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13 February 1969

To the members of the
SDS Labor Committee:

Dear Comrades,

Attached to this letter you will find a portion of the 22 January 1969 issue of New America, the official newspaper and theoretical organ of the American social-democrats, the U.S. Socialist Party. I want to direct your attention to two articles appearing in this issue:

1. on page 7, the article titled "SDS Activist On: NEW LEFT'S BOURGEOIS IMPULSES", written by New York SDS Labor Committee leading member Tony Papert;

2. a small boxed article at the foot of page 8 entitled "SDS-YAF: A CONVERGENCE?" (I might say here parenthetically that this article's title states the essential SP-YPSL line on SDS, that it is a mirror image on the left of the neo-fascist elements of the right, functionally indistinguishable from them, and that SDS equals some new form of "social fascism".)

It is incumbent on me to distribute these materials before the meeting this coming Sunday (16 Feb.) because I think it is extremely important we have a full, informed discussion on these subjects within the New York group, and I believe the articles should be read beforehand so they can be seriously debated.

I heard about Papert's article in New America by chance. I participated in the N.Y. group's trip to Canada this past weekend, and rode up in the same car with Tony Papert. When he mentioned he had been writing articles for "the social-democrats" I felt disturbed at the probable implications of this and asked him for a more detailed explanation. He gave it willingly, stating that while he had nothing in common with them politically, nevertheless he didn't think there was anything wrong with publishing there, that they were giving him space without censoring, and that in any case it was necessary to do something to breach the "left press blackout" on the Labor Committee. He seemed to consider the immediate objections I raised irrelevant; since I was unfamiliar with the article in question at that time, my replies could hardly be more than vague reiterations of the fact that I still thought he should not do it. Since returning from Canada I have had time to read and consider this issue of the paper, and I think my objections have been fully confirmed--in spades!

The politest way I know of putting the whole thing is that comrade Papert got very seriously used. That he participated willingly by writing specifically for that paper (i.e., they didn't just find and reprint a leaflet handed out at Columbia or somewhere) has some pretty sinister implications. What is going on now, strongly and openly on the right (the Daily News types call for smashing SDS, a growing sentiment among many people) is taking on all the elements of purge. It has been joined by the fake left (e.g., Theodore Draper's lead article on Social Fascism in the latest issue of the liberal Jewish Commentary and the article printed last Saturday by a Soviet general in the Communist Party's Daily World on his memories of the Spanish Civil War, explaining how it was necessary to deal with "anarchist types"). There is a growing swing to the right politically in this country; the hyenas are

gathering in an attempt to tear apart the radical student movement; the rottenest, most treacherous elements of the "left" are beginning to fall into line. And right in the middle of all this--in a newspaper which among other things thinks the Viet Cong should be smashed, which defended Kennedy's Bay of Pigs invasion and which supported Hubert Humphrey in the last election!--there appears an article by Tony Papert of the Labor Committee, adding his voice to the hue and cry against SDS!

It is of course correct and principled to criticize SDS for their confusions, vacillations, inanity, for the fact that they have retarded the development of a revolutionary consciousness in this country. We of the Spartacist League have many times attacked precisely these features of the movement in our organ, Spartacist, and in many leaflets, and no doubt we will have to do so many more times in the future. But we have raised our objections from the point of view of communists, of Revolutionary Marxists--that is to say, from the left. Our objective is to help build a revolutionary movement in this country and we criticize those weaknesses of SDS or others which make such a movement more difficult to attain.

But this is not the point of view at all of New America and the fake left. These people are anti-communists! They don't want to try to clear out the debris obstructing the revolutionary movement--they want to destroy the movement itself! They do not give a damn about separating out the bourgeois garbage from the revolutionaries as we do--they use the "excesses" of the movement in order to try to smash the whole movement and its aims. If Papert's article had appeared in Wm. Buckley's National Review, this point would be much clearer; the main point of separation between the politics of Norman Thomas and Wm. Buckley, so far as I'm concerned, is that the former supported Johnson and Humphrey while the latter backed Goldwater and Nixon--bourgeois candidates all. And just who are the supporters of Lyndon Johnson to be lecturing SDS on the "New Left's Bourgeois Impulses"? And just what kind thoughts does Hubert Humphrey harbor toward revolutionary movements? Chicago last August should have given that show away (what did New America have to say about that?). For, irrespective of some of the lunacies which went on among the left there, there is a fundamental difference between the oppressors and the beaten. Basic class loyalty alone must put us on the side of the latter; one can't stand on the sidelines frowning disapprovingly.

What is appalling is not some irrelevant abstraction of publishing one's own views in outside, high-circulation, commercial bourgeois periodicals (like Trotsky sometimes had to do), but the concrete reality of Papert's act. In a time of rising anti-SDS fever and sharp student struggles, by adapting the Labor Committee's criticisms of SDS and PL to the right, Papert got into print in a narrow little organ which is read almost exclusively by conscious opponents of the revolutionary movement. In effect he simply supplies a confidential memo to our class enemies, giving them some exclusive, radical-sounding propaganda with which to soothe uneasy consciences of left-liberal professors so they'll go along with beatings by police and expulsions of militants in campus struggles.

To bring this point a little closer to home: many of the comrades of the Labor Committee have been influenced, to a degree, by the activities, ideas and theories of Rosa Luxemburg. That I think many of the conclusions they have drawn from her are wrong does not vitiate the

point that she lived and died as a true revolutionary. Yet it was precisely the German Social Democrats, the direct ideological counterparts and political ancestors of New America and the U.S. Socialist Party who, holding power at the time, simply turned their faces aside and talked about "revolutionary excesses" while encouraging proto-fascist freebooters to butcher Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht after the failure of the Spartakus uprising in 1919. The Social Democrats then, like their "Socialist" heirs now, stood firmly on the side of bourgeois law and order while the revolutionaries were assaulted. To this day the American SP is still in the same international body with their German counterparts. Isn't it just a bit incongruous for "the heirs of Luxemburg" to bloc with bastards like these against people who, however gropingly and incompetently, want to be real revolutionaries, who want to rip this wretched country up by the roots and substitute a social order ruled by those who actually produce its wealth?

Apart from all that, while there is no evidence that the ideologues of Buckley's magazine have ever taken money from the CIA, the same certainly cannot be said for the people who find political and ideological comfort in the line of New America. The comrades of the Labor Committee have struck out hard against "police socialism" as a means of transforming American society; isn't there something again a bit incongruous, not to say peculiar, in using as a weapon to attack SDS, PL, etc. the paper which, more than any other, is the theoretical organ of those who see "police socialism", or its variants, as the only possible alternative to stave off mass revolutionary discontent from below?

There are few other political organs of the center or "left" in such severe (and justified) disrepute among radicals as New America. Maybe the old backlash-liberal Reporter magazine or the virulently anti-communist, Menshevik-run New Leader come close. It, and they, have only one real function to serve: to smash the left so that their friends in the "mainstream" of the Democratic Party, like Humphrey, can expound their policies of minimal "New Deal"-like social reform at home while extending the hegemony of Yankee Imperialism abroad. That is absolutely all. It is probably redundant to have to point this out to consciously political people, who after all should know who the enemies of the left are, but the constant confusion raised by various theories of "the universal irrelevance of 'sects'" may well make this point necessary. There are, after all, fundamental class differences reflected between those who are themselves socialists and communists and those who proudly carry the label "anti-communist"--however much some people want to pretend they're all "sects"--and it is this fundamental dividing line which I think Papert has tragically crossed.

There is one final point to be made and this is the question of ramifications and tactics. I think what is wrong is a matter of basic principles, and I've tried to deal mostly with these. But moving into shallower water for a moment, has anyone seriously considered what effect that New America article is likely to have within SDS?

The Labor Committee intends to try to lock horns with Progressive Labor at the next National Council meeting and elsewhere, offering themselves as the real revolutionary alternative to the SDS leadership and others. Do you really think PL won't see the value of pointing out that the Labor Committee has lowered itself to using anti-communist mouthpieces in order to attack SDS? A fundamentally serious approach to the working class would represent a real challenge and threat to PL's

ambitions. The Labor Committee has taken several steps toward that kind of approach. Yet Papert has just handed PL the weapon with which they can cricify the Committee--anti-communism! Do you think they won't be smart enough to realize the real value of this approach? The Socialist Party broke with SDS precisely when SDS threw out its anti-communist disclaimer. Don't you see the implications of that? Don't you see that all this New America stuff has the potential of vitiating the influence of any good, serious work the Labor Committee may do among the working class, by handing its enemies in SDS a club with which to beat it? One must conclude, moreover, that if the SDS Labor Committee supports and persists in what Papert has done, then what PL and the SDS leadership will say is just and deserved.

This is a time of crisis nationally for SDS and also for the future of the Labor Committee, which moved to the left for a time. Tony Papert is one of the prominent leaders of the Labor Committee. What he wrote and had printed in New America was done with the prior knowledge and acquiescence of at least some of the rest of the Committee leadership, although not made clear to its membership. If this action is allowed to stand, it will be the divide which marks the passage of the Labor Committee from the left of the current New Left to its right. And it will mark the beginning of the absorption of the more ambitious and cynical young Labor Committee members into the bourgeois Establishment intellectual apparatus--an old, familiar road.

But I insist that these choices before the group be made with eyes wide open, not slid into. I and others from the Spartacist League joined the New York SDS Labor Committee because we respected and agreed with its efforts to link serious young revolutionary intellectuals with the working class. We stood together in a principled critical support in defense of the Teachers' Union in this fall's strikes and racial turmoil. But in the main, the Labor Committee never transcended a species of left-centrist diffuseness and empirical search for short-cuts, hoping to side-step the necessity to build a revolutionary working-class party. Now in disappointment over failed group projects and embittered by vicious attacks from both PL and the SDS brass, the Committee has begun a rapid descent to the right.

To reverse this course, I call urgently and immediately for a vote for and implementation of the following motions:

- (1) To repudiate any ideological reconciliation, collaboration or subordination with the right-wing enemies of SDS;
- (2) To condemn Papert's action and article in New America as a tacit alliance with the infamous Socialist Party against PL and SDS;
- (3) While maintaining fully our criticisms of the Maoist PL and of the anarchistic SDS leadership, to defend categorically the rights of SDS against the campaign of the SP-CP-liberals to justify repression of SDS by the authorities.

Fraternally,

Dave Cunningham
(New York Labor Committee member and editor of Spartacist)