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Bulletin

International
Socialists

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INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS DISCUSSION BULLETIN #2 -- February 1982

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A Response to "A Response"

By Kim Moody

To read the opening paragraph of Mark L's response to "Toward a Perspective for the 80's" is to understand why the proposal to take the IS into DSOC comes about at this time. It's not simply that revolutionary organizations, including the IS, are having hard times. We've had them before, and like all revolutionary groups in history we will probably have them again. Revolutionary politics and organization are not a linear process of accumulation. No, it is not simply the state of the IS that leads some to think DSOC might be a congenial home for revolutionary politics, but the state of the working class.

Reformers aren't winning elections, strike activity is at an 11-year low, unions are getting weaker, etc. etc. the "new period of working class militancy" has failed to materialize. Forget that this is a gross oversimplification of what has happened since 1968. The point of this opening paragraph is loud and clear. The working class is not where it's at! You can, of course, join with thousands of other union activists in these hopeless struggles, but revolutionary politics have no room in the dismal landscape that is the American working class today.

Is There No Hope For A Working Class Response?

One well-known characteristic of revolutionary socialist politics, as understood by our tendency, is that they have relevance only to the degree to which they are attached to working class forces. That is precisely the reason that socialist politics are so marginal in the U.S. From its formation the IS has set itself the task of bringing revolutionary socialist ideas to the working class. Our trade union perspectives and work flow from this task. We felt, as Marxists before felt, that organized struggle provided the friendliest terrain for carrying out that task. But of course, some times and places are more or less friendly than others. In fact, some times are impossible.

No one, for example, proposed "industrializing" in the 1950's. The level of class struggle was simply too low. With the opening of capitalist crisis we had reason to believe things would change. We were wrong about many things, but in fact things have changed. The level of open, visible for all to see class struggle is far higher today than at any point during the 50's or 60's. The problem is that to a large extent, the class struggle is, to borrow a phrase from Fraser, "one sided." It is nonetheless a class struggle that is transforming American politics, labor relations, living standards, and much else as well.

One could, of course, look at the current situation and assume that because we are now sitting through the bosses' soliloquy that they will remain the only actors on the stage. If this really is the case, if workers mount no resistance at any point during the 80's, then there is no basis for an active revolutionary politics—only room for the "art of socialist propaganda."

But there is no particular reason to believe that. We are entering a time when the most basic institutions upon which the era of American political stability rested are being torn apart by the actions of the ruling class. The level of class struggle, and the visibility of that struggle for people who are not used to thinking in class terms, involves more than momentary strike statistics or the outcome of a few union elections. A perspective cannot be based on the impressions of the moment, but on those trends that are forcing people at every level of society to re-evaluate how they live and act in this society. The ruling class has re-evaluated its behavior, the union bureaucracy is doing its own (pathetic) re-evaluation, and workers too are re-evaluating their political and trade union norms of behavior and methods of understanding. People are reacting to events with a mixture of old and new thoughts. As is often typical of human beings, the first response to rapid change is to be stunned. To a large extent the working class is stunned by the sweeping changes in the rules of the game.

Revolutionary socialists can react to this by assuming that the entire labor movement will remain stunned and quietly march to poverty and defeat. Or we can assume that something can and must be done about this situation, that some time in the not too distant future workers will fight back if they see the ways and means to do so. And that, of course, is what revolutionary politics is all about and always has been about.

What Is Revolutionary Politics?

Somewhere between the art of socialist propaganda and the art of insurrection lie 90% of active revolutionary politics. Revolutionary politics are not something that one saves for those rare moments in history when revolution is possible, or for classes and discussions. If that were all there were to it, then the Leninist insistence on the need for a party would be nonsense—one would need only teachers and professional insurrectionists. Of course, no one believes that. The point is that revolutionary politics become most relevant precisely at times when the working class faces difficulties.

What are revolutionary politics in a period still remote from revolution? They are the analyses, ideas and ways and means by which the working class can advance its level of organization, consciousness and combativity. They involve questions of organization, program, tactics.

(Mark is quite right to point out that we do need a programmatic side to politics as well as the main organizational element, the labor party. The document "Toward a Perspective for the 80's" acknowledges that, though I didn't deal with it there.)

Because circumstances change, revolutionary politics are not the same for all periods and places. Nor are they characterized by the fact that only revolutionaries could hold them or carry them out, for if that were the case they would be only sectarian rhetoric.

The value of a revolutionary organization and the politics that it puts forth lie precisely in the ability to move less conscious sectors of the class. One of the main problems the IS has suffered from is that the particular revolutionary politics we put forth in the second half of the 70's, the politics of party building, were inappropriate to the period. We could not move workers around those politics and we paid the price for that mistake. Only in the context of ideas that can move people does the art of socialist propaganda become an important, though subordinate, component of one's revolutionary politics.

To put all of this another way, revolutionary politics are an aid to advancing workers' power. The next to last word in workers' power is, of course, the seizure of state power. But there is much to be said and done before that is possible. Workers' power grows or diminishes within the capitalist system long before it finally asserts itself in revolution.

Today, with the labor movement here facing its most severe crisis in over four decades, the politics that would most clearly advance workers' power center around the direction of organized labor. The ideas of class struggle unionism and the labor party are key elements to those politics. They are ideas that are credible because of the circumstances that are unfolding in this period. It is not simply a matter of always favoring these ideas; in the 70's, for example, we did not put forth the labor party idea because it did not seem credible.

Granted there is more relevant revolutionary politics in the 80's than those two ideas or than are presented in the document "Toward a Perspective for the 80's." That document was presented as a contribution toward a discussion which is only beginning. Criticisms of what it is missing are well taken. But what seems to be at question here, in Mark L's response, is what revolutionary politics are in the first place. I believe that the definition presented above is consistent with the historic tradition of revolutionary Marxism from Marx, through Lenin, and so on.

How Do We Differ from the Reformists?

What about the fact that others—reformists, scumbag labor bureaucrats—will agree with some of these politics and will work along similar lines? One is tempted to simply answer, what about it? After all, the whole purpose of putting forth a set of politics is to get others to agree with and act on them. If some reformists agree with us on some aspects of those politics does that make us just reformists or them revolutionaries? Hardly.

Our purpose in advancing a set of politics is to increase the organization, consciousness, and combativity of the class. We are not simply seeking a pragmatic step, even one of historic proportions like a labor party, that we hope will stop plant closings, wage cutting, imports, etc. For most labor bureaucrats and even more ideological reformists, that is all a labor party is about, that is why they will take that step. And, in the first instance, the same can be said of most workers.

It is of little importance to most reformists how the masses of workers perceive such a step or how that changes their fundamental view of themselves

as a class in motion. Typically, reformists do things for class reasons, but do so with only the most pragmatic understanding of their own actions. Their understanding of their own actions is thus fragmented and partial. It does not for one minute pose the question of workers' power as we understand that. Objectively, the labor party idea poses the question of state power, but the reformist does not see beyond the limits of parliamentary democracy.

For us the question is different. The two things that are least important to the reformist are most important to us—the advanced class consciousness the workers gain from the fight for a labor party and the question of state power as a class question. For us a major aspect of the politics we put forth in the fight for a labor party is the awareness of workers that they are taking an historic step in the class struggle, and furthermore, that this step has implications far beyond the immediate legislative goals of such a party, implications that lead all the way to the conquest of power by the working class.

This is where the art of socialist propaganda fits in with revolutionary politics. Revolutionary propaganda is not, or should not be, discussion of what is not possible—a definition all too often carried out in practice. Propaganda should be the dimension of revolutionary politics that deepens one's understanding of the practice of those politics, points toward the next steps, and provides the long view.

What "Toward a Perspective for the 80's" is saying, among other things, is that the road to a revolutionary party in America lies through the fight for a labor party. This is not an idea we want to hide from the most class conscious workers, but one we want to educate them to. There is no reform that will do this for us. There is no reformist that will understand this question in this way. Almost universally, the role of reformists in fighting for goals that are ostensibly the same as those pursued by revolutionaries is to attempt to obscure the implications of such politics. The unique role of revolutionaries and of revolutionary politics in reform struggles is, and always has been, to point to the implications of the struggle and hence to show the next steps whether or not the reformist leaders favor such steps. This is both a propagandistic and an agitational role.

All of the above represents the understanding of revolutionary politics that underlies "Toward a Perspective for the 80's." Somehow, though, Mark has read into that document the old and much discredited "best fighters method." I don't know where it says or even implies that what is unique about revolutionaries in the 80's is that they will be the best fighters for militant unionism and a labor party. What it does say is that revolutionaries can play an important role in leading the fight for a labor party, for example, because of our understanding of the period.

I am more than willing to throw out the "best fighters" approach, in fact did so years ago, but I am unwilling to chuck the notion that revolutionaries, by virtue of a Marxist understanding of trends and events, are able to point the way forward for the

class when reformists, by and large, are not. This is not just a question of getting in on the ground floor of a labor party movement, although that too is important, it is a question of comprehension and vision at each and every stage of the fight.

It is not an accident that we understand 1) the importance of a labor party, by virtue of our understanding of the class nature of politics which most reformists do not have, and 2) the possibility of such a development, by virtue of our Marxist analysis of trends in political life. Since we understand all this at a time when only a few others do, and most of them only partially, it becomes our duty, so to speak, to organize for that development.

This basic notion of Marxist politics has nothing to do with who is the best fighter—although it does have something to do with whose politics are the best. In any case, I am not prepared to discard the idea that Marxist politics prepare one for coming events better than reformist politics.

A Transitional Program?

I'm not sure, but there seems to be the implication in Mark's discussion of revolutionary politics that while ideas like the labor party don't make revolutionary muster, a "transitional" program would. Program is important and a transitional character for programmatic elements has an important role in what I was saying earlier. But the idea that the solution to the problems our political tendency faces lies in a "transitional" program gives me the willies. Isn't this one of the more discredited ideas of orthodox Trotskyism? Wasn't Trotsky's transitional program a big dud?

And in any case isn't it incredibly obvious, all past pretensions notwithstanding, that such a program is inevitably composed of demands for advanced reforms? In fact, isn't the only possible value of such a program or demand that large numbers of people see it as a realizable and practical reform that can be struggled for without seizing state power? How, from Mark's point of view, does this solve the problem of revolutionary politics as he poses it? It doesn't!

Who is Turning to DSOC?

And now to answer Mark's "two unanswered questions."

Question 1. "If workers turned to the big organizations to fight the big fights in the 30's and 40's as well as in the 60's and 70's, why should they act any differently in the 1980's?" If Mark actually believes the answer to that is simply that workers won't ever act differently, then there is no possibility of a revolutionary politics for the 80's. This simply means that workers always respond in a reformist way and the question is closed.

If on the other hand, Mark is trying to imply that DSOC is the "big organization," then one must be reminded that DSOC is not, by a long shot, the kind of organization I am talking about. The working class parties of Europe discussed in "Toward a Perspective for the 80's" are mass parties with many hundreds of thousands of members and millions of voters. They claim traditions ranging from 60 to 100 years in their respective working classes. They are

factors in the daily political and legislative fights of their countries.

DSOC is none of these things. DSOC, admittedly a big frog in the small pond of the American left, is tiny in relation to anything else in the U.S. DSOC has not yet attained the membership levels of the British SWP, or that the Portuguese PRP attained at the height of its political relevance, and that was in countries much smaller than the U.S.

In terms of American politics, the answer to Mark's question is that the U.S. working class has no traditional party of its own. We have reason to believe that the direction of politics in the U.S. is such as to open the way to the development of something new; a fight for an independent labor party. The U.S. working class has to create its own "big organization," and that will be an historic step forward for the working class.

Will the workers go beyond such a reformist party in the 1980's? Obviously no one knows the answer to that just now. But certainly we should understand that such momentous class developments, along with the agonizing problems that the crisis confronts labor with, raise those questions that point toward the working class reorganizing society for its own self-defense, because the capitalists and their reformist opponents are unable to do so. In other words, a labor party will develop a left wing and therein lies the possibility (or one aspect of the possibilities) of moving beyond reformism in the 80's.

In world terms, the answer to Mark's first question is that workers will move beyond their traditional, reformist, or corrupt organizations when the most advanced active workers perceive that those organizations are unable to deal with the crisis facing workers. There is no timetable for such a development, no guarantee that it will conform with time as counted in decades. There are revolutionary organizations dedicated to working for such a development.

My own wild guess is that the left reformism that is currently sweeping Europe will play itself out well before the end of the decade. And that will open new possibilities. Whether the revolutionary organizations will have the intelligence, strength, and independence to take advantage of that is a question of politics.

Mark's *Question 2*, itself two questions, is, "Why is DSOC so attractive? Why are we no closer to regroupment today than we were in 1978?" One at a time.

DSOC is attractive to a variety of people for a variety of reasons and there are no mysteries about any of them. First, DSOC is attractive to certain activists with non-ideological, basically liberal politics. Liberalism has collapsed as a movement and DSOC is well positioned at the fringe of mainstream politics to propose a program for reviving that movement. For the moment DSOC is filling a certain vacuum in American politics, a vacuum that the revolutionary left cannot fill and would not want to fill.

Second, DSOC is attracting activists new to politics. This should shock and amaze no one, since most people who are new to politics and become in-

tersted in leftist ideas first choose reformist, more respectable groups. Except for red diaper babies, very few people leap to revolutionary conclusions when they first question society as it is. No doubt the pathetic state of the revolutionary left is minimizing the number of such people who might be won to revolutionary ideas more rapidly, but today DSOC would certainly be growing faster in any event.

The third stream of people who have joined DSOC are those who have more or less given up their once more or less revolutionary socialist views. The mainstream of NAM is the heart of this element. Rumor has it that a few ex-Maoists have joined as well. No doubt DSOC will attract more such people, both because of their demoralization and because of DSOC's size.

Unlike the first two elements that provide DSOC with its current dynamic, these people are the direct victims of the crisis of the revolutionary left. That crisis was the collapse of the various party building perspectives and the attendant difficulty of replacing them with a viable perspective. In reaction to an essentially ultra-left orientation that characterized much of the left of the 60's and 70's, it is not surprising that a strong rightward development should occur.

What About Regroupment?

The answer to the second half of Mark's question, why hasn't our regroupment perspective worked, lies in the same crisis. 1) The dynamic in the working class that was the basis of the 1978 regroupment approach (development of reform movements, etc., not a giant upheaval such as underlay our party building perspective of earlier years) has been slow, uneven, set back in cases.

2) The crisis of the revolutionary left, itself a prerequisite to regroupment, has been deeper and more long lasting than we expected, without a central political trend around which clarity could begin to emerge from confusion.

3) The left, all of it, has been stunned by the implementation of a genuinely conservative program by the Reagan administration.

4) The IS has never actually pursued its regroupment policy in an aggressive manner. This last factor is the result of lack of resources and, more importantly, a lack of clarity about the political basis of regroupment.

In future discussion papers I will spell out my views on regroupment as we should pursue it. But it is important to understand that regroupment today is less a matter of organizational mergers than of cohering a revolutionary perspective around which a variety of forces, trends and individuals can gather in the coming years. To say we are for regroupment means first of all that we recognize that a revolutionary movement cannot be built simply by the growth of the IS, there are other forces that must be part of the process. This is a long term process.

Yet there are important initiatives to be taken in the coming months. These involve discussions and joint events with a variety of tendencies, including RWH, Solidarity Network, other third camp groupings (Landy, Draper, etc.), individual Maoists, and

elements of the much disputed trade union left.

The Trade Union Left

Finally, a word about the trade union left. If one writes off the working class as a viable arena for revolutionary politics today, it is, of course, necessary to dismiss the trade union left as an arena for regroupment, recruitment, or any other variety of revolutionary politics. Mark characterizes the trade union left as a "dwindling and demoralized pool of regroupers." Furthermore, once one subtracts the organizational burnouts, hard core M-L's and those drifting toward the CP and DSOC, "there is not much left."

Of course, if this were true there would be no hope for trade unionism, let alone revolutionary politics. The "Labor Notes perspective," which Mark approves of, would be as big an illusion as regroupment. A trade union left composed solely of the elements Mark describes would be a hopeless political zoo unable to accomplish much of anything.

Fortunately, there is another trade union left than the one Mark describes. The one I'm familiar with, largely through Labor Notes, is quite large, numbering into the thousands. It is politically broad. Far from being demoralized, it appears quite energetic. Most of these people are political independents. Some have been through left groups, but most left a long time ago. I know of no trend of significance toward either the CP or DSOC. Indeed, most of the people I've met or heard about seem to be hostile to both groups.

The most important thing about this political milieu, however, is not the momentary attitude of individuals toward this or that political group, but that this semi-mass milieu has gained experience and respect in the working class without abandoning its politics. Not all, probably not most, of this milieu is revolutionary in the strictest sense. But they have a class outlook on politics, not just trade union questions, and view themselves as socialists who seek working class rule—not just legislation for the good.

In terms of politically experienced people, this milieu represents the healthiest thing around. To write them off as burnouts is like writing off in 1932 the thousands of workers who had been through the CP, IWW, and SP in the 20's simply because those organizations were, like the left, a mess and had suffered defeats. There is no such thing as a revolutionary socialist movement that doesn't experience defeats. The question is what it learns from them.

A New Perspective for the 1980's

By Mark Levitan and Mike Urquhart

I. Introduction

At our 1975 Convention, the IS adopted a perspective for becoming a workers' combat organization, the nucleus of a revolutionary party. Having set out an ambitious list of near-term tasks, one document concluded: "it is in this three year period that we will become a workers' combat group in the lead of a growing rank and file movement, or be severely set back."

We had some initial successes, the workers recruitment campaign and the launching of TDC/TDU; but for whatever gains the IS made in its mass work, we found it nearly impossible to translate them into stable Black and working class recruitment. We did not become a workers' combat group. We were set back severely.

In large part, the IS has never recovered from the collapse of that perspective. While our core politics have remained unshaken and our labor work has matured, the IS, as a socialist organization, has been stagnant. The symptoms (if not the underlying causes) of that stagnation are obvious; few branches function, our magazine is barely used, former leaders no longer take responsibility for the group, recruitment is a trickle, and beyond the recitation of first principles we are unable to articulate the reason for our existence.

The regroupment perspective adopted in 1978 was an attempt to address our impasse. If the IS did not have a clear sense of direction then at least we had the hope that soon we would be in a new, larger and self-confident organization. But today we are no closer to a regroupment than we were when we first adopted that perspective. The strategy of "holding on 'till regroupment" lacks credibility as the prospects for such a development loom ever further down the road.

There is now a common sentiment that the IS has no perspective and needs one. The upcoming preconvention discussion can be the most important since 1975 if we can come to grips with past failures and mistakes; if we are willing to re-examine some old, basic and enduring issues; and if we are able to rethink some long neglected questions.

What follows is our contribution to that process. We begin by reviewing our past. We will argue that the failure of the party building perspective was not only due to overly ambitious expectations about our growth, or to a lack of working class militancy, but rested, as well, on a fundamentally wrong perspective about the role we could play in the class struggle and its relation to building a revolutionary socialist tendency in this period.

From there we will examine the state of the revolutionary left today and the prospects for regroupment.

Finally, we believe that the growth of DSOC and its impending merger with NAM is reshaping the American left and imposing a new challenge to the future of our tendency. We propose that the IS explore joining this new organization.

II. "The Tasks for Socialists: Building the Revolutionary Party"; The IS in the 1970's

The IS entered the 70's with boldness, enthusiasm, and a perspective for creating a revolutionary socialist cur-

rent in the working class. The basic idea can be easily summarized. We were going to build a revolutionary party through our participation in the rank and file movement.

Implementing that perspective required that we make some big changes. We had to turn a predominantly student group toward the working class. We had to create an organization that was habitable for workers and their families. Most importantly we had to recruit, hold, and make leaders of our organization that layer in the working class we saw as open to socialist ideas.

The perspective was summarized by Joel Geier in the pamphlet, "The Task for Socialists: Building the Revolutionary Party," published in 1974.

That first international recession [1970], which led to the first wave of working class struggle in the advanced world in the post-war period, did a number of things. The first thing that it did was to restore revolutionary ideas in the working class in the advanced industrial world.

Secondly, it created a layer of workers, in the European countries in particular, who were to the left of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties. These workers today number in the hundreds of thousands in France, Italy, in Britain and in some other places.

Thirdly, what this upsurge did was it began to transform a number of sects . . . The rise of working class struggle took those groups and turned them into the embryo of revolutionary parties. It did this because, for the first time in a generation, it allowed revolutionaries to lead reform struggles and to relate them to revolutionary perspectives.

The Social Democratic and trade union leaders in Europe were more reluctant to lead struggles as a result of this return to crisis and instability to the capitalist system . . . union leaders who are committed to capitalism and to the national capital of their own ruling class, are less willing to lead working class struggles . . . As a result, for the first time in a generation, revolutionaries . . . have been able to fill some of the vacuum of leadership that has been left by the trade union leaders that wished to abandon those struggles.

Revolutionaries have been able to lead struggles over wages and working conditions, and against the capitalist state attacks on the trade unions, and to relate that to revolutionary perspectives. They are able to show workers that they are the best militants, precisely because they are not committed to capitalism but to the interest of the workers.

They can show that their militancy grows from their socialist perspectives and that the sell-outs of the bureaucracy flow from its commitment to capitalism and to the needs of national capital in the struggle for the world market." (pp. 5, 6) [Emphasis added.]

To summarize: we believed that capitalism was entering a new period of crisis, which would give rise to sharp class conflict and a new generation of working class militants open to revolutionary socialism. Those conditions opened a road to the party. By demonstrating that revolutionaries were the "best militants" we could attract a working class base and transform what were essentially student-based sects into the "embryos of revolutionary parties."

This strategy had three requirements. First, there had to be a vacuum of leadership; workers had to be ready and willing to fight around issues that their traditional leaders in the unions and reformist parties were not. Se-

cond, the revolutionaries had to be able to fill that vacuum. They had to have enough "weight" in the class to pose a credible, alternative leadership. Third, and most difficult, the revolutionaries had to be able to translate that leadership into recruitment, into revolutionary organization.

That third requirement brought us up against a most basic question facing any socialist tendency. The question of political method. Simply put, how do we make socialism relevant to the present? Our answer, our method was the "turn to agitation." We believed that by becoming leaders of the class struggle at its present level, we could create a bridge between the rank and file movement and revolutionary socialist organization.

Our agitational work was crucial to the transformation of the IS. Many of our members have become valued leaders, albeit on a small scale, of the working class. Our experience and knowledge are generally recognized as second to none. But these successes have not been matched by growth of the IS.

By 1978 it was clear that this perspective was failing, not just for the IS but internationally as well. Understanding the reasons for this failure is crucial to our continued development as a political tendency.

What Went Wrong?

Our analysis of the period as one which would be marked by economic crisis has been vindicated by events. Our belief that it would quickly open to party building was not.

We clearly misjudged the pace and dynamic of working-class consciousness. Our hope that militancy would grow as the crisis intensified was ill-founded. Although there were some significant battles in the 1970's (the miners' strike of 1978 is one example), overall the level of class struggle was low and there was no significant vacuum of leadership.

But, perhaps the problem is temporary, and the workers have only initially retreated before the employers' offensive. Would a return to struggle in the future place our old perspective back on the agenda?

Clearly, the passivity of the working class made it impossible to implement our strategy. Our ideas of socialism and workers' power are more compelling in the context of struggle. Yet the failure of the party-building perspective of the revolutionary left was not confined to countries where the working class has been quiescent.

In Britain, the Socialist Workers Party expected that the election of the Labour Party government in 1974 would lead to the disillusionment of workers with the Labour Party and the rapid growth of their organization. Instead, the failure of the Labor government led to the election of Margaret Thatcher and a renewal of working class participation in the Labour Party. Meanwhile, the SWP has stagnated.

In Portugal, where the class struggle approached the point of genuine dual power, the Party of the Revolutionary Proletariat (PRP) was unable to break the grip of the Communist Party on the working class.

In Italy, the revolutionary left has collapsed, despite its leadership of significant battles during the "Hot Autumn" of 1969 and its subsequent growth. The fatal blow came in the 1976 election when the revolutionary left's united slate, "Proletarian Democracy" was virtually wiped out by a record Communist Party vote.

We could cite other examples but the point has been made. The failure of the revolutionary left was not due simply to a lack of militancy. There have been sharp struggles and revolutionaries have distinguished themselves by the leadership they have provided, but universally we have failed to translate that leadership into revolutionary socialist organization.

The reasons are two-fold. As Kim has pointed out, by and large the working class has tried to address the employers' offensive by renovating its traditional organizations. The crisis, after all, ups the ante of struggle and in the process highlights the weakness of the revolutionary left. While individual militants can provide effective leadership on the shop floor, there is the growing recognition that local struggles aren't enough. National, political solutions are required yet it is precisely at this level that size counts the most and the revolutionaries are the weakest.

Thus, in Italy for example, while the "base committees" and the left groups could lead some industrial struggles, when it came to a solution at a national, political level, the workers turned to the Communist Party—which could, after all, win an election.

Our conclusion is *not* that revolutionaries are always trapped between their small size and the demands of the crisis, but that the building of a revolutionary party through an agitational perspective can only work under certain specific conditions.

What are they? Until the "final conflict," revolutionaries will be concerned with reformist ideas and demands. But it is only when revolutionaries can credibly identify the winning of immediate demands as directly dependent on the growth of their own organization that they can turn agitation into stable growth.

Our own experience provides an illustration. Our work in a national rank and file organization is exemplary and in general that organization is strongest in areas where IS members are active in it. Yet it is not obvious to its members that the success of the rank and file group is in any way dependent on the growth of the IS. While our members are among the finest activists in the group they are not at all the only ones. It is not clear that the socialists are the best fighters because they are socialists.

The reason lies in the political context. The gap between reforming the union and socialism is enormous. The connection between the two is neither direct nor obvious. Some of the rank and file groups' leaders would in fact hotly deny that there was any connection at all.

While the group needs more and more leaders, it is not imperative, given the issues at stake, that those leaders be socialists.

In the past we tried to recruit members of the rank and file group on the basis of their commitment to, and our leadership role in, the rank and file movement. It didn't take. There are many effective leaders of the rank and file group who are not socialists. The gap between today's issues in the union and socialism is just too vast to be bridged by the agitational approach: "join us; we are the best fighters."

Under what circumstances could it be different? The connection between the reform movement and socialism could be more direct and compelling if, hypothetically, the issues around which that movement had or could be organized were such that *only socialists* could provide ef-

fective leadership. If, for example, nationalizing the industry, workers' control, and independent political action were rank and file demands, the connection between the issues at hand and a reordering of society would be more readily apparent. The idea that success on the issues of the day rested on socialist leadership and the growth and influence of a socialist organization would then be a compelling one to a significant audience of non-socialists committed to the rank and file movement.

The question for us at that point would be whether or not we were big enough to actually do the job. The "vacuum" would be present, but could we put ourselves forward as a viable leadership?

Another example might help here. In Portugal, in the period of 74-75, the issues of the day were clearly radical enough to provide for the growth of revolutionary organization. Workers had won considerable power in the factories and neighborhoods. The issue actively debated was how to extend that power over society at large. The vacuum was there as well. Many tens of thousands of workers were impatient with the Communist Party and willing to follow the lead of the revolutionaries on specific issues. But the revolutionary left was simply too small to present itself as a credible alternative to the CP. Militant, radical workers were unwilling to leave a party of 100,000 to join a "party" of several thousand.

The agitational method can work. But only when the issues at stake and the size of the revolutionary group make it possible to identify the success of one with the success of the other.

An Agitational Perspective for the 80's?

If we understand the conditions under which the agitational method can work it is obvious that today we are far from such a state of affairs. We agree with Kim that in the immediate period party building is not on. We also agree that the central issues facing the working class in the 1980's, the next steps, are the rebuilding of militant trade unionism and independent political action. We disagree that those ideas alone can be the basis for a distinct role for the revolutionary left.

The problem of making socialism relevant to the 1980's is solved neither by a more modest self-conception nor by recreating the illusion that by being the most consistent fighters for the next step we can build a socialist current in the working class. The agitational method failed us in the 1970's. If maintained it will fail us again in the 1980's.

Militant unionism and the labor party, as big a step as that would be, do not necessarily imply radical, let alone socialist change. There is no reason to believe that the labor party is anathema to reformists, even organized, self-conscious, social democratic reformists. In the context of America in the 1980's such a party just might be the best vehicle for the kind of reform they favor.

Historically, the establishment of labor parties in the "English-speaking world" has been the work of social democratic unionists. That should come as no surprise. The Canadian New Democratic Party illustrates that independent political action and class collaboration are hardly incompatible.

Even in the U.S. today "realignment is in the air" in large part because social democratic unionists no longer relate to the idea as some heresy. Winpisinger is the clearest example. Tony Mazzochi and Ed Asner are

others. Even Fraser when pressed is willing to consider a labor party as a last resort, after we give the Democrats one more try.

Independent political action does not distinguish revolutionaries from social democrats. Not now and certainly not in the future when the idea will gain popularity and the Frasers and even more conservative types climb on board. There will not be a vacuum of leadership which only we and the "broad" trade union left could fill. (Which is fortunate; if the the future of independent political action really rested on our forces alone it would be a very long time coming.)

The next step, independent political action, rebuilding the union movement, organizing the unorganized, and confrontation politics are an excellent program for *Labor Notes*. But it is not the basis for building a socialist current in the working class.

What Needs To Be Done?

As long as it was (and inasmuch as it still is) a question of winning the proletariat's vanguard over to the side of communism, priority went and still goes to propaganda work...."

V.I. Lenin, 1920

Regardless of whether the IS continues as an independent group or as a tendency within a broader organization, our fundamental role is the same: to be the *left wing* of the next step.

Certainly there is a strong connection between the level of working class self-activity—its militancy and organization—and consciousness. Socialists, indeed, have much to contribute as leaders of those movements toward class independence. We also have, in addition, a *socialist role* to play, one which because of our agitational perspective we have neglected for some time.

Part of that role lies in what Kim calls confrontation politics, bold tactics and mass participation. (Here our ideas and those of some social democrats would begin to diverge.) The other part is an ideological role. Lenin called it "propaganda work." That entails finding ways to make the connection, in the realm of ideas (for that is all that is possible now), between the next step and a socialist transformation of society.

There are events, issues and movements which can provide us with more of an audience for our "third camp" politics now than there has been for some time.

Poland is one obvious example and it is an issue we have worked on effectively. There is also the beginnings of an anti-nuclear weapons movement in the United States. It raises an issue which we are uniquely qualified to address—how to advocate unilateral American disarmament in the face of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. The struggle in Central America opens up other basic questions about the role of the working class in liberation movements and the nature of socialist society.

We can also play a socialist role in the labor movement.

We would not pretend that the opportunities for "ideological intervention" in the unions are great or that we could recruit numbers of workers if only we were more committed to the task. The potential is modest. But there are possibilities, especially around issues such as plant closings, reindustrialization, and the crisis of the auto and steel industries. Some socialists have been trying to address these issues; we should and can, too.

For example, in the UAW we have been active in the "no concessions" movement. The question of course comes up that if concessions will not solve any of the auto workers problems, what will? Dan Luria and Jack Russell have written a pamphlet *Rational Reindustrialization*, which for all its shortcomings is the basis for a socialist response to the crisis in auto. We should be using their work to begin a discussion with UAW activists about the issue of planning and community and workers' ownership.

In steel, U.S. Steel's purchase of Marathon Oil raises some other issues that lend themselves to socialist input. (See Jim Balanoff, "U.S. Steel Cons the Congress and Union," *In These Times*, January 20-6, 1982.) Local 1397 has filed a suit—Staughton Lynd is the lawyer—demanding that U.S. Steel divulge its investment plans. The issues are sharply defined: who controls investment and for what purposes—and we have something to say to steel workers about them.

These examples indicate the kind of activity, propaganda work, which could be done now (and we wouldn't be just talking to ourselves either) if we are prepared to shoulder the task.

That will mean first rebuilding our own politics. The stagnation of the IS organizationally has been more than matched (despite *CHANGES*) by our decline politically. Correcting our "depoliticization" involves not just rebuilding an intellectual cadre and upgrading the use of our magazine but rethinking the way we see our role in the struggle. Or more precisely, renewing an aspect of our work we have allowed to atrophy.

(It will also mean ending our isolation. One reason we are providing so few answers is that we are asked so few questions. The solution to that lies in part III.) The responsibility to play a socialist role will grow as workers go into motion and the labor party idea gains adherents. Workers will want to know how a labor party could more effectively address the problems the Democrats have failed to. What would be its program for change? What is its vision of a better, more just society?

The history of social democracy shows that even parties based on the working class can give some fairly conservative answers to these questions. Revolutionary socialists will be called on to provide some answers of our own and that will require our own programmatic ideas, an intellectual bridge between the fight for class independence and the socialist transformation of society.

If we are prepared to play an ideological role, if we are prepared to be a left wing, as well as the champions of, the next step, we can begin again the job of rebuilding a socialist presence in the working class. No matter what organizational form our tendency takes, we must find an answer to the question of making socialism relevant to the present.

III. Regroupment

The regroupment perspective was our first attempt at coming to grips with failure of our party-building perspective. On the one hand we had failed to translate our success in the union movement into growth for the IS. On the other, the miners' strike of 1978 and the solidarity activities it inspired seemed to open a new road forward. We gave up on the conception of the IS as the nucleus of a revolutionary party, rejected the model of a single tendency cadre organization, and adopted a regroupment perspective.

For us the miners' strike marked a "turning point" for class relations in the U.S. We drew a series of conclusions based on it and our solidarity work. First the strike seemed to indicate a qualitative intensification of the employers' offensive. Second, the strike indicated in sharp relief that there did exist a new layer of reform-minded trade union activists. We saw these developments as a challenge to the left. Could we provide some direction for these militants? The labor paper idea (now *Labor Notes*) was one response. Another part of that challenge was whether we could win some of these new activists to socialism. Could we revive and implement the perspective of building a socialist current in the working class?

It was clear that if any serious movement was developing the IS was too small and the revolutionary left too fragmented to meet the challenge. A regroupment of non-sectarian revolutionary forces could be a solution.

REGROUPMENT VERSION 1:

We thought that regroupment could become more than a good idea. We saw that more and more of the left was orienting in a serious way toward trade union work and that as the various party-building strategies were going into crisis the left was also shedding some of its sectarianism. The movement in the unions would be the glue that would pull together the healthiest sections of the left. The new layer of union activists would be the human material for a revived American socialism organized in a broad, multi-tendency organization.

What hasn't regroupment worked?

One reason is clear enough; the dynamic we were counting on—the movement in the unions—did not reach the level we expected. Without that glue many of the forces we were looking toward for regroupment became unglued. The OCIC (the Trend) went on its white chauvinism rampage and self-destructed. NAM is merging with DSOC.

REGROUPMENT VERSION 2:

As it became obvious that the reform movements in the unions would not soon provide the positive dynamic for regroupment, our motivation for it shifted. We began to emphasize the need for the revolutionary left to pose a credible alternative to a reviving social democracy.

The need is real and others on the left also recognize it, but this approach to regroupment has also failed. There is not today nor has there been any serious motion toward regroupment on a revolutionary, democratic, socialist basis. Our regroupment work may have enhanced our reputation on the left but has created little else.

We have some regular contact with two national organizations. We have relations with the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters which are based on our common work in the union movement. But they identify themselves as that part of the new communist movement which supports the political line of the Communist Party of China. They are pursuing a regroupment with the CP(ML) and others with a similar orientation. For them, party-building is something to do with other "Marxist-Leninists," not with "Trotskyists."

We also have some dialogue with Solidarity: a Socialist-Feminist Network. Much of that relationship is based on a few ex-ISers who are now Solidarity members. We have no common work with them. Solidarity is not yet definitely for regroupment but is moving toward that position as its viability as an in-

dependent organization becomes more questionable. Even if Solidarity made that decision, unity would be difficult to achieve. Finally, we have ongoing discussion with a few local collectives, some of whom would join in a broader regroupment process, but none of which would join the IS without it.

Why is this picture so grim? Solidarity's vision of a potential revolutionary regroupment provides more than a clue. Besides the IS and themselves the other two organizations they look to are the Socialist Party and Workers Power. That perspective is not attractive to us or any one else.

There is no motion toward a revolutionary regroupment because any regroupment that would take place along these lines would be more of a salvaging operation than a renewal of revolutionary politics. It would be an ingathering based on the defeats of the past decade, not on anything new or energizing. This regroupment perspective lacks precisely what made the original perspective attractive, the challenge of a new, radical dynamic in American society.

VERSION 3: REGROUPMENT BASE ON THE "BROAD" TRADE UNION LEFT:

Kim's document "Towards a Perspective" tries to revive regroupment as our answer to the problem of building a viable socialist organization. He again looks to the union movement, in particular that part of the trade union left which comes out of the Marxist-Leninist tradition.

How realistic is this perspective? First, we need to make a distinction between a long-term process of recruitment of trade union activists to socialism which, of course, is central to any Marxist perspective, and whether Kim's perspective for regroupment based on these particular activists is on the agenda now or in the near future. It is the latter we question.

This milieu is a heterogeneous one. What it shares is a common history. These activists were politicized in the 1960's. They oriented toward the industrial working class as part of one or another Maoist party-building tendency. Their organization declined or collapsed. Yet, they remain active as unionists.

In many ways these are attractive people. They are activists in the same unions we are. Their functioning has become less sectarian. They think of themselves as revolutionaries.

There may be much we share with this left at the level of trade union issues. But, the potential for building a socialist organization with them is small. Many of them are so burned out by their past experiences that they have no active interest in the question of socialist organization. Those who are interested are looking in many directions; some toward the CP, some toward DSOC, some toward creating a viable pro-China Marxist-Leninist group. After all these subtractions, there is not much left.

Kim's new version of regroupment shares the same flaw as the earlier models; it relies on a dwindling and demoralized pool of regroupers. Regroupments are not motivated by defeats.

A historical example helps illustrate that point. For a generation, the American left was dominated by the Communist Party. In the 30's and 40's, it was the hegemonic force on the left. In 1956 the party, already weakened by repression, was rocked by two events: the revelations of Stalin's crimes at the 20th party congress of

the CPSU, and the Soviet invasion of Hungary.

Party members began to leave, in droves. Our forebears, the Independent Socialist League, saw this as an opportunity to restructure the American left on a democratic, socialist basis. The ISL joined the Socialist Party in order to create a pole of attraction for the thousands of CPers looking for a new political home. Nobody moved in. The ex-CPers went in many directions, but few were interested in joining what was in reality a sect. They did not serve as the basis for rebuilding the left. That process began in the 1960's, when a new generation came on the scene.

Our regroupment efforts suffer from the same fatal weakness. They are based on the failures of the past. The demise of Maoism is no more the basis for regroupment than the shattering of the Stalinist illusions of that earlier generation. The collapse of Maoism and the party-building perspectives has only resulted in a revolutionary left which is in decline in visibility, numbers and morale.

IV. DSOC

Where does all this leave the IS?

Our response to the crisis of the revolutionary left has been to continue the IS, doing what we can to recruit individuals, build the magazine, and foster political discussion with other socialists. The IS today is a sect (not sectarian) with little potential for breaking out of its isolation.

Most of our work is in the trade union movement and potential recruitment from this area is (even if we were more aggressive) very small. We have slightly better prospects for recruiting independent radicals from other movements, but this prospect too is limited. We are too small to intervene on a national basis in any broad movement. We have few student activists and therefore little presence on the campuses. If a significant student movement develops we will have a difficult time benefitting.

There is a third reason why recruitment to the IS is a limited prospect: competition from DSOC. This is a recent development but it must be faced. DSOC is successfully carrying out its regroupment strategy. It presents itself, with growing credibility, as the "organization of democratic socialism in America." Or as DSOC chair Michael Harrington put it as of merger with NAM, "any democratic socialist who is not a member, is a dues cheat." The result is that people are joining DSOC not only on the basis of its politics but on the basis of its size and dynamism. Socialists whose politics are far closer to ours than to Harrington's are choosing DSOC. To the extent that this trend continues, it will further cut us off from potential recruits.

As new movements arise, and the question of intervention in those movements becomes more pressing, our small size will become an even greater handicap. All of the above leaves us with a difficult choice:

1. We can maintain the IS, holding on until some new opening is created. This, of course, is what we should do unless there is a better alternative.

2. We can join DSOC. Our point of view is that we should explore the DSOC alternative. Its growth and growing diversity are cutting off the possibilities for building an independent revolutionary organization. But that same development may have opened up the potential of building our tendency and effectuating a revolutionary regroupment inside DSOC.

We favor an exploration for the obvious reason that such a "historic" decision could only be made after an intense period of self-education, discussion with our co-thinkers on the left, and members of DSOC. It would also include efforts at joint work with DSOC on specific issues.

In order to argue for the DSOC option, we will first describe what DSOC is, its growth and political development. From there we will lay out what we think might be the benefits of joining.

DSOC: From Social Democratic Sect to . . . ?

The Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee was established in 1973, as the result of a three-way split in the old Socialist Party. DSOC's original 200 members were that splinter which had ties to the McGovern, "New Politics" forces in the Democratic Party and the social unionist wing of the labor leadership. In its beginnings DSOC was little more than an intellectual center for academics, Democratic Party activists, and trade union officials and staffers.

Today, DSOC has 5300 members. It has grown beyond its original constituency as well. Who has joined, where did these 5000 come from?

DSOC's growth has come from three sources. The first and smallest source has been more recruitment of union leaders and Democratic Party members. This source is the smallest not because DSOC doesn't want them but because there are simply very few people in either of these milieus who want to belong to a socialist organization.

The second source has been people who were radicalized in the 60's, and whose political work and self-conception is primarily mass organizing activities. They are very much like the people who joined NAM in the 1970's. Let's look at them a little more closely.

In the 1970's, while the Leninist left focussed on work in the industrial unions, other sections of the left became active in a wide variety of other issues: energy, nuclear power, and environmentalism; citizen action groups and public interest organizations; the women's and anti-war movements; public and white collar unionism. During the 70's this broad left provided a base for NAM. But NAM never had the coherence to offer such a varied left much leadership. DSOC could at least provide some valuable connections between those activists and others in the unions and the Democratic Party.

In the past few years DSOC has recruited out of this broad left and added a new generation of activists to its ranks. Unlike DSOC's old guard, these people do not share a historical and deeply ideological commitment to either the Democratic Party or the social unionists. Their attitudes are essentially pragmatic. In general they would like to see a labor party but are not opposed to working for "good" Democrats in the meantime. They understand that the labor movement needs to be revitalized. They are sympathetic to rank and file movements as one of several ways that revitalization could and should happen.

The third source of DSOC growth has been students. The DSOC youth section now numbers 1500, organized on 40 campuses. Its activity includes strike support work, divestment in South Africa campaigns, and most prominently, the anti-intervention in Central America movement.

DSOC is virtually the only left organization that is

recruiting significant numbers of students and young people. These are not the burnouts of the 1960's "collapsing into social democracy," but the first of a new generation coming to socialist conclusions from their experiences in the anti-war and student movements. They are the kind of people, young people moving to the left, who are the basis for any revival of American Socialism.

DSOC is now an organization whose members are mostly recent recruits. The majority of its members bear little resemblance to the hard social democratic cadre who established it nine years ago. DSOC's growth has created an organization of growing diversity. DSOC is still, in part, a social democratic intellectual center and there are DSOC leaders who want to maintain that; but the majority of DSOC leaders and members are also committed to building a mass organization which describes itself as "democratic socialist." (The contradiction between these two models of organization has been the source of much conflict within the group.) That commitment has created an organization which participates in other activities and movements besides reforming the Democratic Party: student and anti-war activity, the women's movement, strike support and Poland solidarity to name a few. The activities of DSOC members span an even wider range.

Growth in numbers and in diversity of activity has been matched by a growing diversity of politics. DSOC now has a Left, Right and Center.

Until recently much of DSOC's internal struggles have been over organizational questions. The Right, the smallest grouping, has sought to preserve DSOC as the intellectual center. The Left has fought, successfully, for organizational measures which would make DSOC more attractive to young activists: a more democratic internal structure, more emphasis on chapter development, internal education, political discussion and public conferences. The Center, trying to balance the two, has for the most part accommodated to the Left's demands while attempting to placate the fears of the Right.

There are, as always, political issues which lie behind these organizational questions. They are beginning to emerge. There have been shifts and differentiations on two key issues: independent political action and labor strategy.

DSOC's commitment to the Democratic Party—a first principle for its founding cadre—is no longer stated, even in its official documents, as a timeless or unconditional one. The NAM/DSOC unity statement allows for support for third party and independent efforts. "The form of our electoral work is not of primary importance. We emphasize the Democratic Party because in the foreseeable future that is where the forces with whom we ally ourselves are located. If and when these social forces take on other serious electoral expression—in non-partisan campaigns or third parties—we would support those efforts as well."

The "Political Perspective of the Youth Section" is consciously ambiguous. On the one hand it states that "what is required is a new party." On the other it asserts that such a party can only come into existence "as the result from a conflict within the existing parties," leaving unclear whether the intention is to split or reform the Democratic Party.

More importantly, DSOC members have been active in independent political efforts. Many DSOC members

were active in the Citizens Party, enough to prevent the DSOC Executive Board and Michael Harrington from endorsing Jimmy Carter in the fall of 1980. In unions like AFGE, ACTWU, the IAM and Screen Actors Guild, DSOC members have been among the most aggressive in pushing for independent labor politics.

Officially, DSOC's labor policy is that it has no labor policy. The organization takes no position on internal union affairs. But many DSOC members are active in or actively concerned about trade union politics. That activism spans every position from hatchet man for the Laborers Union to *Labor Notes*. DSOC has more than its share of union bureaucrats. It also includes unionists committed to the rank and file movement. DSOC includes Jules Bernstein (lawyer for the Laborers) and members of R.O.O.R., the rank and file opposition in that union. In UAW Region 9 both the Regional Director and members of L.A.W., a rank and file caucus at the Linden GM plant, are DSOCers. So are staff members of TDU and sponsors of *Labor Notes*.

These differences are finding their way into DSOC. The 1981 DSOC Convention dropped Jules Bernstein from the DSOC leadership because of his union activity. The platform of the Left Caucus supported "genuine rank and file struggles for the democratization of the unions, since militant, responsive, democratic, racially and sexually integrated unions are a prerequisite for building a successful mass coalition and labor movement capable of transforming society."

At its most recent Youth Conference, panelists Bill Smith of the Association for Union Democracy and Stanley Aronowitz blasted the union leadership and received an enthusiastic response.

None of the above is intended to argue that DSOC or even most of its left wing has "IS politics" on either of these issues. What is argued is that DSOC is no longer a Social Democratic sect. It is growing and becoming more open to the left as it grows. Merger with NAM will only enhance both those tendencies.

DSOC's target is to have 10,000 members by mid-1983. With NAM bringing in 1500 members that goal seems obtainable. We have no crystal ball but if present trends continue, it is probable that DSOC will begin to so outdistance the rest of the Left in terms of numbers, dynamism and public visibility, that in the next few years it will emerge as the dominant organization on the left. DSOC will have grown from a sect to a mass (by American standards) "democratic socialist" center. It will begin to take on some of the characteristics of a "movement" organization.

To use an analogy from the 1960's, DSOC will not be a latter day Socialist Party so bound to the trade union bureaucracy that it is incapable of responding to new developments. Rather, its role will be more akin to that of SDS. It will be the organization at the center of the emerging radical movements.

From afar, SDS could seem unattractive. It was a zoo. It was Stalinist and anarchist, counter-cultural and third worldist, ultimatist and opportunist. The social democrats who had initiated it were horrified by SDS. The Communist Party denounced it as bohemian and anti-working class. We too, tragically, stayed out until it was too late. The "Old Left" could not relate to it. Yet, it was the movement center. It reflected and had a tremendous impact on the student movement.

Although there are many obvious differences, DSOC will play a similar role. It will be the first place where the vast majority of the next generation of socialists, including working class socialists, will be drawn. It will be the radical center where all the questions facing the mass movements—from labor party to unilateral disarmament—will find expression.

Our prediction is not just based on DSOC's size and growth. It is also based on the dynamics at work in American society, the issues around which a mass left will develop and DSOC's politics.

If DSOC is not a latter day Socialist Party, neither is the Socialist International exactly the same organization today as it was in the 50's and 60's. The most immediate prospect for the left in the United States is a renewal of anti-war activism. DSOC will play an important role in that development because of its Youth organization but also because it and the SI have been actively establishing fraternal ties to third world liberation movements and view solidarity work with them as a political priority. (The recent sale of weapons by the French government to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua shows that this is more than just verbal leftism.) The same will be true if a mass anti-nuclear weapons movement develops as well. Today, social democracy here and abroad has an independence from U.S. imperialism which was unthinkable 15 years ago.

What about the longer run? What about developments in the working class? Here Kim's anticipation of the next step in the growth of working-class consciousness becomes relevant. We agree that as the working class begins to respond to the crisis its response will be reformist. But we are not shy about characterizing the political content of that reformism. It will be social democratic. Kim's example of the IAM's rebuilding America Act as the kind of reformism he expects is truly apt. It indicates exactly why DSOC (yes, the act's authors are DSOCers) will be a force among trade union militants and union reformers. Every movement needs ideas. Historically (Lenin pointed this out a long time ago) the Left has been the bridge between the working class movement and the left wing of the intelligensia. If working class activists are in the market for ideas of an essentially social democratic character, DSOC could not be better situated to play that historic role. DSOC will be important for the future working class movement not because it is a mass organization workers will try to reform, but because it will be the source of many of the ideas they will try to reform those organizations with. DSOC will be the place where workers who are looking for a set of ideas which explain the world will be. We should be there too.

Inside DSOC

The previous discussion of DSOC does not yet make the case for joining. It still must be shown that through joining we can more effectively build our political tendency. We think this can be done. The fundamental point is straightforward: as DSOC members we can have a much larger audience for our politics. We would be able to reach people who have never heard of us, have never been exposed to our ideas and probably never will if we continue on as an isolated sect.

Being in DSOC will be more difficult, complicated and demanding than continuing the IS. We will have to sus-

tain a higher level of activity than we have for several years.

First, we will have to maintain and continue to build our union work, including our participation in *Labor Notes*. Besides being important in its own right, our activity is essential to the credibility of our ideas. Our work is something we will want to draw DSOC members to and involve them in. Winning people to our tendency means winning them to the kinds of activity we see as important as well as winning them to a set of ideas.

Second, we will have to involve ourselves in those activities, especially student work, which DSOCers are engaged in and which we think are positive and ought to be built. (Like other DSOC members we are not obligated to participate in those activities we do not agree with.)

Third, we must publish and build a readership for a revolutionary marxist journal which can develop and argue for our politics to an audience both within and outside of DSOC. That can be done by establishing a readers club, open to all supporters of the magazine, which would sponsor educational events, forums, debates, dinner discussions, etc.

Finally, we would participate in DSOC's internal life. We would write for its internal bulletin and external publications, attend organizational meetings, build those DSOC activities we choose to. Most importantly we would participate in the development of DSOC's left wing.

Getting There

We are proposing to the convention that the IS explore joining DSOC, not that the IS join, for several reasons. The most obvious is that this is a very big step and deserves careful consideration. There are also advantages to a planned and unrushed approach.

By deciding to explore joining we can more systematically test whether DSOC would be a "habitable environment" for our tendency. Exploration would include: discussions with other revolutionaries who are also considering this option (they exist), discussions with members of DSOC's left wing who are friendly to the idea of our joining (they, too, exist), and joint work proposals by us to DSOC chapters or members around issues for which we have a similar approach: for example, Poland solidarity work, PATCO support, where possible a third party or independent campaigns (Barbero). We would also use *CHANGES* to further educate ourselves about DSOC politics and to begin a more formal dialogue with DSOC activists.

If, after exploring the DSOC option, we decided that it was right, we would be able to join with other revolutionaries and with some assurances that there are people already in DSOC who would defend our right to join and organize for our views.

We would not negotiate with the DSOC leadership. There is nothing to negotiate. We would place no demands on DSOC except that we enjoy the same democratic rights as any other DSOC member. Neither would we "sneak in." We would join on the basis of a public statement explaining candidly why we are taking this step.

Four Questions

There are some potentially compelling reasons against this course of action. We have boiled them down to four:

1. We agree that DSOC is big, will get bigger and that the development of a left wing in DSOC is significant, but we can influence that process from the outside.

We can influence DSOC members without joining DSOC but there is very little likelihood that we can convince people who have already chosen to join DSOC that they should stop fighting for their politics in a big organization to join our small one. They will instead demand that, if we think that what happens inside DSOC is important, we should stop coaching them from the sidelines and join the fight. Influencing DSOCers from the outside will not build the IS.

2. There may be DSOC members who respect the IS but DSOC's leadership is hostile and won't let us in.

Many DSOC leaders would certainly be hostile to our membership but they would have a difficult time keeping us out if they decided to try. If they were successful, it would be at a high price.

There is nothing in the DSOC constitution which could bar our membership. It would be difficult to create one at a time when DSOC is calling itself a multi-tendency organization open to all democratic socialists. Besides some knotty technical problems—how to create wording which applies only to us—it would lead to a nasty fight. Furthermore, a discussion in DSOC about our membership would be a good, not a bad thing. It would show us where we stood in the eyes of the DSOC membership. It would also create a section of the organization which was committed to our right to join.

If they went ahead and barred us, we would at least have shattered their claim of being an all-inclusive group. We would be in a better position to argue with revolutionaries inside and around DSOC that they should be outside, with us.

3. Joining DSOC may bring us into contact with new people but won't it damage our relationship with others?

If we decide to join we will try to convince the people we have been discussing regroupment with and others to come with us. Not all of them will. There are people on the left who will be horrified by our decision. This is one of the hard choices involved in any radical new direction. We believe it is a choice that must be made. As we have argued above, revolutionary regroupment as we have understood it will not happen. Joining DSOC means turning our back on an illusion.

4. The most important objection is that joining DSOC means the dissolution of our tendency.

Our contention is that joining DSOC is a means to build our tendency, not to destroy it. We recognize that being in DSOC will subject us to conservatizing pressures (although those pressures are not unique to DSOC). There are no pat reassurances we can or would want to make. We do want to emphasize that we regard it as an absolutely essential condition that we continue to have a public vehicle for our politics—a magazine and a readers club. If joining DSOC meant giving up that vehicle we would oppose joining DSOC. The accusations of "dissolution" would then be accurate.

In Conclusion

When the IS was founded in 1969 we had over 300 members. Today we have fewer than one third that number. We saw the 1970's as a period in which small, student-based revolutionary groups could, through their leadership in the class struggle, transform themselves into

the embryos of working-class revolutionary parties. We have attempted to analyse that perspective. We believe that our failure lay not only in our youthful expectations, or the lack of working class militancy, but in a false assessment of the role we could play as socialists in today's class struggle. The agitational method could not have worked. It will not work in the 1980's.

We looked at our regroupment efforts. They have produced little. Our conclusion is that they will in the near future produce no more. It is our judgement that the revolutionary left which was created by the mass movements of the 1960's has by and large been defeated. A new left must be created, with a new generation of activists.

Finally, we examined a new challenge to our future, DSOC. We believe that the IS must now explore joining the organization that will be created by the merger of DSOC and NAM.

We appreciate that this proposal is a radical departure. It is painful to discuss past errors. It is even more painful to discuss the bleakness of our present situation. But avoiding these issues will only result in another decade of disappointment.

A perspective must answer the question of how to most effectively build our political tendency today, in the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. We believe in the politics of the IS, in democratic, revolutionary socialism. Unfortunately, the IS is no longer an effective vehicle for those ideas.

We propose that we explore joining DSOC because we are optimistic that through joining we can more effectively argue for our politics, reach a broader range of people, participate in the reconstruction of an American Socialism and thus build our tendency.

serious question of "k stg" perspective
solid reports for investigation / collaboration -
try explanation of why ~ DSOC in certain key areas
(Boston, NW (industrial) Bay Area)

problems - "now tendency" goal!!
Even beyond that - no job in this period possible
look at how to maintain - who is attached to work class
self activity - folders remain "independent" -

A Call for a Real Discussion

By Marty Rosenbluth and Foss Tighe

As new members we are very disillusioned with the level of political discussion within the organization. In joining the organization we were attracted by its practice: rank and file unionism. Its rationality, non-dogmatic ideology, and successes were inspiring, and its theoretical basis was sound. These factors remain true now as they did when we joined.

As former Antioch students we knew that joining the IS would mean a smaller amount of political discourse would take place (and this seems good, given the amount of bullshit one can encounter on the college campus). However, over the course of the past year, and in particular with the introduction of the Mark L. and Mike U. document, it has become increasingly frustrating to see the nature of political discussion in this organization. The IS was lucky enough that many of its political outlooks were correct enough to carry us through the 70's without collapse, like the Maoists suffered. Yet, these same ideas will not, in themselves, carry us through the 80's. We must rebuild our ability to talk about socialist ideas. (After all, dialectics has its roots in the Greek sense of the word "debate" or "talking," and we're sure Marx used the word carefully.)

Kim's perspectives piece represents one of the best-ever elaborations of our trade union, and now our student perspectives; but in essence, as far as the the IS as a socialist organization goes, has nothing new. The outlook is much the same only everything is on a slower time table.

This new document does not address the crisis of political life in the organization. People will not eagerly schedule new meetings to discuss the ideas in Kim's document.

We must not forget that ideas can be very invigorating, and that most of us were won over to socialism in a large part by ideas. Why do we now fear discussion? Kim's document represents little new addition to the realm of ideas, yet it is this need for some sort of invigorating perspectives discussion that motivated the current perspective discussion in the first place; to rebuild the political life of the organization.

It has been with great disappointment that we have seen Mark and Mike's proposal dealt with in such a shabby manner. Aside from the not so veiled threats to leave the organization, and the elaborate historical condemnations of Social Democracy (from Kautsky, to Allende and Harrington—all of which we are aware of), we have heard little discussion. There have been some interesting discussions of how the proposal might affect our trade union work, and this has been good, but this still does not address our starvation diet of socialist ideas and discussion.

Mark's proposal attempts to do this, in his words to make socialism relevant to the present. We see it as an attempt to give some life and purpose to our political life. Why be part of a socialist organization that remains isolated politically from the people it works with (i.e. the Rank and File) because of the nature of the period and the political strategy we understand to be correct—and at the

same time rigidly remains isolated from those who consider themselves to be socialists—and are we talking about what that means?

As members of a socialist organization we must be able to do more than just be the best fighters in the union reform movement. As revolutionary socialists we must be able to keep up our end in the political debate that goes on beyond the current level of consciousness found in the working class. It is true that we all have our own personal socialist underpinnings that give us the motivation to keep going, but our ability to interact constructively in political discussion seems limited to the realm of militant trade unionism. We have good answers to trade union political questions, and we have pat answers to socialist political questions.

We can continue, probably indefinitely, being the best fighters in the trade union movement, but unless the IS can show more vigor and health in the realm of political ideas and discussions, we will stagnate as a socialist organization. Individually, our commitments to socialism, can give us the energy to go on, but organizationally what will the basis of unity be? Sadly, though objectively, socialism, at least in the U.S. today, remains in the realm of ideas, and it is there we must keep it alive; and that is not done by strict adherence to past formulas and closed ears to new ones.

As an organization of a hundred people, it is fine to be proud of our past achievements, and we should be proud—for a small organization we have done a lot; but as an organization so small it is sheer arrogance to imply that any of our positions are immune from questioning. As new members it is often intimidating to deal with people who are so sure that they are right. Come on! How about a little humility in the face of so many failed perspectives.

As a conclusion, we would like to make it very clear that we are not advocating the abandonment of the perspective that guided us through the rank and file work we now have. We merely seek to find a way to complement it with a more active political life. Activism and political discussion are hardly mutually exclusive phenomena, in fact Karl himself was in favor of doing both.

We too have a lot of questions concerning Mark and Mike's proposal. They will not be answered by attacks on the history of social democracy, but by thorough and open political analysis and discussion.

Report on Trip to Denmark

By Marty Rosenbluth

At the IS Summer Conference, a member of the VS (Left-Socialist) Party of Denmark was our guest. On a recent trip to Denmark, I spent a lot of time talking to VS members, and found that although the political arenas we operate in are different, many problems we encounter are the same, or at least similar. The VS, while almost totally Third Camp, is fairly broad, including left-social democrats, utopian socialists, and revolutionary socialists like ourselves. The VS was formed in 1967 as a result of a parliamentary disagreement in the SF (Socialist Peoples Party) when the right-wing of the SF and the Social Democrats put forth several pieces of anti-worker legislation, including wage ceilings. The left wing of the SF (the SF having split off from the Danish Kommunist Party or DKP) became the VS, so at the time of the split, they already had people in Parliament.

The VS structure is interesting. They allow factions the right to an independent voice and organization within the VS. Some of these put out their own publications and hold their own educational and political meetings. A few of the people I spoke to were critical of the factions, saying that they "were more interested in bulding their factions than the VS"; but most people including those not in factions, felt that the factions were a positive thing. (I think that the translation to the English word 'faction' might also be slightly inaccurate.)

The VS has maintained its people in Parliament, although it lost one seat in the last election, but has also obtained a lot of local offices, including one of Copenhagen's mayors. But VSers and non-VSers I spoke to felt the VS did good work in the government. The VS's analysis is that as long as the working class has Parliamentary illusions, they should be in Parliament representing the interests of the working class. Their work on international issues like Palestine and Ireland is also quite good.

I was asked to check into three questions in particular: 1) the nature of the Polish Solidarity movement 2) What the VS observers thought about the recent SWP convention in Britain and 3) What the FFL (Industrial Joint List), the VS faction closest to our politics, was doing.

The information to answer these questions came from a number of discussions, some that I have better notes on than others. It is also difficult to answer them thoroughly without a longer discussion on Danish politics, but that is not possible in a document of this length.

1) Polish Solidarity Work (Or, Being Just a Ferry Ride Away Doesn't Bring You Closer to the Right Line)

Unfortunately, the left in Denmark isn't any more unified on what to do about the crackdown in Poland than the Left here. As of January 20, neither the SF, or the SAP (4th International) had taken a public stand. Even within the VS, which does support Solidarnosc, what kind of political support to give, and how to best go about it, was a matter of much debate. The weekend after I left, a national meeting was scheduled in Aarhus by the FFL to discuss Solidarity work in Denmark with both VS and non-VS people invited.

The discussion within the VS basically breaks down like this: the National Committee of the VS, while it supports the goals of Solidarnosc, feels their goals are best accomplished through a "dialogue" between the union and the government. Therefore they don't want to antagonize the Polish government by pushing for aggressive action either in Parliament or in the unions. (Remember that they do have influence in Parliament and it is not just an abstract question.)

The FFL, along with the utopian faction, feel that it is absurd to talk about dialogue while mines are being flooded and most of the leadership is under arrest or in hiding. Who would negotiate with whom? While some of the FFL are in favor of encouraging street fighting, from what I can tell the majority sentiment in FFL is to support whatever Solidarnosc thinks is necessary and to organize support in the unions in Denmark.

They, in principle, take no stand on the loan issue, feeling it is a diversion rather than an issue. They think the movement should be built along class lines, the working class of Denmark and the working class of Poland. They have attempted to organize trade union boycotts of Polish goods and succeeded in organizing a four-day action in one of the port cities but wound up with six of their members getting fined after getting no support from the Social Democrat and DKP-dominated union hierarchy. Also FUGA, an unemployed youth organization, took over the Poland-Denmark ferry the day marshal law was declared, passing out leaflets in Danish and Polish and holding it for six hours before leaving.

In Denmark, and elsewhere in Europe, there is the problem of people questioning the extent of US influence on Solidarnosc. This exists even among people who do support them, but are cautious because of the CIA's track record of infiltrating unions in the Third World. While it is unclear to me how widespread this feeling is, it is something that the movement will have to deal with. We have not yet received a report from the meeting in Aarhus but expect to soon.

I also had the opportunity to meet with a woman from the Abermarket in Norway (roughly translates to the Workers Group) who had been doing Solidarity support work there before marshal law, but has since moved to Denmark. The work in Norway is more highly developed, and began earlier than anywhere else (except Poland, of course). Norwegian unionists were the first foreign delegation invited by Solidarnosc to the Gdansk shipyards.

The solidarity work was initiated by Maoists, but the Solidaritet Norge-Polen (Solidarity Norway-Poland) coalition has grown to have official representatives from 50 unions and locals. The trade union leadership council (LO) was approached for support by Lech Walesa, but didn't do anything until pushed from below by Solidaritet Norge-Polen (SNP) from within the unions.

In addition to doing educational and propagandist work in the cities and in the unions, they worked to get people to donate one hour's wage a week to buy printing presses and mimeograph machines to send to Poland. A lucky by-product of increased mechanization of offices was that mimeograph machines could be gotten dirt

cheap in used office machine stores. They succeeded in getting seven offset machines and many smaller machines into the country before martial law, despite long delays at customs. The SNP, since it was a left coalition, made sure that the machines got to the best and most militant of the chapters. Since the mimeographs are light and easy to transport, it is probable that not all of them have been seized and that they are being used by the Solidarnosc people underground. They have more machines and money in Oslo, but they haven't found a way to get them to the union yet.

The SNP has been putting pressure on the LO in the workplaces, and has apparently embarrassed them into taking action. In addition to the SNP, there are a number of community-based groups, mostly bourgeois, but never-the-less there are 30 neighborhood groups in Oslo alone.

The British SWP Convention

The last SWP Convention marked a few departures from past work that are interesting, but not too surprising. The changes are manifested both in the work they are steering their members toward and in the structure of their organization.

The analysis on which the changes are based is that, with strikes at their lowest level in years and other indications of a decline in union militancy, there is also, on the other hand, an upturn in political activity. The working class is looking to parliamentary and other non-trade union avenues to voice their militancy, or maybe more appropriately, their opposition.

As a result of this trade union downturn, their rank and file work in the opposition movements in the unions had not been going well. They are in fact losing ground. Basically, they have decided to abandon the trade union opposition work and are asking their members to do other work. Some of this was happening before the convention. They still hold the perspective of bringing revolution to the workplace, but they are seeking another avenue to do it.

They have also abandoned their Anti-Nazi League (ANL) work. The National Front (British fascists) has been forced to change its tactics since most of its support has been broken. They are now looking to more mainstream approaches, but they are in retreat. In some sense, you could say that the SWP has abandoned the work because they believe they won. But this change was not accomplished without having to expel a number of people opposed to stopping the ANL work, and confusion from people in industry who had been told to push ANL in the workplace, and then were told to stop. Also, it is not yet clear what will happen with people who were recruited to the SWP because of the ANL now that the work has been abandoned.

The SWP now has about 3,500 members, but as with the VS and groups like DSOC, it is unclear how much of that is paper membership.

The work they are doing now is basically in two areas, the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and some very good work organizing right to work marches, which apparently they are the only group active in. (In Britain, "right to work" means demanding jobs, not busting unions.)

They are trying to bring the CND into the workplace,

but so far have only succeeded in doing so in a propagandist fashion, showing films, leafleting, etc. They claim CND groups in six shops, but it is unclear how many workers they have attracted to the work. There is the problem mentioned above, of the sudden shift in lines from ANL to CND, which has created distrust among workers, and the added problem of the CND being looked at as CP-dominated in most of Europe.

The person I talked to, a member of the FFL, was critical of what he saw as a drift towards propagandism and away from struggle, except for the right to work activities. A similar drift is visible in the ISO according to observations in the student movement by both IS and RWH people who work with them.

He was also surprised by the lack of dissent at the convention. Everyone seemed to go along with the leadership.

In an organizational sense, they are moving away from the industrial groups towards a more regional structure. This is more of rationalization than a plan of action.

I think that the problems with giving up the rank and file work are obvious. The reason that people are turning away from their unions is due to a lack of leadership. By giving up the opposition work the problem isn't going to get any better. It will also be interesting to watch the effects constant changes in line have. The SWP is by far the best group in the British left, but the recent convention is distressing.

3) The FFL (Industrial Joint List)

The FFL is the largest faction in the VS, and the one that is closest to our politics. They are trying, from within, to push the VS towards a more revolutionary perspective. While the FFL is the largest organized faction, the majority, according to the FFL people I spoke to, is left social democratic and paper membership. Because of language and time barriers, I was not able to speak to all of the people I wanted to, but the people I agreed the strongest with were in the FFL.

While they are, in varying degrees, critical of the VS, they were all proud of the VS work in Parliament and elsewhere in the government. Also, as stated above, they have the clearest vision of the situation in Poland.

They were very interested in our trade union work because they are trying to do opposition work in the unions they are active in. Even though 85% of the population is in unions, the level of activity is very low. They share our perspective on developing leadership in the working class through the unions.

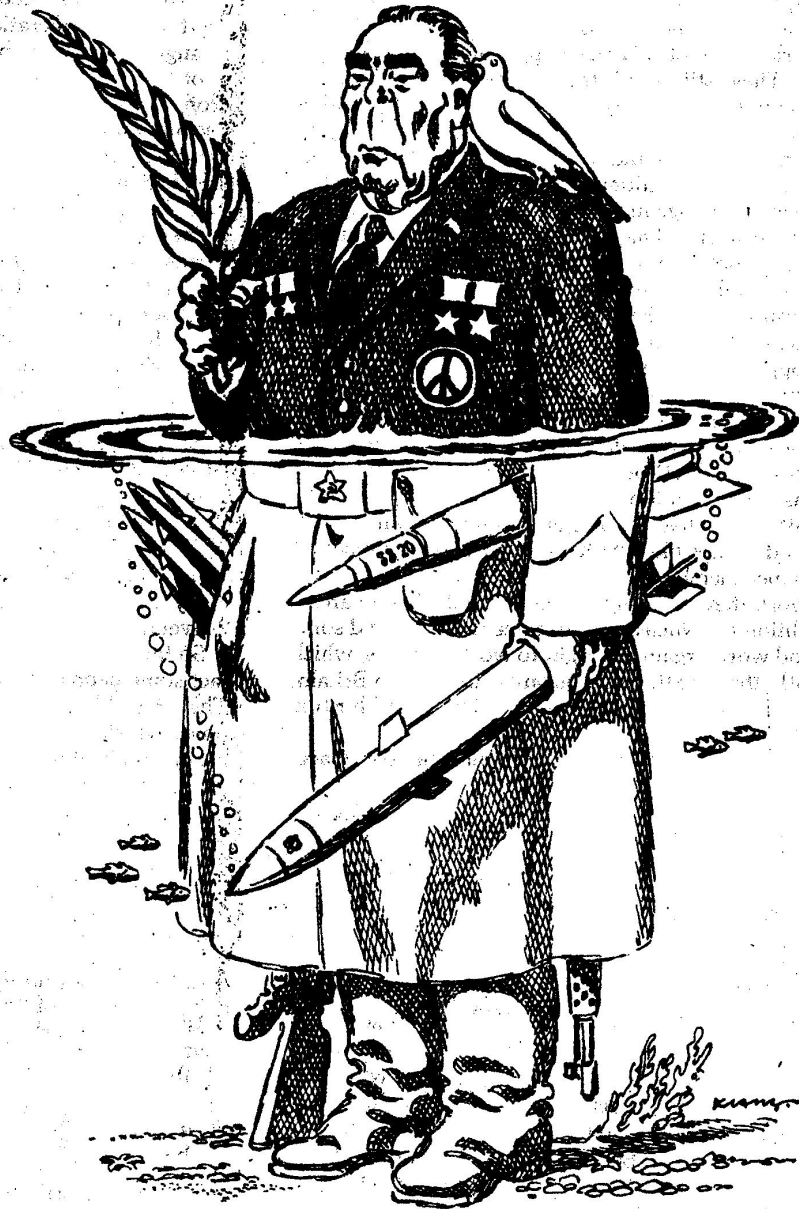
Of all the factions, they also have the highest percentage of industrial workers. Some smaller groupings with a working class and industrial base have been attracted into the VS by the FFL. I spoke to some folks who were in a small group, whose name I unfortunately lost on a pub napkin, who came into the VS some years after the split with the FS, feeling it was better to be in a large group than isolated off in left field. While it hasn't won a majority of the leadership, the FFL is organizing for the next convention.

So far, the FFL has no intentions of leaving the VS. In fact some people I talked to felt it was an odd question. They feel like the Parliamentary and other non-trade union work is important, and to form another small group is ridiculous. While fighting for their politics inside

the VS isn't easy; they feel the people in VS are closer to the politics they want to create, and it makes more sense to try to build the VS and their faction than to splinter.

It should be noted that their ability to operate as they do has a lot to do with the structure of the VS, mentioned earlier in the article, but the problems they are grappling with are interesting and similar to ones we are dealing with. It is important for us to maintain contact with them to find out how they resolve them.

Next Bulletin: Danish Beer—A pub tour of Scandinavia.



Cartoon from VS publication