribes met they sometimes argued most noisily. They only agreed, all of them, that one day the Great Power would fix it so everyone would be a Redman. And they, or most of them, tried to help the Great Power, from time to time, but never did too well.

Nevertheless, in between quarreling, and changing tribes, the Redmen thought hard about the Great Power and performed many rituals and made strong incantations to bring its day closer. Each tribe had its own ritual and sometimes several -- for though the tribes were small there were many views and oftentimes a tribe would be divided into clans each with its own ritual.

Now one day it came about that all the Redmen began to quarrel about a new idea. This idea was that all Redmen should join together and make one bigger small tribe instead of several smaller small tribes.

It would seem that this idea came to them because the biggest tribe of Redmen -- which was not really a Redman tribe but only just said it was -- because this biggest tribe's Mighty Medicine Man had died and the new Shaman could no longer hide the badness of his ritual. It was a very very bad ritual indeed and real Redmen began to leave this tribe.

Now it happened that each of the little tribes (except for one that lived on a high plateau, and another that lived in a swamp) wanted these Redmen to come live with them, or best yet, as was stated, for all Redmen to get together and form one bigger small tribe.

One of these little tribes was very excited. Its strongest clan was run by a sort of Redman who was called Mighty Shaman. He was headman because he had made his own ritual, could make awesome incantations, and mainly because out of the many tribes he had been in he had made this one.

Mighty Shaman's tribe was small and old but it lived right



next to a younger and stronger tribe. This younger tribe bowed down to Mighty Shaman and used his ritual and made his nephew, Little Shaman, headman because Little Shaman knew the ritual real well and could make almost as much noise as Mighty Shaman.

The Redmen in Little Shaman's tribe were even more excited about tribal unity and talked about it all the time.

But Mighty Shaman had a strange idea all his own. In his wanderings he had once lived with the tribe in the swamp and he always regretted leaving. He had heard that another tribe (of very pale Redmen to be sure) was coming back to live in the swamp and make it even better for swamp dwellers.

Now it should not be thought that the swamp was not a nice safe place for a Redman to live. It was. In the swamp a Redman could ooze down into the warm mire up to his neck and almost no one would know he was a Redman if he did not tell them.

Besides, in the swamp a Redman was safe from the Others. The Others (or some of them) were sometimes very mean to the Redmen and would not let them hunt or fish in certain places and even worse. But not in the swamp. In the swamp the Others did not do bad things to Redmen and if the swamp tribe behaved well (which they were very good at doing) and kissed the feet of the Others and took parts of the Religion of the Others into the tribal ritual (which they did) why then they were allowed to hunt and fish all over.

Well, Mighty Shaman decided he was lonesome for the swamp and called together his Pow-wow Council. Some of the witch-doctors on the Pow-wow Council thought the slime was too deep in the swamp but they were hooted down by the elders who kept thinking of how warm and safe and comfortable it would be.

So it happened that Mighty Shaman called in Little Shaman and told him to prepare the younger tribe to march into the swamp. Little Shaman went back to his tribe and incanted long and loud. The other leaders of his clan finally gave in because he allowed them to think that the real reason for going into the swamp was to pump out all of the mud and build a fine strong tribe which would gain many Others.

Some of Little Shaman's tribal brothers rebelled, however, and formed a new clan. They pointed into the swamp at the unhappy younger swamp dwellers, and also they said that they did not want to give up their ritual for that of the swamp. They called for a new bigger tribe of all Redmen, including the unhappy swamp dwellers, on firm dry land and with a good ritual.

Mighty Shaman and Little Shaman and their lesser headmen became very unhappy because of this. They sent out the story that the new young clan was not loyal to the ritual and was made up of scouts and spies from an enemy tribe.

This was a big un-truth but it scared many of the undecided members of Little Shaman's tribe and some of them stopped thinking rebellious thoughts and came again to sit placidly at the feet of Mighty Shaman.

They noticed, however, that Mighty Shaman's feet gave off a strange odor and were covered with clay and slime, due to his explorations in the swamp.

Many of them just could not stand the odor and they went to the new clan and made it strong.

Finally the Shamanites could not stand dry land any longer and they gathered up their followers and, after begging the permission of the muddiest swamp dwellers, they snuck into the swamp to live.

They found it so pleasant that most of them slipped all the way down in the muck and buried themselves so deeply that after a very short while no one, Redman or Other, ever heard from them again.

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OUT OF THE PAST

NUMBER TWO

But if the Thomas-Tyler party is torn to shreds and has been left weak and emasculated, the left wing is not. Robust and self-confident, the revolutionary Marxists stand on the granite foundation of principle laid by the great masons of the scientific socialist movement. Even in the moments of the greatest difficulty, of reaction, they remain inspired by their principles, and, unlike the muddleheads and dillettantes, do not abandon them in the pursuit of those will-o'-the-wisp "revelations" of "New Truths" which, upon examination, prove to be warmed-over ashes from the cozy fireside of reformism, class-collaboration, and social-patriotism. The foundations for the new party of the Fourth International in this country, which is sure of its growth and its victory, cannot but be the rock of Marxism, of Bolshevism, cleared of the rubbish left by Stalinism and social democracy.

-----From the introduction to Stalinism  
And Bolshevism By Leon Trotsky written  
by Max Shachtman

## LABOR ACTION AND THE RACKET PROBE

By Martha Wohlforth

The current Senate investigation of labor racketeering is daily unearthing lurid details about the connection of certain corrupt union officials with the underworld, vice, government, and business. This committee, the Senate Select Committee on Labor and Management Practices, will keep these unsavory details in the headlines, day after day, for months and even years. The effect of such an atmosphere of hysteria on public opinion provides an unequalled opportunity for an attack on the entire labor movement and for an intensive drive to put through anti-labor legislation at every level of government. A "right-to-work" bill has recently passed the state legislature in Indiana, a major industrial state with 600,000 union members. A similar bill failed by only two votes in the Idaho Senate. In Delaware, leaders of both parties are making a strong effort to push a "right-to-work" bill. The NAM has released a new batch of anti-labor propaganda. Labor leaders have virtually given up all hope of repealing the anti-labor legislation in the eighteen states where it now exists. They frankly state that the "Congressional climate is not conducive to any move for Federal action to shut the door to state rule over union security (N.Y. Times, March 4, 1957).

In the midst of such an attack on the union movement, when the very right to strike and organize are seriously threatened, it is the clear duty of every militant socialist to come to the defense of labor: to point out to the well-meaning but misguided liberal public the dangers inherent in the situation: to destroy the illusion that the bourgeois government, the enemy of labor, can solve the workers' problems for them.

Labor Action has failed pitifully in this important task. Several articles by Ben Hall and Jack Wilson have put forth an attitude of virtually uncritical support to the labor bureaucracy (albeit the "progressive" section of that bureaucracy) and its policy of cooperating with government investigations of unions and denying to union officers the right to hold office if they invoke the Fifth Amendment. Several union papers, among them Hotel and Ford Facts, -- which fortunately, in this case, have a far larger circulation among workers than does Labor Action -- have taken a far more correct and more militant stand on the question than has Labor Action.

The official union policy, recently adopted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council, is that union officials have a responsibility to cooperate with governmental investigations of labor organizations and that those who invoke the Fifth Amendment have "no right to hold office." In addition, the Reuther leadership of the UAW stated that it actually "welcomed" the government investigation.

The most basic flaw in Labor Action's approach is this: at the outset it should have stated the obvious, namely that the problem of racketeering can never be solved under capitalism. The most im-



portant fact that the present investigation is clarifying is that labor racketeering could not exist without the active participation of a section of the ruling class. Illegal activities among the corrupt elements in the unions are inextricably linked with business, big and small, and with city, state, and even Federal government. The Senate committee may be able to get a Hoffa or a Dio (though even that is not too likely) but the big, well-known and highly respectable men who are undoubtedly behind the Hoffas and the Dios -- these the Committee would not want to get even if it were able. Furthermore the personal motivations of the racketeers, consciously expressed by many of them in the hearings on welfare funds last year, reflect the pressures of this profit-oriented society: "The guys on the other side of the bargaining table have Cadillacs and diamond rings," they say, "why not us too?"

Secondly, Labor Action has failed to adequately point up the dangers of entrusting to the enemies of labor a task that should be done by labor itself. Ben Hall admits (LA March 11) that "some commentators maintain that the unions should have voiced a strong unanimous protest against any government investigation." But the unions could not do this, claims Hall, because they failed to clean their own house soon enough and now would be accused of "covering up" for the corrupt elements. It is indeed unfortunate that this government investigation had to occur, according to Hall. But it was made necessary; it is the "evil consequence" of labor's having permitted rackets to flourish for so long. And since it is necessary, claims Hall, there are certain advantages to labor: it will create a climate in which Carey, Reuther, etc., the "progressive" labor bureaucrats, can speak out openly against Hoffa and Beck, and it will speed up their own drive against the racketeers; and the \$350,000. appropriated to the committee, more than labor could ever afford, will enable many facts to be uncovered which the unions can use. So it is not such a bad thing, after all, even though of course it is doing tremendous damage to the prestige of the labor movement.

Of course we socialists cannot excuse the casual and permissive attitude toward corruption which has existed for so long in the labor unions. This, however, is no reason why we have now to jump on the bandwagon, give up all faith in the ability of the labor movement to do its own job. It is not possible under capitalism to eliminate all corruption in the unions; but very significant progress can be made, and the very process of the struggle will sharpen the consciousness of the workers.

On this issue many elements in the unions are far more outspoken than Labor Action. In the Feb. 2 issue of Ford Facts, organ of Local 600, the UAW's largest local, Carl Stellato came out with an attack on the Senate Committee and on the AFL-CIO Council's support of it. He pointed out that labor is quite capable of cleaning its own house, and that the job should not be entrusted to the very people who are the most powerful and outspoken enemies of labor. Had Labor Action reported Stellato's attack, it would undoubtedly have been quick to point out that Stellato is the most outspoken opponent of Reuther in the UAW, and was seizing this opportunity to

make a demagogic attack on Reuther, whom Labor Action has consistently supported through the years. Demagogic or not, Stellato's remarks are perfectly correct, and doubtless reflect much dissatisfaction and pressure from the ranks.

Hotel, organ of the New York Hotel Trades Council, AFL-CIO, has devoted considerable space in its Feb. 25 and March 4 issues to an attack on the official AFL-CIO policy. According to Jay Rubin, Council President, even some of those who voted for the AFL-CIO policy have expressed misgivings about the ultimate consequences. He stated that "it is their feeling that the door has been opened to intervention in union affairs by people who have no interest in labor except to undermine and destroy it. Those taking this view ask whether Congressional committees are really concerned with eliminating racketeers or whether they are seizing upon wrong-doing by a few individuals as a means of launching an attack on the labor movement. ... Among those taking this position are some who are most concerned with cleaning corrupt elements out of the labor movement. But they are frankly doubtful that the job will or can be done by Congressional or other governmental committees and urge that the task is one for labor itself. ... because 'what affects any part of the labor movement affects all,' the International also must speak out against labor's enemies and their efforts to use the sins of a few to smear and destroy the many. The open-shop elements such as the National Association of Manufacturers ... are eager to see labor investigated not because they are concerned with the elimination of racketeering, but because they want to discredit union organization ... cleaning out the few corrupt elements 'is the job of labor alone.'" Rubin also emphasized that the only way the job could be done was to see that control of the unions "is in the hands of the members."

We see, then, that several progressive labor leaders are far more aware of who their enemies are than Labor Action's writers are. This important question is scarcely mentioned in Labor Action. The reactionary composition of the committee is well known to socialists, but at least they should be reminded of it, which Labor Action does not do. McCarthy, Mundt, and McClellan are notorious. Of McClellan the N.Y. Times says, "He fits without apology among the Southern conservatives." The only so-called "friends of labor" on the Committee are McNamara and Kennedy. The pervading tone of both Hall's and Wilson's articles is one of pessimism and lack of faith in the working class to solve its own problems independently of the bourgeois government.

### The "Principle" of the Fifth Amendment

A third weakness, and a very serious one, in Labor Action's treatment is its discussion of the Fifth Amendment. Hall seems overwhelmed by the vague promises in the moral codes of the AFL-CIO Council to uphold the "principle" of the Fifth Amendment. The code states: "We recognize that any person is entitled, in the interests of his individual conscience, to the protection afforded by the Fifth Amendment and reaffirm our conviction that this historical



right must not be abridged." It goes on to say, however, that if a union officer invokes the Amendment "for his personal protection and to avoid scrutiny by proper legislative committees, law enforcement agencies or other public bodies into corruption on his part, he has no right to continue to hold office in his union." This is clearly an invasion on the constitutional provision that an individual does not have to testify against himself, no matter what the reason. If exceptions are made in the case of racketeering, who knows where the line will be drawn next? To prove a person guilty of any crime requires (or should require) evidence other than the accused person's own testimony. It is the elementary duty of a socialist to defend the civil liberties of any person, no matter how despicable his personal actions or his political views may be.

Hall gives four rationalizations for the Council's position:

- 1) It defends the "principle" of the Fifth Amendment. As stated above, defense of a "principle" means nothing unless one is willing to defend it in all its aspects.
- 2) It does not direct its fire at Communists. "By omission it makes a distinction between racketeers and Communists." Wouldn't you agree, Ben, that it might have made slightly better distinction than that?
- 3) The statement is "carefully worded so that it does not apply ... to any and every use of the Fifth Amendment at Senate hearings." So the Fifth Amendment can be used on some occasions. If there are any occasions where it cannot be used, it might as well not exist.
- 4) "The Council does not suggest that such witnesses be penalized by the government for refusing to answer questions," merely that they are not entitled to hold office in a union. The only trouble with this code, Hall goes on to say, is that enforcement of it is left up to each International union, and in many cases they won't bother to enforce it!

Hotel is again, on this point, more aware of reality than is Labor Action. Hotel states: "Some in labor also have expressed concern at what they regard as a surrender of basic constitutional rights. They argue that the Fifth Amendment must be defended in principle and that no right can be given up without imperiling all, including ultimately the right to strike and even to organize." (Emphasis added).

### Labor Action Out of Touch with Labor

Labor Action has its ears so finely tuned to the labor bureaucracy that it fails to hear the grumblings of discontent in the ranks. The statements of Rubin and Stellato provide ample evidence that the policies of the AFL-CIO Council are not being swallowed without protest. But no word of these or similar protests has found its way into the pages of Labor Action. Who should Ben Hall choose to mention as his sole reference to the existence of opposition in the unions to the policy of the Council? No other than Dave Beck! Beck stated that he opposed the policy of the Council regarding the Fifth Amendment and that he would protect the right of Teamster officials to invoke the Amendment. The fact that the Teamsters Union is one of the most corrupt and undemocratic unions



in existence does not mitigate in any way the correctness of Beck's stand. It is significant, I think, that Hall did not, while justly attacking Beck for his crimes against the working class, defend the use of the Fifth Amendment in all cases.

The primary purpose of the Labor Action articles appears to be the description of the various corrupt practices of some union officials. This we can read in gory detail in any daily paper. But a socialist analysis of the real causes of corruption in the labor movement, the role of the labor bureaucracy and the government and their relation to the class nature of our society does not seem to be forthcoming.

This type of reaction is but the latest example of the orientation of the ISL (and the YSL's right wing) to the labor bureaucracy. It seems that in every case where the working class ought to do something, these people find some reason why someone else ought to do it for the workers -- either the trade union bureaucracy, the liberal movement, the social democracy, or the bourgeois government itself.

This orientation is an integral part of the overwhelming drive toward respectability which impels the ISL to regard entry into the SP-SDF as the only solution to its problems. There are many militant comrades in both the ISL and the YSL who consider that the most urgent task for revolutionary socialists is work in the union movement. These comrades must be made to realize that this work will be greatly hindered, if not made actually impossible, unless this bureaucratic outlook is reversed.

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AN URGENT APPEAL FROM THE EDITORS OF THE LEFT WING BULLETIN

We have recieved a large number of requests for the first issue of the LWB from all over the country. We are sorry to announce that the first issue is completely out of stock and we have been forced to turn down a number of requests. We also have a dangerously low supply of the LWB for our files.

We urge anybody who has an extra copy or copies of the first issue to please send them directly to us. We will be glad to reimburse anyone for the postage involved.

We wish to publicly apologize to all those who have been inconvenienced by this. We have increased the run of this new issue and should be able to handle all requests without any difficulty.

---THE EDITORS

LETTER TO A YSL COMRADE

By Shane Mage

Dear Comrade,

Feb. 28, 1957

In this letter I would like to discuss some of the important points raised in this discussion of socialist unity and socialist regroupment.

I think our starting point should be the fact that no one in the YSL is opposed to socialist unification. This is very encouraging to me -- I think it is a sign of political maturity that our organization is free from any hint of an ultra-leftist sectarian insistence on complete theoretical and political agreement. In fact, if any significant number of members of the YSL held such a view, the very existence of the YSL would become impossible, so important are the political differences among leading members of the organization!

The political differences dividing the Left and Right wings of the YSL are thus not at all based on a different opinion as to the need and importance of socialist regroupment. The disagreement is over with whom we should try to unite, and on what basis. Precisely because of this we should try to keep firmly in mind the basic reason why we want socialist regroupment in America today -- otherwise we run the risk of becoming so involved in organizational details and unimportant considerations of all sorts that we forget what it is that we want to achieve by socialist unity.

I think we all, no matter what tendency in the YSL we belong to, can answer that basic question in essentially this way: we want socialist regroupment because we want to form an organization which will be more effective in promoting socialist politics among American workers and American youth. We of the Left Wing go further and define the "socialist politics" we wish to promote explicitly as "independent political action of the working class and the oppressed peoples here and everywhere throughout the world, against both capitalist and Stalinist oppressors." I believe you also conceive this as your political objective as a socialist, and I also think that most members of the YSL who are for unity with the SP-SDF would agree. The question is how can we best apply it in America today.

I answer that we have to start with the possibilities open to us as socialists in America, with the famous "objective situation." I am sure that you're well aware what this means -- that the various socialist groups in the U.S. are not small propaganda groups ("sects") because they want to be, but because the general climate of cold-war prosperity and witch-hunt repression make it impossible for us to form any large scale movement among workers or students. It follows from this that we will not be able to grow out of this propaganda group existence and become a "significant" political

movement as long as the same general economic conditions continue to exist. Now I don't think anyone in the YSL will say a radical economic change is around the corner -- so we are left with a basic perspective of a slow and gradual radicalization of the American working class.

Under these conditions, what will be the organizational form of the American socialist movement? I think we can confidently predict that it will be similar to what it is today -- a relatively small propaganda group (and, remember, we can grow a hell of a lot without beginning to get out of that category!) But this is no reason at all to get discouraged -- socialist politics and socialist ideas are relevant and significant precisely because they represent the future, not the present, imperative necessities of the American Labor Movement. It is very possible for us to grow today, because the war prosperity is wearing thin, the witch-hunt has gotten tired for want of handy victims, the international objective situation has, despite "Doctrines" of one or the other sort, moved away from the immediate threat of major war. The first signs of radicalization are observable today in the American working class, and in the more narrow circles of the Left the emergence of the workers' revolution in E. Europe and its effects on the Stalinists have given us major opportunities for growth in that quarter. The stakes in this discussion of socialist unity are essentially whether or not the YSL will be able to intervene in a positive way to promote the growth of a healthy socialist movement out of this present period of regroupment.

On this basis we can examine more closely the proposals offered by the two tendencies in the YSL. The Right Wing proposes that the YSL (and ISL) dissolve itself as in independent tendency and enter the SP-SDF on the basis of the present politics and leadership of that group. The Left Wing counterposes to this the idea that the YSL should seek to attract to itself all radicals who agree with the basic definition of socialist politics I cited earlier, whatever their differences on a host of other important political and theoretical questions (such as Third Camp, nature of Stalinism, Colonial Revolution, Road to Power). In this respect the YSL would pose itself, in the youth field, as the center of regroupment for the left, hoping that a similar regroupment would take place speedily among "adult" socialist organizations. To an extent, the YSL Left Wing caucus today represents this sort of regroupment -- we seek to include, and actually do include on a basis of full equality, members who differ on many questions but who agree on the need to maintain the YSL as a revolutionary socialist organization.

In discussing these counterposed approaches, I think we have several criteria in mind. If any socialist organization is going to be a propaganda group, shouldn't it be judged first of all on the basis of the propaganda it puts out, ie., on the basis of its political line? Secondly, because even the best



socialist propaganda is worthless if it only remains on paper, what possibility does this organization have to intervene in the actual process of growth of the radical working class consciousness that is today coming into existence? And thirdly, what possibility does it have of today gathering around itself the best elements of the present socialist groups?

Now as to the first point, what is the political line that the SP-SDF is putting forward to the American workers, and will continue to put forward if the ISL and YSL join it? We have qualified their politics as pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist -- and you know that this definition is regourously exact. Do you think that propaganda for the sort of program contained in the SP-SDF "Memorandum of Understanding" aids the cause of socialism in America? If not, doesn't the presence of a supposedly "revolutionary" group like the ISL in the SP-SDF really serve to cover up for the politics of the SP-SDF leadership, to set the seal of genuine socialist upon them? Certainly, in many instances it is important for socialists to join groups with atrocious programs (like trade unions) in order to reach important numbers of workers with their program. But who can say that the SP-SDF has even as many workers in it as the ISL?

Some people have put forward the position that they are for entering the SP-SDF, but only if it changes important aspects of its political position first. Like most center positions, this one is likely to be torn apart by the fire from the two extremes. The Right Wing can say, with absolute accuracy, that the only way to get into the SP-SDF is to accept their terms without reservation -- they would never take us on any other basis. And we of the Left add to that that this is a compelling reason why those who think socialist unity must take place on a socialist (or at least not anti-socialist!) basis cannot be for unity with the SP-SDF.

This seems to be the position of Bogdan in the YSL, of Hal and Gordon in the ISL. But what is the actual political effect of their stand? Don't they, by agreeing with Shachtman and Martin that socialist unity means primarily unity with the SP-SDF concede the main point? What they are doing now, it seems to me, is to establish the basic principle of unity with the SP-SDF. On the basis of this principle, the Right Wing will be able to procede to negotiate unity on their program of complete acceptance of the SP-SDF political line and discipline as the basis for unity. Faced with this eventuality, the center group must split -- some comrades who see no alternative will go along with the majority (a majority only thanks to them) and enter the SP. Others, who are intent on participating only in real socialist regroupment, will refuse to go along with a program which they reject, and will seek to form an alternative center for regroupment together with us of the Left Wing. We will welcome them, of course, but wouldn't

the whole situation at that time be far healthier and better for regroupment (for instance, insofar as the YSL would continue to exist as a center for regroupment) if they had earlier drawn the logical consequences from their political position and joined with the Left to obtain a YSL majority against SP-SDF unity?

As I have stated, the socialist regroupment we of the left advocate would be based squarely on the minimum socialist politics that I outlined. Thus, despite the fact that it very well might have a stand with which many of us disagree on various theoretical questions, it would be able to put forward a really socialist political program to American workers and youth, and we, as a revolutionary tendency, would be able to function within it loyally and with complete freedom. From a political point of view, isn't this infinitely preferable to the Right Wing's proposal which would confine the YSL tendency to an impotent minority in the SP-SDF, and unable to struggle for its views internally, because it has pledged in advance not to take over the SP-SDF (and because, if it did attempt to get its basic political views adopted by the united organizations, that would merely lead to a new split, reducing us to where we are today!)

Now as to the second of these criteria, the possibilities for intervention in the radicalization of the American working class. We all conceive of this radicalization as leading to and through the formation of a labor party. As I showed in my report on the plenum in the first issue of our Bulletin, the Right Wing conceives of this process as a mechanical succession of stages, basing themselves on a formal and a-historical comparison with the experience, half a century ago, of the British labor movement. I don't think I have to add anything to that exposition here, but I think I can clarify this point a little more by examining the actual processes leading to the formation of a Labor Party, and the likely relationship of socialists to them.

Let us look at two examples of the developing radicalization among the American workers: the recent call for a Labor Party by the biggest local in the UAW, and the Dues Protest movement in Steel. Both of these represent a single process -- the rebellion of the workers in America's basic industries against the domination and corruption of their unions by a solid, entrenched, privileged, conservative bureaucracy which serves as a heavy restraint on their class struggle, both in the factory and in politics. This is apparent in the Dues Protest movement, despite the excessively narrow and limited character of its program. It is no less true for being somewhat more indirect in the UAW. Ford Local 600, the UAW's biggest, has continually, under the leadership of Stellato, been the center of rank and file opposition to the Reuther bureaucracy. Its clear call for a Labor Party represents an extension of its intra-union struggle into a straightforward rejection of Reuther's entire political



position of acceptance of an support to the Democratic Party. Now, what can we say about the relationship of the SP-SDF to this process, in reality and not in Max Martin's visionary schema? Our starting point, as Marxists aware of the history and nature of international social-democracy in that the social-democrats, from the viewpoint of class nature and social role, are no different from the labor bureaucrats -- that in fact, in virtually all instances, the social-democratic leaders are simply the political instruments and spokesmen of the labor bureaucracy, and sometimes even more committed to the preservation of the capitalist system than the labor bureaucrats. Is this general proposition untrue of the U.S.? Not historically -- in Debs' time the actual leaders of the SP worked out the theory that the political party and the trade unions were separate arms of the working class, therefore the SP should not interfere in the affairs of the unions (I speak of the Hillquits and Bergers as the actual leaders of the SP, the men who controlled its machinery, above all its electoral and publicistic apparatus. Debs was always the outside leader, who considered himself "above factions" in the life of the party). This meant that, in practise, the SP sided with the Gompers bureaucrats against the revolutionary SP left-wingers like Haywood, who was forced out of both the AFL and the SP.

In the 1930's, when a new and radical generation entered the SP, it seemed to be breaking with this persistent practice, to attempt to organize the SP to pursue a class struggle policy in the unions in a democratic and disciplined fashion. This led directly to the split with the SDF, right-wingers who refused to separate themselves from labor bureaucrats like Dubinsky, who had left the SP at the start of its leftward movement, because they were unwilling even to accept consultation with rank and file SPers in their unions. The high point of this development was reached when the SP split with the SDF and accepted the Trotskyists as members -- but the SP under the pressure of "Popular Frontism" and the New Deal retreated from its left-wing peak, and rejoined the labor bureaucrats and the SDF in supporting LaGuardia, though it had to expel its own left wing to do this.

Today the radicalizing process is long since completely undone, and the SP has returned well behind its starting point by mergin with the SDF, which had steadily and consistently moved right. The political basis of the SP-SDF fusion was complete support to the politics of the labor bureaucracy -- pro-U.S. imperialism in world affairs, pro-Democratic Party in the U.S. Can we expect the SP-SDF to intervene in the labor movement in the way that socialists must in order to speed the formation of a Labor Party -- as open and declared opponents of the Reuther-Meany bureaucracy? To ask that question is to answer it. Despite the fact that the American labor bureaucrats today feel no need for a "socialist" covering, and consequently the official social-democracy is tiny and isolated from the labor movement, the identity of social nature and class interest between the two is what decides!



The final one of the three criteria I set forth was: what represents the best possibility for regrouping today the best elements of the various left-wing groups?

Our starting point here again must be the objective conditions behind the discussion of regroupment in America. It is evident, I think, that the only change in those objective conditions which can in any way promote the regroupment of socialists is the world-wide crisis of Stalinism. Those groups which previously looked toward Russia as representing the realization of Socialism are the ones which have been thrown into confusion by the events of the last year, whose members are questioning their whole previous outlook and seeking a way to form a genuine united organization of American socialism. Doesn't it follow from this that our primary concern should be to find a way to unite with these socialists, to find a way to win them to our political position?

Does unity with the SP-SDF help to achieve this regroupment? On the contrary, I would expect it to preclude it. First of all, the SP-SDF is not for this sort of regroupment -- it wants as members only those who accept its basic politics, not those who seek to maintain their own ideas (and that is why Shachtman is having so much trouble getting the SP-SDF to want even him as a member!) Secondly, the politics of the SP-SDF are positively repulsive to these people, particularly to left-wing youth who seek to act as genuine socialists, not to be forced into the role of apologists for Stevenson and Dulles -- they could just as well stay with Kruschev! And third, the conditions which the Right Wing itself sets for unity are completely undemocratic and should be sufficient to repel anyone who continues to believe that Russia represents a progressive force -- for the actual proposal says that this regroupment should be open to everyone, but that under no circumstances should its political program accept the idea that Russia is any sort of socialist or even workers state. This means that members of the organization will be told that they have no right to get it to adopt their position, even if a majority agrees with them (as it most certainly would if even a large section of those who consider themselves socialists joined it). Can democratic socialists make such a proposal? Can serious political people accept it?

Compare the appeal which the Left Wing of the YSL could make to these groups if it had the majority of the organization. They would be asked to join on the basis of socialist politics, not State Department politics. They would be welcomed as first-class members with full democratic rights, including the right to have their viewpoints adopted if they so desire and get a majority for them, of course within the framework of the basic principles that they would genuinely accept by joining. The largest single organization of the non-Stalinist, non-sectarian left, the SWP, would not be precluded from participating in this regroupment (as it would be by the SP-SDF), but would, on the contrary, place it under considerable pressure to do so.

What I have tried to do by this comparison of the Right and Left wing positions on these points is to show that, in addition to being a principled socialist political stand, the Left Wing proposal for regroupment is more practical, less "sectarian", and of course far more in the interests of the development of American socialism.

One final point. I have heard that the leaders of the Right Wing, particularly Comrade Schachtman, have been accusing the YSL Left Wing of being "agents of the SWP." Now I don't know what effect a formal denial of this by us can have, since we will undoubtedly be accused of hiding our real views, but I can categorically state that this is untrue. We are not out to take as many people as possible into the SWP. We are out to build the YSL as an independent socialist youth organization, including members of all socialist tendencies.

My own political sympathies for the SWP are, of course, well known. I feel that it is the only socialist organization in the U.S. that has maintained a consistently revolutionary political outlook, that has been able to maintain its socialist opposition to Stalinism while correctly gauging the importance and progressive character of colonial revolutionary movements even under the Stalinist mis-leadership. I have never concealed my views on this point.

But the YSL Left Wing is not founded on this basis -- it is founded on the basis of preserving and building the YSL! It includes people who represent different political views on the colonial revolution, people hostile to the SWP as well as those friendly to it. We want you to join with us. We do not make as a condition for that your changing, by so much as a comma, your present views (whatever they are) on the Chinese question, on the Russian question, on the SWP.

What we want to build is a strong and united socialist youth movement in which proponents of all socialist views can discuss their differences while acting for socialism. We feel that a YSL genuinely committed to this proposition could have enormous appeal to radical youth of all tendencies, and could grow very rapidly in size and influence. Adoption of the Right Wing's perspective, if it is carried out, would mean a split in the YSL. We are completely against a split -- we will, if we win, urge the Right Wing comrades to remain in the YSL, even if they join the SP. We want to make the YSL the center for socialist youth regroupment. I certainly hope you will help us to do this, and in any event I look forward to receiving your answer to these thoughts.

-- Shane Mage