

A CHALLENGE TO COMRADE ARLON AND OTHERS

By Tim Wohlforth

Comrades Arlon, Debbie, Bogdan, and a number of others who are at present supporting Martin on the unity question, resent very much our characterization of the present unity move as "capitulation to social democracy." They attempt to discuss the issue as solely a tactical one and not one involving political capitulation.

In the last issue of the LWB I gave one example of current YSL and ISL politics which can only be described as capitulation. I cited the refusal of the YSL-NEC majority and the ISL to recruit from the SP-SDF or to urge the left-wing comrades there to carry out a thorough fight against the SP-SDF merger.

In this issue I will give another example. I will do this in the form of a challenge: I challenge all these comrades who support the right-wing unity proposal, but who insist that this support in no way limits their political functioning, to write an article for Labor Action criticising (in a friendly way, to be sure) the politics of the SP-SDF.

I warn you in advance that there is an excellent chance that such an article will not be printed. In fact LA's editor, Comrade Draper, has made quite clear his resentment on this fact. Should your article not be printed I for one will protest to the best of my ability the refusal of L/A to print such an article. What Martin and Harrington will do is another matter.

I will gladly suggest a list of subjects for such an article, subjects, such as the SP-SDF's support of American imperialism in the Suez crisis.

This is no small issue, for in this country the spokesman of the social democracy is the SP-SDF. It doesn't suffice simply to attack the French SFI. It is the responsibility of any real socialist to express his criticisms of the treacherous politics of the SP-SDF in this country---the country in which we live and function politically.

All the comrades should think for a minute on what is involved here. Before we even enter the SP-SDF the comrades are refusing to criticise the social democracy publicly in our own country. What can we expect from such comrades once they get into the SP-SDF and once they will be exposed to the threat of expulsion? (The SP-SDF has had plenty of experience in expelling radicals!) Once in they will undoubtedly play the role of "policeman of the left-wing" as Comrade Haskell so accurately has put it.

Thus we have before us another example of the capitulatory nature of the present unity move. To those comrades who feel that this is simply a mistaken tactic and not integrally related with the whole politics of the right wing I repeat my challenge: write an article critical of the SP for Labor Action and see what happens. I would only be too happy to be proven wrong on this point.

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Editorial Note—

In order to be in keeping with the general spirit of things we would like to suggest a few slogans to the "majority" as a basis for further activity on the part of the YSL. We hope these will come in handy to somebody.

JOIN THE YSL! ! ! !

AND BUILD THE SOCIAL DEMOCRACY ! ! ! !

AGAINST THE ALLIED BLOC! ! ! !

AND THE MURDEROUS STALINIST IMERIALIST DOGS! ! ! !

FOR THE SOCIAL DEMOCRACY! ! ! !

JOIN THE YPSL ! ! ! !

AND WE'LL JOIN YOU! ! ! !

CLASP HOOPES TO YOUR BOSOM! ! ! !

UNITY TO THE RIGHT! ! ! !

## A SHORT REPLY TO COMRADE MEIER'S TRIVIAL COMMENTS

By Scott Arden

March 6, 1957

The publication of Comrade Meier's article "Some Trivial Comments on the meaning of the voting process, and in particular of an 'abstention' in organizational and democratic functioning" in the last issue of the Young Socialist Review (Vol. 3, No. 4, Mar. 4th, 1957\*) establishes once more, for the benefit of any doubting Thomases, Norman or otherwise, that the YSR is truly a democratic organ.

We shall not dwell on her article's title, which is enough to bug the eye and fray the typewriter ribbon of an ordinary mortal, except to concede its essential honesty -- seldom has the promise of trivial comment been so thoroughly carried out.

More important is what she says, which if one is analytical (and she does provoke this approach) amounts to:

- 1) Certain members of the YSL have been acting up rather badly.
- 2) This takes the form of their not voting for the positions put forth by the Martin group. The "people" in question have dared to abstain instead.
- 3) We all know that you do not have to agree with a position, or understand it, to vote for it. Understanding is a bourgeois anti-socialist prejudice.
- 4) If you happen to walk into a room when a vote is taking place, don't hesitate. Fasten your eyes on the nearest supporter of Comrade Martin and imitate the movements he makes. Discussion, exchange of ideas, presentations of points of view, are all very nice but insignificant. Go to the john if you must when this kind of thing starts, but get back in time to vote.
- 5) If you don't do so you are guilty of COUNTER-REVOLUTION, as well as other stuff.
- 6) Fellow Martinites, if you have 'abstainers' in your Unit, force them to justify not voting with you. This approach works particularly well when applied to newer members who because of their insecure background in the YSL tend to be susceptible to pressure from "the established leadership." Embarrass the hell out of them and in the future they'll not dare to do other than vote with you on every question they do not understand.
- 7) Gneez, Max, did you really lose the membership referendum?

Comrade Meier makes these seven points in a manner we would

\* I cite the source in this careful fashion only because uninformed comrades might think me guilty of inventing this title.

not dream of imitating. The illogic of what she says seems to mean little to her and we must therefore extend to her our deepest sympathy, since basically she is a very nice and well-meaning comrade.

If we are, however, allowed the right of examining her logic, we must raise certain questions.

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

How "other YSL units" apply to "At one time, in the Chicago SYL" (my emphasis) is not of particular interest. I was a member of the Chicago Unit of the SYL a year or so before you were recruited and do not remember such a practice but this too is not important.

What is important, and if you have any typewriter ribbon left I hope to hear an answer, is why, pray tell, is it more necessary to explain an abstention than a vote pro or con?

I, personally, usually explain any "abstention" vote I make (just as I do any "pro or con" vote) so as to eliminate any doubt in the minds of others as to my motivations. This is, however, a privilege (not an obligation) and I do so only to make my position clear.

But logically, aside from your bias toward the "official leadership" (demonstrably unrepresentative), what's the difference between Pro, Con, or Abstention? Why, applying your criteria, shouldn't the member just back from the john, who voted for Martin's position only because he saw certain hands raised, be as subject to a demand that he justify openly his vote?

The "precious right to vote" is irrelevant, especially since you yourself point out that an abstention is a positive vote.

Is it not, Debbie, contrary to your specifications, obligatory for every socialist to cast his vote in the most intelligent and informed manner possible?

We do represent, however distorted, a vanguard element socially speaking, and the only responsible course for any member who really is undecided on the issues involved in any particular ballot is abstention.

You cannot deny, in any case, that the "viewpoint" you present on this question is one geared to aid the present artificial majority in the YSL leadership.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

I have just read the first issue of the LEFT WING BULLETIN, and on the whole I find it quite interesting and worthwhile. On page 20, however, I note the following remarks about YSL Chairman Mike Harrington: he "... is a pacifist, believes in God, and holds a menshevik position on the Russian revolution ..." I gather from the context that the writer deems these to be undesirable qualities.

It would appear from the above that the Left-Wing Caucus has established restrictive membership clauses, based on matters of little or no relevance to the issues at hand, which would place many socialists permanently beyond the Pale. I for one would be among their number, since I firmly believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, and I make no apologies for this belief.

It seems ironic that with its first breath of fresh air, the Left-Wing Caucus should already be encumbered with the ugly carbuncles of reactionary prejudice. And while it is not my place to tell the Caucus how to conduct its affairs, it would appear that now, at the outset, is the best possible time to rid itself of such disfiguring intellectual boils. It is my understanding that 98% of Americans believe in immortality; it would therefore appear that the LWC must eventually lower its barriers if it ever hopes to build a mass movement.

I trust the members of the LWC will give these remarks their earnest consideration.

California, March 13, 1957

Sincerely,  
George R. MacKenzie

Dear Comrade MacKenzie:

Let me first make it clear that our Caucus does not exclude those who happen to believe in God. Anyone who agrees with the "Left-Wing Declaration" is welcome, and agreement with the Declaration is the sole criterion for membership in the Caucus. Statements made in the BULLETIN by individual contributors like myself do not necessarily represent the views of the Caucus.

However, as far as my own views are concerned, you are quite correct in assuming that I consider belief in God, pacifism and menshevism to be undesirable qualities in a revolutionist. These positions I do not consider to be "the ugly carbuncles of reactionary prejudice" but simply a defense of Marxist methods and politics.

I myself speak as a conscious Marxist. By raising in this way the question of Comrade Harrington's views I was simply questioning whether the leading spokesman of the right wing also was a Marxist. Of course I feel the right wing has a perfect right to

pick its own spokesmen but at the same time their choice is a reflection of the nature of their politics.

As Marxism is based on a materialist conception of nature it is obvious that any religion is in conflict with basic Marxist methodology. If one chooses to believe in God and be a Marxist one must at least attempt to reconcile these mutually conflicting approaches.

Marxists have always opposed pacifism, feeling that any attempt to disarm the working class in the face of the destructive power concentrated in the hands of the ruling class has in reality a counter-revolutionary effect.

Menshevism as a methodology and as politics also plays, as it did in 1917, a counter-revolutionary role. Martov, for all his good intentions, placed himself on the wrong side of the barricades in the most important historical event in the history of the working class.

Now any comrade can hold any and all of these views and remain a member of the YSL. I for one will defend his right to do so and have even recruited such people myself. But such a comrade has no right to consider himself a Marxist, for at least in these fields he is not. Whether he can still apply the Marxist method in other areas is doubtful, to say the least.

In the case of Comrade Harrington, who holds all of these positions and who also has informed me that he opposes the dialectic, we are presented with what our euphemistically inclined sociologists call "a syndrome of characteristics." When we add to this his lack of seriousness about his ideas and politics, evinced by his refusal to present these views openly to the movement, I feel we can be justified in calling into question the seriousness of the right wing's politics, for which he speaks. If the right wing wishes to openly repudiate Marxism, this is its privilege: then we can conduct a different type of discussion. So far every person in the right wing I have spoken to has the impression that he or she is a Marxist.

Fraternally,  
Tim Wohlforth

March 6, 1957

To All Units of the YSL:

At the March 5 meeting of the NAC a motion unanimously passed by the Berkeley Unit of the YSL calling for immediately opening the pages of Challenge to anti-unity articles was discussed.

After a short discussion, all the NAC members favoring unity voted against the Berkeley request and the one member who opposed unity voted for it. The majority argued that the minority was being denied access to Challenge largely because of space considerations.

The minority member informed the committee that on several occasions in the past Challenge was opened to discussion of questions raised in the ranks. These included a discussion on civil liberties of fascists, on the Chinese Revolution, and on liberalism. He pointed out that the present controversy in the YSL is far more significant than any of these as it involves whether or not to dissolve the organization.

He also referred the comrades to the following motion passed at the September plenum and still in force: "The minority to be allowed access to Challenge in the form of a discussion article, at least." He then reminded the comrades that less than a week ago Comrade Shachtman had publicly called for an open and public discussion of the unity question in the ISL and wished that the YSL would do likewise.

I urge all units of the YSL to discuss this matter at the earliest possible date and to inform the NO as to their feelings on the matter. I am sure that you will all agree that the right of a minority to express itself publicly has been an important part of our tradition and our conception of democracy in a youth movement.

So that this discussion can proceed in an open, public and democratic fashion I urge all units and members of the YSL individually and collectively -- whether or not they agree with the minority -- to protest this move on the part of the majority of the NAC. I also urge all of you to write for further information on the matter from the NO.

I am confident that everyone in the YSL wishes to proceed in the most democratic fashion in discussing this basic question of unity. It is in this spirit that I address this appeal to you.

Submitted by

Tim Wohlforth  
Member NEC, NAC

Copy to NO and all units

SP-SDF MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Editorial Note:

The following document is now in the public domain as it has been reprinted in the Reading Labor Advocate, we have been informed by Comrade Harrington.

It is important that every comrade in the YSL thoroughly acquaint himself with it as this is the political basis upon which you are being asked to "unite" with the SP-SDF. The document itself is so rotten that the SP-SDF did not make it public until considerably after the unity had been consummated.

We of the Left-Wing Caucus have defined the SP-SDF's brand of "socialism" as "State Department Socialism" while the left wingers in the SP have questioned whether the politics expressed in this memorandum are "socialist" in any sense of the word.

The comrades supporting Martin et al seem to have the greatest difficulty describing the SP-SDF's politics. Debbie finds it "hard to find out what its program is" and Jim B. together with Arlon defines it as "politically amorphous" and question whether it has "real politics and positions in the usual sense of the words."

We urge these comrades to read this document. You will find the basic politics of the SP-SDF clearly expressed here so that Debbie will have no trouble finding them out and Jim B. will discover that its politics are just about as real as you can get. So real in fact that it hurts.

So lets quit kidding ourselves. One may be for unity with the SP-SDF or against it. But let all at least understand what the SP-SDF is and on what basis it just united.

(All emphases in original unless otherwise specified.)

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Foreign Policy Statement

As believers in democratic socialism, we feel that sure and abiding peace requires the progressive achievement of a universal fellowship of free men and free nations. The political expression of this fellowship will be the conscious management of the world's resources and technology for the good of all the people, for the universal abolition of slavery and for the end of exploitation and war.

To this end democratic Socialism -- or Social Democracy -- with its historic proclamation of the unity of the workers

of the world has always been devoted, and our united Socialist movement in America will take its rightful place in the ranks of Socialists everywhere who believe in, and struggle for, this Aim.

We Socialists believe that the struggle against the factors that lead to war -- the battle against exploitation, against imperialism, and against that newer and more terrible form of imperialism, totalitarianism -- must be continued and intensified. Today man lives under the shadow of three enormous fears. The first and most immediate is that we may use the marvel of growing mastery over atomic energy for an act of collective suicide. The second and more remote in time is that uncontrolled increase in population, exhaustion of resources and the barriers to cooperation set up by national, class, and ideological divisions may drive mankind, despite its collective achievements in science, down to a level a little above subsistence. The third is that the growing power and influence of totalitarianism, operating under false but appealing slogans that enlist the sympathy of the have-nots and that warp the judgment of those not in the orbit of our civilization may either win out in the struggle for men's minds or force us into ever-increasing armament, saddling democracy with too great a burden or forcing upon us a state of tension and fearful apprehension that may result in the war we all abhor and would do all we can to prevent.

In this crusade to prevent war at the same time that we ward off hunger and the spread of appeasement of totalitarianism, we must work out a cooperative war on the world's poverty, in which the more industrially advanced nations would give economic aid in the task of helping industrially backward nations to raise their living standards and to line up with us in the battle against a totalitarianism that fattens on men's hunger and discontent. Toward this end we must erase the last vestiges of colonialism and despotic control of others. We are aware that misery, disease, poverty, and oppression are the poison weeds that breed communism, and that colonial peoples have an inalienable right to fulfill their aspirations for freedom and home rule. We extend the hand of friendship to all colonial peoples engaged in genuine democratic liberation movements not initiated, engineered, or directed by Communist plotters.\* We call on our government to expand and democratize the Point Four program launched by the preceding administration and to aid in the achievement by colonial peoples and by all nations of genuinely democratic governmental and economic systems. We know that such economic help to backward and undeveloped areas -- aid given to the peoples and not to the military or economic masters of a land -- is one of the most practical methods of establishing and strengthening democratic institutions and of repelling and defeating the machinations of Communist propagandists.

### Strengthening the United Nations

In pursuit of our aim to make maximum war upon hunger and

\* Emphasis added -- Ed.

exploitation American Socialists find their allies around the world in the Socialist International and the Asian Socialist Conference and they look for the strengthening of the United Nations as a step in the development toward federal world government. We believe that at the heart of a practical program for the achievement of peace ultimately must be our insistence upon world-wide acceptance of universal, enforceable, not unilateral and not illusory -- disarmament under a strengthened United Nations. This drive must go hand in hand with the cooperative war on the world's poverty outlined above.

Such a crusade must not be based on any illusion that peace can be achieved by appeasement of the Communist imperialism that threatens the world's peace and freedom by its persistent drive for universal control over men and nations, over the bodies and minds and souls of men. We realize that until universal, enforceable disarmament can be achieved, the free world and its democratically established military agencies must be constantly on guard against the military drive of Communist dictators, \* lest the gains made by the socialist movement in the last half-century -- as indeed its hope for the future -- be lost in an enslaved world. This position is an acceptance of a world frame of reference in which the united Socialist Party can continue to fight against the social evils of our times, including militarism, and for a socialist world.

We still believe that there is a Socialist alternative to both a hot war against Communism and appeasement -- at least, an alternative that must be tried before we throw up our hands in the kind of despair that may be the forerunner of the total war we fear. We believe that a democratic and Socialist offensive against totalitarian aggression must be advanced -- an offensive that calls for unceasing attack on poverty, racial and social injustice and colonial exploitation, which are not only intolerable in themselves but are the best breeding grounds for new totalitarian conquest. Socialists do not seek to compromise the struggle against dictatorship and injustice but to divert it into channels and forms where it can more easily be won. Their hope lies in the transfer of the conflict between democracy and totalitarianism out of the realm of atomic war, and worse, at a time when the weapons that we have fashioned and that both sides possess threaten universal extinction, mass suicide in which both totalitarianism and democratic countries may be engulfed.

### Helping the Have-Not Peoples

We believe that it is possible by cheerfully working together to raise the standard of living in economically underdeveloped regions, and by intelligent and understanding and sympathetic cooperation to win the people of these regions to enlistment in the struggle against totalitarianism. We maintain that through the United Nations rather than individual governments a program should be carried on involving billions of dollars of

assistance to these peoples. This program would first help the people to help themselves to industrialize and to utilize scientific knowledge for constructive purposes. It would, second, enable them to resist the blandishments of Communist propaganda and third, it would do much to line them up with democracy rather than with totalitarianism in the continuing battle for a democratic peace.

We Socialists urge that there be a more intelligent and far-seeing American leadership in this cooperative struggle against poverty and exploitation. The Marshall Plan and the Point Four proposal under President Truman's administration, the proposal of a pool of atomic energy for peaceful purposes under the present administration, are expressions of the American spirit at its best (Emphasis added - Ed.). We must do all we can to infuse that spirit into more of our fellow Americans, to implement it and to give it a more socialist underpinning and direction.

In adopting this general statement of Socialist aims in foreign policy, we realize that there is room for some disagreement on implementation, though none in regard to our belief that totalitarianism must be resisted with all our power and that we must build up the world economy, raise the standard of living, defend democratic rights and human values all over the world and provide the economic basis for world-wide democracy.

Detailed application of the general principles herein set forth to current issues of foreign policy is not a matter of easy and automatic deduction. Socialists the world over are united in opposition to preventive war but they have not achieved unity of method in dealing with such problems as German and Japanese rearmament and the recognition of the communist government on the Chinese mainland. Disagreements on these questions do not follow the lines which have divided the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Federation, and eventual agreement can be worked out better in the united party facing realistically as they arise than in a party where consideration of honest differences arising out of issues with which time has already dealt. In any case we call upon all Socialists everywhere, and upon all men of good will, to join together in the struggle for peace, cooperation, brotherhood, and Socialism in America and throughout the world.

#### REPORT ON POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

1. The United Party recognizes that its first duty in present day America is to increase the awareness of its fellow citizens in the values of democratic socialism. Its second duty is to work with all its power of persuasion for the establishment of a labor party, which would tend to become democratic socialist in principle.
2. Until such an organization is formed, United Party groups shall be encouraged to take such action as will best advance socialist education. Recognizing the contribution that a politically organized labor movement can make toward such a party, Socialists will take steps such as to enhance the value of trade union political action.
3. The United Party at this time also reiterates its belief that the Democratic and Republican Parties as presently constituted, cannot, and will not, properly represent the best interests of the vast mass of working

people and farmers of America, in spite of the presence of some liberals in the Republican Party, and a greater number in the Democratic Party.

4. Because of the obstacles and difficulties encountered in carrying on independent socialist electoral action in the coming period, the United Party will put its primary organizational emphasis on carrying on non-electoral campaigns and community activity for the maintenance of civil liberty, against segregatory policies, for the extension of social welfare measures, for a foreign policy which would reduce the threat of war, and general educational activity for a Socialist reorganization of our economy.

5. In localities where the socialist program can be enhanced by such action, or where, traditionally, socialist campaigns have received support, continued socialist political action should be encouraged.

6. In various parts of the country some of our members have been involved in labor-liberal organizations (such as the ADA, the Liberal Party of New York State, CIO-PAC, LLPE, etc.). Members of the United Party in these organizations are urged to stress the importance of independent political action.

7. In the absence of independent Socialist electoral action and in the absence of independent liberal-labor candidates, it shall be the privilege of individual state and local organizations to allow their individual members to support candidates for public office who have been endorsed by liberal and labor groups. (Emphasis added - Ed.)

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