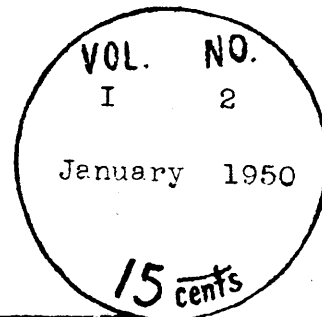


FORUM

Discussion & Information Bulletin
of the Independent Socialist League

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THOSE ST. LOUIS BLUES

A Reply to H. D. Coleman

By James M. Fenwick (Newark)

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One of the points of the American Credo, whose existence is periodically brought to our attention by Comrade H. D. Coleman, is a belief in the harmonizing influence of a hobby upon the self. A hobby - so the theory goes -- is a fine deterrent to all varieties of malfeasance, misfeasance, and nonfeasance.

Faithful to this conception, Coleman over the recent years has diligently pursued a hobby. It consists of acting as the party arbiter of polemical tone and literary style. A modest correspondence has accumulated at the National Office, in which Coleman has pitilessly tracked down mixed metaphors, specimens of the pathetic fallacy, weak negative constructions, and other stylistic barbarities in the literature of the League.

Now this isn't necessarily a bad thing. God knows, even granting the smallness of our forces, the pressure of time under which much of our material is written, and--let us insist--the high level of technical excellence of our literature in comparison with that of the rest of the political left, it must be admitted that more finished writing is both desirable and possible. Similarly, there is room for improvement in the tone of our polemics. One of the minor lessons of the Stalinist experience is surely that polemical crudity is not only an index of ideological decay but that it can serve as a contributor to it. Further, in a period when Marxism is being challenged from every point of the political compass, polemical excesses are only one more impediment to attracting the type of democratic and informed personality we want in our movement. While our polemical record has certainly been superior to that of other socialist organizations it has not been entirely free of overly-personal attacks and polemical vulgarity.

Therefore we could envisage the selection of a Pontifex Maximus who would adjudicate matters of style and tone. Coleman is not our candidate, however. His article attacking Shachtman in the first issue of FORUM is, to begin with, itself couched in an impermissibly uncomradely tone. Like all of Coleman's recent output, the approach of the article is that of someone who is standing outside the movement, and not that of a person who is, in a responsible fashion, trying to work out in common with all of us the many very difficult problems which press upon us for solution. The venomous reference to "the whole theoretical and organizational tradition of the Comintern" as "that malodorous burden;" the sneer at our poverty and our passion for democracy and clarity which is contained in the phrase, the "very hard seats and endless harangues at endless conventions and membership meetings;" the ironic reference to "that great educator, L. D. Trotsky;" the off-hand dismissal of the "October Revolution (in the original sixty-five volume, Russian edition)"--all of this we have heard before, but not from within our ranks. We have heard

it from the bourgeoisie--and not, we must add, from its serious ideologists but from its philistines.

The question is not exhausted, however, by an examination of tone or style, no matter how rigorously it may be conducted. After all, the times are rude--and how few there are in any camp who write with grace! In the end, therefore, it is the content which is decisive. But the political content of Shachtman's article is, of course, precisely what Coleman is not anxious to grapple with. For Coleman the bankruptcy of Shachtman's line does not, in fact, have to be demonstrated politically at all. It suffices for Coleman that "this stubborn adherence to the polemical tradition of the Comintern is alone guaranteed to prevent the 'Americanization' (hateful word!) of the party - that is, its transformation into an organization with something approaching a mass base in America, as distinguished from an organization with a fine circulation for its press in Europe and Asia."

The first two pages of his article consist of such pious rumblings about tone. The last three consist of a whirlwind exposition of why we should support U. S. imperialism in World War III--all done with that current hardboiled realism which is possible only when the interests of U. S. imperialism and the world revolution happily coincide. How Hook roars these days! Listen to our own Coleman: "But, given the situation as it is today, if we reject pacifism, we must accept some variety of defensism, critical or uncritical, temporary or permanent, socialist or reactionary." Politics will out.

Let's see how our moralist arrives at this conclusion. To demonstrate that he is a bit of a radical himself Coleman begins with a sweeping pronouncement: "The development of a mass socialist movement in America lies in an entirely different direction: in a complete break, so far as Trotskyists are concerned, with the tradition of the CP, and the reduction of Leninism from the rank of sacred scripture to the level of other socialist doctrines and theories - all subject to re-examination, revision, and amplification."

To date only an individual or two still in the League have proposed "a complete break...with the tradition of the CP." A break with the organizational and political practices of the post-1923 Comintern? That has been done. A break with the pre-1923 Comintern? That has been done only in minor respects, for we regard pre-1923 Bolshevism, by and large, as being a logical extension of the doctrines of Marx and Engels. If we have failed to re-examine, revise or amplify Leninism in the aggregate, it has not been because we have regarded it as holy writ. We have, as a matter of fact, long since "revised" a number of Lenin's ideas and have brought under inspection a larger number of others. Is not the respect with which we are held throughout the radical world based in good part precisely upon our willingness to reassess received doctrine--and change it where we find it necessary in the light of experience?

It is possible, of course, that the changes have not been sweeping enough. This is not the opinion of the present leadership or the ranks of the League, however. It is the opinion of Coleman. With the exception of his major point, which we shall deal with shortly,

Coleman's "complete break with the tradition of the CP" consists entirely of substituting the following for it: "A full utilization of specifically American political traditions and methods, which Marxists have always been backward in doing; a more flexible approach to the whole problem of the socialization of industry, with the emphasis on the decentralization of control, these are some of the elements of a socialist program for America." Nobody in our organization, we can guarantee, is going to give up Bolshevism for this two-legged stool, one leg of which was rough-hewn by the old American Workers Party and the other by Bakunin.

After having exhausted his inventiveness with these two modest practical proposals, Coleman, obviously a little uneasy, hastens to add: "I do not intend to enter into a discussion at this point of the theoretical questions that Shachtman raises.... These rigid categories have no meaning for me...." In other words, Coleman has no program. In laudable fairness to those who might tend to yield before the virility of his assault Coleman hastens to warn them not to expect too much. One is so often deceived! "But this movement might, nevertheless, have a very different character from the social-democracy."

"Such a mass socialist movement," says Coleman, "would necessarily be based on a minimum program which would leave most purely theoretical questions entirely open." There is one point, however, which Coleman with his generous attitude toward theory has no intention of leaving open--and that is support of United States imperialism in World War III. This is what all his crabbing comes down to.

His position is similar to that of Erber and Green, with whose general approach he says he is in agreement. We shall, however, not assume more than Coleman explicitly states. Therefore we shall confine the argument to Coleman's own article. In any event, in many ways the article of Coleman is more interesting than the article of either Erber or Green. Their respective positions are explicitly stated and are thereby easily accepted or rejected. Coleman's approach is vague, inferential, and disturbed--and in this respect more adequately represents the moods of a number of individuals in the League than do the clearly stated positions of Erber or Green.

In his first argument Coleman grabs us by the lapels and says: "Come on, be honest with yourself--admit that in practice during World War II we behaved like defensists." The appeal is to logical consistency. That politically we were opposed to the war Coleman does not contest. "But to the war in the concrete, we adjusted ourselves very successfully; and I do not see how our protestations of not being involved politically altered the fact that by not one single political act did we distinguish ourselves from those socialists who admitted that they were defensists of one kind or another." The question is then: did we in practice refuse to give support to U.S. imperialism in World War II?

The classical method of demonstrating socialist opposition to war has been for socialist representatives in parliament to vote against the war budget and against the declaration of war. The fact is that research discloses that we did not have a single representative in Congress during the war period. This fact was not only

unfortunate in itself but indicates that the anti-war struggle in this country was forced to begin on a much lower level than did, say, that of the German Social Democrats in 1914. They had, after all, a party of one million members and 111 members in the Reichstag. This absence of socialists in Congress is one more evidence of a fact which should now be a banality in our movement, namely, that the working class of the United States is politically one of the most backward in the whole world. We recognized this in the past by attempting to devise a program of transitional demands which would bridge the gap between the limited class-consciousness--largely economic-- of the U.S. worker and what was socially desirable.

On the question of the war, it seems necessary to recall, we similarly began on the level at which the U.S. worker found himself. Our participation in the campaign against the no-strike pledge at home and in the demobilization demonstrations abroad was governed by the understanding that the demands expressed genuine needs, that they were directed sharply against the interests of the capitalist class, and that their prosecution would raise the level of consciousness of the participants. "Our opposition to the 'No Strike Pledge'," says Coleman, "took a form fully in accord with non-political trade union policy as interpreted by the more 'progressive' unionists." Without insisting upon the value to be attached to the word "fully," of course we addressed ourselves to the more progressive trade unionists. Whom else should we have addressed ourselves to?

To have engaged in a policy based upon "purely political considerations" (and Coleman is careful not to specify what such a policy would have looked like) without considering that the class consciousness of the United States worker is manifested almost exclusively on the economic level would have meant our total isolation and discreditment. This was not the Germany of World War I, where a Liebknecht could go into the streets and hundreds of thousands of workers would respond.

As for political activity, we did what we could--and that was a great deal. We distributed millions of copies of LABOR ACTION containing our political line--which even Coleman admits was anti-war. Our tactic was not the product of covert support of the war but of a recognition of how masses are put in motion. It is not done, certainly, by abstract political propaganda. Fortunately, if Coleman did not understand the content of our policy, many workers did--in both a positive and negative sense. Nor did the bourgeoisie, the labor leadership, the Communist Party, the SWP, or the left in general have any difficulty in understanding the content of our line. Just Coleman.

And unless conditions change radically in the next few years, it is safe to say that we will follow much the same tactics in World War III that we pursued during World War II.

However, it is obvious from reading Coleman's article that he does raise this point in order to attack us from the left. He raises it in order to indicate what he considers our inconsistency in not proposing to be defensists in World War III, when from his point of view we were actually that in World War II. This brings us to a, shall we say, delicate point: just what is Coleman's present position

toward our non-support of either side in World War II? He double-talks all around the issue but in an article in which this is a central point never manages to commit himself. For example: "Among ourselves," he says of the no-strike-pledge campaign, "we exaggerated the political significance of this campaign, because we did not want to acknowledge the fact of our complete abandonment of what was once called 'defeatism.'" Assuming that the statement "we did not want to acknowledge the fact of our complete abandonment of what was once called 'defeatism'" is true, what we would like to know is Coleman's present reaction to this abandonment. Does he think that what he considered our abandonment of defeatism was correct? An unambiguous answer to this question would round out the picture of Coleman's present development. A further question: would not such a policy of objective support of the war have strengthened U.S. foreign policy-- and thereby have strengthened the position of her ally Russia, which Coleman now considers the main danger?

Coleman's second argument similarly attempts to prove that we should be defensist in World War III because that was actually the meaning of our policy in supporting the resistance movements! Like Moliere's hero, who was surprised to find out that he had been speaking prose all his life, we are equally surprised, and with more reason, to learn that we were defensists vis-a-vis allied imperialism. Our only consolation is that up to yesterday Coleman was equally unaware of it.

What was our position in regard to the resistance movements, and what determined it? Let us take the example of France, for simplicity's sake.

Given the decline of the revolutionary temper in Europe and the occupation of France by the Nazis, we stated that French society had been thrown backward and that the problem of national liberation had once more been put on the order of the day. For the time being democratic demands had taken precedence over socialist ones in the eyes of the overwhelming mass of the working class and petty bourgeoisie in France. In order to aid the regroupment of the socialist cadres we stated that our forces had to fight in the resistance along with the best elements in French society. In that milieu we would advance our program--differentiating ourselves from the Gaullists and from all other imperialist influences--and seek to channelize the obviously existent sentiment for a different world in a socialist direction. We envisaged that as the war drew to a close and the Nazis were expelled, national demands would more and more turn into social ones, particularly if we were in a guiding position.

Events confirmed our orientation. That the final desired consummation was not achieved was due to a number of factors, not the least of which was the small size of the Trotskyist forces in France and the false policy which was largely pursued. That our strategy was the correct one in the situation was amply confirmed when, against the general line of the PCI, it was put into practice by small groups within the French party. The bourgeoisie, interestingly enough, did not regard the evolution of events as being "defensist" in character, as was revealed by the haste with which they moved to disarm the resistance. Unlike Coleman they did not operate on the basis of formal resemblances!

Needless to say, were France to be similarly over-run by the Russians we would advocate much the same policy. Is this what is bothering Coleman in his very muddy next-to-the-last paragraph? If it is, he need worry no longer. We have long since committed ourselves on this issue.

Coleman, of course, does not bother to analyze the contemplated war concretely or in any detail. His article says, in the main, that we should support the U. S. in the coming war as we actually did when the U.S. was fighting Germany in World War II. Granting for the sake of argument that this is true, the same criteria can hardly be automatically applied to the Stalinists--unless, perhaps, Coleman considers the two societies as identical formations. If he does he is then certainly obligated to note the fact. It would, in addition, make his case more coherent and our task easier. What has to be analyzed is the results of a policy such as the one Coleman advocates for World War III. Coleman, of course, attempts no analysis.

"....given the situation as it is today," says Coleman with that fine disregard for invidious distinctions characteristic of the man, "if we reject pacifism, we accept some variety of defensism, critical or uncritical, temporary or permanent, socialist or reactionary." The first thing to be said about such a policy on our part is that it would be a real boon to the Stalinists. In the United States they could capture the peace sentiment. They could undermine us by saying, "You see, we told you the Trotskyites were agents of capitalism!" Abroad they could strengthen their regime in Russia and in the occupied countries by similarly portraying us as agents of the not too popular U.S. imperialism.

But what are the war aims of the combatants? What would be the result of a victory by either side? Coleman doesn't pursue the problem this far. We assume that with Coleman we do not have to dilate upon the results of a Russian victory. But what would be the result of a victory of U.S. imperialism? Incalculable destruction, a world in economic and political bondage to the U.S., armies of occupation all over the world, and nationalist revolts. With "luck" the U.S. working class would occupy a privileged position based upon the exploitation of the whole world. Then the new Ice Age would begin--the long decline of capitalist barbarism. This is what, for better or for worse, we commit ourselves to by a policy of defensism!

These are the results which follow from the war aims of U.S. capital--not simply some dreamily conceived defeat of Stalinist totalitarianism. These facts must constantly be kept before the eyes of the working class. It will weaken the struggle against Stalinism? Only if you feel that capitalism can resolve the economic, social and political contradictions which created Stalinism. But let us suppose that through out prosecution of the class struggle capitalism would be so undermined that it could not continue the war. Then, we can reply, the socialist seizure of power would be on the order of the day--and so would a genuine, a revolutionary, assault upon the Stalinist world positions.

And if we were to maintain a position of defense during the war? So long as the social patriotic mood was dominant no one would look at us--they would prefer those who were able to deliver the goods,

namely, the big bourgeoisie, not our organization, which for the next period will be able to conduct only a small scale war waged with pins on a map. Those people who would join us would be much the same stripe as joined the CP during the latter phase of World War II. And when the war-weariness began, with what political capital would we be able to approach the masses? They would have no cause to support a party which proved itself to be no more perceptive than they were-- or even less so.

Coleman's thesis--typically impressionistic, typically incomplete, and typically illusory as such these seem ordained to be--is not new. It is the old thesis of the lesser evil which gave us Hitler after the defeat of the greater evil, the Kaiser, in 1918-- and Stalin after the defeat of the greater evil, Hitler, in 1945. In yielding to it Coleman is merely obeying another sociological law: that in periods of revolutionary defeat or stagnation socialists bend under the pressure of capitalistic propaganda. It is hardly more complex than that.

Historically it may prove that our generation has been conducting a gigantic rear-guard action, whose function will be seen to have been that of preserving the main body of Marxist doctrine. Perhaps. But today, at this moment, the world working class is demonstrating in a thousand ways its willingness to struggle, completely oblivious to what is historically inevitable--as viewed by an intelligentsia which is weary of everything except committing.....a little....of its weariness to paper. The current struggles foreshadow the major engagements to come. And that its struggle is all that a revolutionary can reasonably ask the working class to do. The rest is largely up to us.

In the meantime we have no intention of flying from present difficulties to solutions which are in advance guaranteed to fail. Zinoviev, Trotsky once said, tried to maneuver with history, but history ended up by maneuvering with Zinoviev. We fear that this is the position which Coleman is about to find himself in.

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MUNIZ SEEKS NEW TACTICS -- AND REJECTS MARXISM

By Jacques

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It has been long since we have read any documents by Muniz. Now several articles have come to hand, notably one on the French miners' strike of November 1948 led by the Stalinists, another on the RDR. Here we have not mere attempts at interpretation, but a summation of what Muniz considers to be the fundamentals of doctrine. He deals with the tactics and strategy to be accepted by the vanguard if the working class movement is to go forward. Reading these documents leaves one with the curious feeling of listening to a violinist with but a single string to his fiddle. Muniz is forever keyed up to the point where the revolution is -- must be -- immediately on the order of the day. Two years ago, upon his arrival in France, Muniz hastened to write an article in which we were privileged to read that the whole question of power in France lay in the streets of Paris. That is, the situation was revolutionary, or, in the well-known expression of Trotsky with respect to Germany before Hitler's advent to power, everything was poised on the edge of a knife. Two years have gone by and we read now that the epoch is such (it is no longer merely a situation, but a continuous situation, i.e., an epoch!) that no tactics and strategy are permissible except those that call on the workers to turn every struggle into a political one so as to raise at once the question of power through the proletarian revolution. If we are taken unawares by the urgency attributed by Muniz to events, it is unfortunately because he does not help us to reach his exalted position by one single sentence of analysis concerning what is actually transpiring. But without such analysis, it is utterly impossible to prove one's correctness. We know that revolutionary situations do not prolong themselves over a period of years, but must be resolved in a relatively brief period of time. And is it permissible to inquire whether even in the "final" epoch events can move downwards on the curve of the class struggle as well as upwards, so that conceivably tactics might still have to be modified depending on the exact situation? One thinks, for example, of the tactics of the Bolsheviks in the months between February and October 1917.

But Muniz has an outlook that is simplicity itself. Marx and Engels - he tells us - were not permitted in their studies of capitalist development, great as was their genius, to see certain elements now in evidence. Today the possibility of the decline of civilization faces us as an actuality; we can even observe its concrete form in Stalinism. Yet all the tactics of the workers' movement (including those advocated at various times by the Fourth International) issued out of a period when this actual danger of decadence could not be taken into account. It follows that these tactics no longer apply and must be changed radically in accordance with the new character of the epoch.

Let us quote Muniz in his own words: "Partial struggles (that is, struggles for immediate demands) are no longer conceivable in the same manner, for real partial victories are henceforth im-

possible. Not that the workers are incapable of wresting from capitalism increases in salary or a reduction in the hours of work, but that in the actual conditions, this can prove nothing finally but a trap; even the simplest workers begin to understand this. The fate of the proletariat can no longer be ameliorated under capitalism and consequently the conditions for the revolution can no longer become better. It flows from this that those organizations which have in view only partial amelioration are no longer reformist, but reactionary; they serve only to bind the proletariat to capitalist society or even to offer to this society a new counter-revolutionary solution, just as does Stalinism. It flows equally from this that an economic struggle led by revolutionists takes on immediately a political character... Today, either the partial struggle becomes rapidly a general revolutionary movement, or else it can obtain nothing durable. For us, it involves therefore not partial struggles, but rather the organization of the working class for the final struggle."

Muniz goes on to say that whereas formerly one could look upon the big trade unions and reformist organizations as partaking of a dual nature, conservative in relation to the revolution, but progressive with respect to the bourgeoisie, today this contradiction has disappeared. Both reformism and Stalinism are now unreservedly reactionary. When it was possible to seize on the progressive side of the reformist working class movement to win over their adherents to the revolutionary cause, the tactics that could be utilized suited the necessities of the situation. The united front, workers' control of production, opening of the company books, trade union unity, etc., proved extremely useful. But all of these cease to be useful from the moment when capitalist society exhausts all possibility of further development, and when reformism, from being the extreme left of capitalist society, changes into one of its reactionary pillars. These tactics are even less appropriate in the case of counter-revolutionary Stalinism. Furthermore, what renders all these tactics, and above all the united front, obsolete, is the fact that workers no longer believe in these parties, no longer have illusions about them but are profoundly skeptical.

There would seem to be a painful lapse in the logic applied by Muniz here. If the trade union, for example, engages in a strike struggle for betterment when capitalism cannot possibly afford to grant amelioration, the struggle must inevitably take on a more bitter character. Far from doing away with the contradictory nature of the reformist organizations, the nature of the epoch should then accentuate the contradiction more than ever. Muniz acknowledges this himself when he says that every struggle for partial gains must be transformed into a political struggle. Evidently the situation must make this possible or it would be unreal. But it is still the reformist (or Stalinist) organizations that control the workers in their present struggles, and not the revolutionists. Thus these organizations come face to face with their inadequacy each time they are forced into a real fight. The fact that the leaders act to betray their followers does not change the objective situation which should thus tend to set the workers in opposition more and more to this leadership. If this is the case, then it follows that Muniz is entirely wrong and the old tactics which re-

ried on the contradictory nature of the reformist organizations, should prove more effective than ever before in this epoch.

But thirty years of defeats, says Muniz, have taught him that there is nothing to be gained by working with the old parties. Note this well. Muniz demands a change in tactics because the epoch is entirely different. Yet he cannot help bringing in the previous defeats which have taught him the self-same lesson. That would indicate that the tactics were wrong even in the previous epoch! In fact, Muniz is of the opinion here and elsewhere that the defeats were due to false tactics and appraisals by the revolutionary leaders. We shall see that this forces Muniz into full retreat from all the ideas of Marxism. But Muniz still thinks that the revolution must be carried through by the leadership of the vanguard organized in a party. The revolutionary party must win to itself the most conscious and courageous workers as the necessary condition for winning the masses. This vanguard, says Muniz, is not won on the basis of such slogans or ideas as the united front, but by the most general ideas of the revolution. Every day struggle leads directly to the political struggle which permits raising the revolutionary slogans. Only in this way can new hope be roused among the workers, the hope necessary for struggle and for victory.

Muniz is nothing if not consistent. His rejection of all the old tactics includes that of the nationalization of the means of production in a workers' state. Muniz, like Chaulieu in a long, pretentious article on this question, sees no need for any transition period in which all industry is concentrated in the hands of the state. No, not any more concentration than now exists is necessary, but the immediate socializing of this property. The means of production must become an instrument in the hands of the workers to satisfy the needs of consumption of society. Nationalization according to the Russian model can lead only to the same type of Stalinist reaction and decadence. Muniz thinks of nationalization in this sense even in the workers' state as a mere continuation of the process of concentration that takes place under monopoly capitalism. What then of the workers' state itself immediately after the revolution? Muniz tells us that on the morrow of the revolution the workers' state, as well as capitalist distribution must enter in their phase of withering away. But a state owning all the means of production and obtaining all the surplus value, will never wither away. Therefore the means of production should have, "au lendemain meme de la revolution," the same structure or form of property (an inadequate expression in the eyes of Muniz) as in socialist society. The whole concept of a transition period, worked out by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, is thrown overboard. Muniz wants nothing but socialism, pure and simple.

Muniz relegates Marx and Engels, in their analysis of society, and in the strategy and tactics which they advocated as a result of this analysis, to an obsolete past. He has apparently forgotten whatever he may have known previously concerning the founders of socialism when he speaks of them as having raised only the broad and general ideas of the revolution. Is it necessary for us to send him back to their works in which they deal with the trade union question, the question of parliaments and reformism, the question

of economic demands, the housing question, the relation of the working class to the middle class, yes, and even the question of permanent revolution which itself involved for Marx precisely the relation of partial demands to ever more general demands up to the most general ideas (and practice) of the revolution? But if Muniz thus unwittingly denigrates Marx and Engels, he does far worse for Lenin and Trotsky. He casts overboard everything for which they stood, everything which Trotsky devoted himself to saving from the corroding influence of Stalinism, without so much as giving them honorable mention. Marxism in the hands of these four towering figures, was a rich integration of all the experience of the working class. This integration took the form, above all else, of the sharpening by all-sided analysis, of all the weapons of tactics and strategy in the arsenal of the revolutionists. The interrelation of all the ideas of minimal and maximum programs, the dialectical transformation of tactics with every important turning point in the situation, the correlation of tactics and strategy with the economic conjuncture -- these were the methods of thinking that, worked out over two decades and more, became the art of Bolshevism. The greatest art of all, the art of leadership, was shown to be tied to the ability to recognize in timely fashion sharp turns in events and to the readiness to change tactics just as sharply accordingly. Trotsky worked out -- warning, of course, that it must not be used dogmatically and schematically, as though it were the unchangeable letter of the law -- a transition program, the purpose of which was precisely to show the movement how to win the sympathy and confidence of the working class with partial demands, and, as the situation became more revolutionary with the deepening of the class struggle, how to aid the workers to bridge the gap between these partial demands and the more advanced ones that would direct the struggle for power.

All this wisdom, the summation of a lifetime of experience (and what experience!) Muniz finds not merely unnecessary but -- reactionary! He proposes to drop all the middle terms of the program, all the slogans and ideas that lie between the present status and consciousness of the mass of workers, and the final insurrection to take power, and to retain only the end point, the revolution itself. Muniz asserts that it is necessary, in the light of the changed epoch, to modify radically all our tactics. What change has he proposed exactly? What are the new forms? Let him point to one single new one! All that he proposes is to drop tactics - is negative. There is not one iota of creativity in his thinking! Does he seriously think that he has discovered something new in the fact that the epoch is the final critical one in which capitalism stifles in its own contradictions and threatens by its decay to drag all civilization under with it? But Trotsky based all his thinking on this very view. His transition program is tied directly and unequivocally to this analysis of the present epoch, although Trotsky never dreamed of basing working class strategy and tactics on the nature of the epoch when he knew, as we know, that the changes in situation during the epoch must determine these weapons. The epoch, final though it be, is nevertheless prolonged and its historic movement has, even since the end of the war, shown tremendous swings both upwards and downwards on the curve of the class struggle. Both Lenin and Trotsky taught that capitalism had reached its death agony in the first world war.

It is truly amazing that Muniz, who has read Lenin's work on "Left Communism, an Infantile Disorder," should be so forgetful as to repeat the foolish errors against which Lenin polemicized -- and repeat them in almost the identical words! Due allowance must be made for the status of the CP in that period and this. Lenin quotes from the documents of the German ultra-leftists: "The Opposition has selected a different road. It is of the opinion that the question of the supremacy of the CP and of its dictatorship is only a question of tactics. At any rate, the supremacy of the CP is the last form of any party supremacy. On principle, we must strive for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and all the party measures, its organization forms of struggle, its strategy and tactics must be planned to fit accordingly. Therefore, every compromise with other parties must be rejected. There must be no turning back to the already outworn historical and political forms of the parliamentary struggle, no policy of maneuvering and temporizing. The specifically proletarian methods of the revolutionary struggle must be strongly emphasized. In order to embrace the greatest mass of the proletariat which is to carry out the revolutionary fight under the leadership of the CP, there must be created new forms of organization upon the broadest foundations and within the widest limits." One of the new forms is that of shop committees, and the document of the ultra-leftists rejects the reactionary trade unions in favor of building these shop committees. Lenin also quotes Sylvia Pankhurst, the English leader, as follows: "CP must not enter into compromises.... A CP must keep its doctrine pure, and its independence of reformism inviolate; its mission is to lead the way, without stopping or turning by the direct road to the communist revolution." Even more appropriate is a quotation from Engels on the Blanquists, who wrote as follows in their manifesto: "We are communists because we wish to attain our aim directly, without stopping at intermediate stations, without any compromise, which only postpones the day of victory and prolongs the period of slavery." To which Engels replies: "The German communists are communists because, through all intermediate development, they clearly see and perpetually follow the one final aim, the abolition of classes and the creation of a social system in which there will no longer be any place for private property in land or in the means of production. The 33 Blanquists are communists because they imagine that, since they want to leap over intermediate stations and compromises, the cause is as good as won, and if things begin moving one of these days and power gets into their hands, 'Communism will be introduced' the day after tomorrow.... What childish naivete -- to put forward one's own impatience as a theoretical argument!"

We may well apply Engel's remarks to Muniz. Lenin, learning from Marx and Engels, teaches us precisely the opposite viewpoint to that of Muniz and the Blanquists. He tells us that communists must utilize every possible form of tactic -- only filling the tactic with communist content and meaning. He warns again and again of the need for participating in and mastering all forms of social activity, and of the need to be ready to change rapidly from one form to another. He says: "Communists, adherents of the Third International (written, remember in 1920 before the International degenerated under Stalinism), exist in all countries precisely for the purpose of adapting along the whole line, in every domain of

life, the old socialist, trade-unionist, syndicalist and parliamentarian activities to the new communist idea." And to emphasize most strongly this view, he adds: "We do not know... which of the inflammable sparks...fanned by the economic and political world crisis will be the one to start the conflagration...; we are therefore bound to utilize our new communist principles in the cultivation of all and every field of endeavor, no matter how old, rotten and seemingly hopeless."

The real heart of the question of tactics lies in the analysis of each concrete situation and the determination of what will raise the level of class consciousness of the workers. Lenin and Trotsky reiterated this on every occasion. Thus Lenin says: "The whole point lies in being able to apply these tactics to raise and not to lower the general level of proletarian class-consciousness and revolutionary ability to fight and conquer." Muniz informs us that the workers today are completely skeptical as concerns their parties. He refers to the socialists and the Stalinists. Assuming that he is correct (which is most unlikely, since skeptics generally leave parties and do not join or remain in them) this mood is surely the last one on which to base direct appeals for revolutionary struggle. The skeptic is not ready to risk life and limb in a struggle which calls for the greatest sacrifices. Muniz adds as an afterthought, that it is necessary to instill new hope in the masses, and this he proposes to do by the simple process of appealing for the direct struggle for power through a party that does not yet exist -- no less!

No matter what the question touched upon, Muniz has his ready-made abstract formula on hand to apply. This simplifies thinking, since there is then no need for any sort of concrete analysis of the actual situation, the state of consciousness of the workers, the relation of the classes, the strength of the workers' organizations, the economic conjuncture, and above all, the development of present events out of previous ones. Take for example what Muniz has to say on the question of the RDR. He finds that this organization is completely negative, nay reactionary, with demagogic, reactionary leaders, and with a program that pretends to be radical in order to attract left elements. He calls attention particularly to the dishonest use of revolutionary phrases, such as: "Le RDR reaffirme que le meilleur moyen de lutter contre la guerre et la dictature est de preparer la revolution socialiste." (The RDR reaffirms that the best way to fight against war and dictatorship is to prepare for the socialist revolution.) Muniz tells us that "Les auteurs du programme ont crus sans doute etre tres radicaux en adoptant presque mot par mot le programme de transition du parti trotskiste officiel." (The authors of the program thought beyond a doubt that they were being very radical in adopting almost word for word the transition program of the official trotskyst party.) This organization (RDR), it is very evident, does not have the same program as Muniz. Therefore it must be exposed and its really forthright revolutionists must be appealed to in order to get them out of the RDR and in the Muniz organization where they belong.

It never seems to have occurred to Muniz that the RDR arose at a particular time and that it therefore throws some light on this particular period. Why did not Sartre and Rousset and the

others come forward two years or even one year prior to this particular moment with their present views? And is it to be sneered at and rejected off-hand that now they find it necessary to come out with views that correspond at some points with the Trotskyist program? The organization is obviously a loose and confused form of centrism. The first question that Marxists ask with respect to such a grouping is: Is it moving leftwards? What symptoms does it offer as to the working class of France, or as to the petty bourgeoisie? What does it indicate concerning the grip of the Stalinists on these workers? Is this grip loosening or tightening? Can we do anything to strengthen a left current inside the RDR so as to win the whole organization or a good part of it to the revolutionary cause? Muniz had nothing at all to say on the RDR until its large meetings caught him (and others) by surprise. He speaks entirely as an outsider, evidently having done nothing at all to explore it near at hand. Yet events force Muniz to attend one of its meetings and, at the very last moment (too late, indeed!) to try to have something to say to its members and sympathizers. Reports make it abundantly clear that the membership became very much dissatisfied with its leaders, particularly with their conduct in inviting representatives of Yankee imperialism, or spokesmen for this imperialism, to their anti-war congress. The RDR held its general conference shortly after this episode, which gave a splendid opportunity to those inside to aim blows at the inept leadership and to educate the membership in the need for an organization that could control this leadership democratically, in order to have it carry out a good program decided upon democratically by the majority. But Muniz is not one for making a step at a time, shorter or longer, in the right direction. He wants all or nothing -- and so he got precisely nothing. (Elsewhere we shall criticize the Shachtmanites for their opportunist role.)

Muniz has the usual misconception of the sectarians and ultra-leftists. They criticize tactics with reference to a finished program (or "final" program) of revolution. This is, so to speak, an inner process with not the slightest reference to the outer world (Muniz need not be living in France this year in order to write his documents; he could do so anywhere and at any time). Whereas the discussion of tactics -- in whatever "general" period -- is totally meaningless without some attempt at evaluation of the situation among the workers and the relation of all the classes in society. Muniz eschews all interest in situations other than the revolutionary one for which he sits and waits. He keeps repeating that everything else is today meaningless. This is, of course, the very best way to separate himself and his handful of misguided followers from the actual day-by-day struggles of the workers. Take again the attitude of Muniz on the miners' strikes led by the Stalinists. This strike was a criminal misuse of the terrible straits of these workers to accomplish political aims in the foreign policy of the Kremlin; of that there can be no question. Did the miners understand this? The vast majority did not, but accepted the Stalinist leadership because there was no other to lead them in their desperate struggle. It is unfortunately still true (look at the figures!) that many workers continue to think that the communists fight sincerely for the working class. Yes, many miners were coerced into joining the strike, but then again it took very many to participate in the process of coercion, as in other big strikes. Frequently in the class struggle large-scale

strikes occur with which we have little sympathy, either because of the false, betraying leadership, or because of the situation at the time and the aims of the strike, which may tend to play into the hands of the bosses and bring serious defeats. We take no responsibility for these strikes, and we criticize them openly. But we tell the workers -- just as openly -- that we march with them even when they are wrong in order to show our solidarity in the struggle against the capitalists. We are with them also to teach them lessons in tactics and in leadership and in politics. We have some chance to gain a hearing if we are with them, but none at all if we are against them or if they are persuaded that we are against them. True, the task is infinitely difficult with the Stalinists in control, but no amount of wishing and cussing can evade this circumstance. The situation is not made to order for us. We are forced to accept it as it is.

We repeat, the unfortunate fact is that many militant workers (not just careerist scoundrels) still accept the Stalinist leadership. Many accept it because they see no other and because they think that the power of Russia (still to them the land of socialism) behind the communists may help bring some gains to them. How shall we reach these workers? Are they worth reaching, in France, in Italy and elsewhere? It would be utter folly merely to turn one's back on them. We are convinced that sooner or later they, like many other workers, will become disillusioned with their foreign-directed leadership. We must be ready at that time (only the most careful attention will indicate when this begins to occur) to try to win them over to our new party rather than to see them quit all politics in disgust, as so often happens. Can we reject the united front tactic once and for all with Stalinists, when masses of misguided workers are involved? That again can only be termed the worst kind of folly. We do not at all propose on each and every occasion (as do the Cannonites) to call for a united front with the Stalinists or with any section of them. But we demand that this tactic remain in our arsenal, that this question be left open to depend on future events. If and when the possibility opens up to break through the Stalinist leadership by offering and participating in a common struggle, we must be ready for it.

There is at hand on a small scale a most instructive example. We have little sympathy with the rigidity of the Cannonites or with their views on Stalinism. Yet we must freely admit that their tactics with regard to the Civic Rights Congress in the United States had excellent results. This congress was obviously Stalinist controlled and had as its aim the mobilization of support for the CP leaders on trial in the federal courts. The Cannonites could have pointed to the record of the Stalinists in relation to the trial of the 18 Trotskyists in Minneapolis just before the war, and could have ridiculed the whole congress. Instead they showed rare good judgment by entering it, offering a united front against capitalist oppression and for the abolition of the abominable Smith gag act. But they also proposed that the congress go on record for a pardon for the Trotskyists condemned under the same act now being used against the Stalinists who had previously supported it. The Stalinists were in such an obvious dilemma that the entire press gloated to watch their squirming discomfort. Many Stalinist hacks and close fellow-travellers found the position so obviously untenable that they had

to take a stand publicly against the CP. The Cannonites thereupon foolishly erred in calling these hacks "liberals," thereby permitting types like the infamous Schuman and the not-so-naive Shapley a loophole to escape completely the responsibility for all their past foul deeds. But Muniz should study this episode and learn something from it.

The present period may well be compared on an international scale with the period inside Russia after 1905-7 when the first revolution gave way to blackest reaction. The Russian revolutionary movement came close to the vanishing point and suffered incredible depression, demoralization, schism, dispersal and renegecy. The entire Russian revolution may be looked upon as the "1905" of the world proletariat. On the world arena we witness precisely all the same effects that were seen inside Russia in the earlier period: decimation of the workers' movement; schisms, demoralization on all sides; yielding up of the struggle and permitting the philistines to place their stamp of disapproval and distorting criticism on the revolutionists who presumably "failed." Renegecy we witness on all sides. There is the same retreat as after 1905 -- with one big difference. The Bolsheviks had to make a grand retreat, but it was made under experienced leadership. Lenin says of the retreat after 1907 that "the Bolsheviki only attained this by mercilessly exposing and throwing out the revolutionists of phrases, who did not wish to understand that it was necessary to retreat, that it was obligatory on them to learn how to work legally in the most reactionary parliaments, in the most reactionary trade unions, cooperatives, workmen's insurance and similar organizations." Today we do not have the experienced leadership that remained after 1905. That is what has made the retreat more prolonged and more confused. And that makes it all the easier for the renegades from Marxism to call everything in the past, above all the Russian revolution as led by Lenin and Trotsky, a great mistake.

Muniz has unconsciously given way to the moods of this period. He makes the task of the anti-Marxists far easier by himself acquiescing in everything they say. Muniz started by criticizing Trotsky just a wee bit. In his case that seemed to start a complete crumbling of the dikes, so that the waters have now overwhelmed him. The revolution ended in failure. Therefore all the tactics and strategy connected with it were wrong and must be rejected. Is this exaggerated? No, for look at what Muniz rejects. He says that all the old tactics must be rejected and must be replaced by new ones. Nationalization of industry under a workers' state is wrong, for it places power in the hands of a bureaucracy that must inevitably become like the Stalinists. (Thus he swallows Burnham and the other "critics" in one big gulp.) There cannot be a transition period for this same reason. (And what happens to the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the need for coercion against the capitalists who remain though defeated?) The workers must take over the industries ("possession") and immediately proceed (after a civil war?) to run them to satisfy the needs of society. All industry must be "socialized" at once! What becomes then of central planning? Obviously this attempt was all a mistake. (And how about the backward countries? How exactly will they satisfy the needs of "society"?) Here Muniz takes over the views of the anti-authoritarians (the anarchists) against whom Marx and Engels

bitterly polemicized. Engels says concerning them: "But the anti-authoritarians demand that the political state should be abolished at one blow, even before the social relations which gave birth to the state are themselves abolished. They demand that the first act of the social revolution shall be the abolition of all authority." In what way does the attitude of Muniz differ from that of the anarchists? On what basis can he still call himself a Marxist? Will he not advocate the old anarchist idea of small workers' communes? He has given no clear view of what he proposes instead of the "old obsolete tactics."

Muniz is like a gambler who makes his wager for all or nothing. His outlook is in reality one of despair and can gain only the "nothing." Revolutionary situations arise in society, but they do not come for the asking, nor are they prolonged in time. Trotsky emphasized, along with Lenin, that there come situations in which even a few hours are decisive and make all the difference between victory and defeat. But these few hours must be painstakingly (and patiently) prepared for through the building up of real discipline in a revolutionary party. Such discipline depends above all on correct guidance by a leadership which gains respect precisely by its correctness. This leadership must know how to tie the party closely to the masses in their everyday struggles. Muniz cannot possibly supply this type of leadership, for all his views now militate against it. He is unable to apply the Marxist tactics; hence he rejects them as wrong. But they are the only ones by which a revolutionary party can be built and through which it can accomplish its great tasks. Thus Muniz asks us to reject all Marxism -- and offers nothing in return.

#

INTRODUCTION TO THE POST-PLENUM DISCUSSION

The following are motions on political action which came before the recent plenum of the National Committee. None of the resolutions or motions was adopted by a majority vote of the National Committee, despite a considerable discussion of the varying views presented. Although no technical measures have yet been adopted for arriving at a decision at this time, the material is presented to the ISL for a membership discussion in the branches and the ISL bulletin.

The discussion is opened with the issuance of these documents. All comrades are invited to participate in this discussion not only as it takes place in the branches, but to contribute their views in writing for a discussion bulletin.

A number of other decisions were taken by the Plenum, the material for which appears in a separate bulletin which will reach you very shortly. Though they deal with questions that were not in dispute, they are also sent out for a general membership discussion since they relate to problems of ISL activities and perspectives.

The branch executive committees are advised to organize the discussions in the branches. When you have done this, please notify the National Office of the steps you have taken and how the discussion develops.

When the Political Committee arrives at a decision on the disposition of the dispute on political action, it will be communicated at once to the branches.

Fraternally yours,

Albert Gates,
Secretary

AG:m

* * *

Ben Hall motion (defeated by plenum):

The slogan "For a Labor Party" serves the ISL as a means of putting forward the concept of the class struggle in popular language and of pushing the labor movement toward a break with the existing capitalist parties. The orientation of the labor movement today, including its most leftist sections, is generally toward the Democratic Party, in particular its Fair Deal wing. Our Labor Party slogan, put forward essentially as a slogan for breaking with the Democratic Party and for the formation of a new party, does not allow for the support of candidates on the Democratic ticket either in the primaries or the general elections.

The amendments are conceived of as a second trench defense of class politics after the Labor Party proposal has been defeated. The

principal argument for the Labor Party must reject the concept of an alliance with Fair Deal Democrats. If the new tactic is to have any meaning from the point of view of the ISL it must be proposed in the same sense. Once the proposal for a Labor Party (or independent labor ticket) is defeated, the proposal to contest the Democratic primaries with union candidates and to support them if victorious as Democratic candidates can only appear as ludicrous or deceitful. In attempting to apply the proposed tactics, our union comrades can only escape from such a dilemma by abandoning the slogan for a Labor Party completely in practice or relegating it to an unimportant place.

The new tactic presumably is especially applicable among the more advanced militants as in the UAW. Yesterday these militants looked toward the formation of a new party but today, under the pressure of rightists tendencies in the labor movement, they have retreated back toward the Democratic Party. By initiating proposals for primary fights within the Democratic Party, the ISL will appear to endorse their retreat and will find it impossible to contrast their correct leaning of the past with the false tendency of the present.

Where unions actually do run candidates in the primaries, they will run them as part of a labor-liberal coalition within the Democratic Party against its right wing. Support to these candidates in the primaries as in the regular elections will not be support of independent labor candidates but of Fair Deal coalition.

The motions are rejected because in the specific conditions of labor's role in the Democratic Party at the present time, they would make it impossible to present a consistent pro-labor party position with a genuine working class content.

* * *

Max Shachtman motion (defeated by plenum):

The leadership of the trade union movement, particularly of the CIO, gives every indication of continuing to follow the same course in the field of political action in the 1950 elections as in the 1948 presidential elections. This course has the active or passive support of the membership, including its more militant sections, and even those who have in the past been generally sympathetic to the idea of an independent labor party. Short of a sharp turn in the political situation, the prospect for the formation of such a party or even the presentation of a labor ticket under trade union auspices, will give way in the 1950 elections to the prevailing policy of working for "friendly" candidates of the capitalist parties, primarily the Democratic. This means that the labor movement continues to act as the left wing of the capitalist parties and not yet as an independent political movement. Our problem continues to be to break this left wing - the organized working class - away from the capitalist parties so that it can constitute itself as an independent class party. Our main political slogan therefore continues to be the formation of a labor party.

If, however, it appears in the pre-election period that the unions will follow their present policy unaltered, and if the slogan of the left wing is not accepted by the union ranks, it is permissible,

and under certain conditions necessary, to present to the ranks another slogan or proposal. Where the policy of supporting the candidate of a capitalist party is adopted by the unions, it would be correct for the left wing, after a declaration that it retains its views on the labor party and recognizes the fact that its views have for the moment been rejected, to propose that the unions at least put forward their own candidates for the nominations, chosen democratically by the membership, and organize a fight for these candidates, in the primary elections, as against the official nominees of the capitalist party machines - pledging its support of the union nominees if they win in the primaries. The left wing should certainly give aid and comfort to those militants who may make such a proposal independently and should even stimulate them to do so.

The aim of this proposal is to help arouse rank-and-file militants, by an appeal to their class feelings and to their growing awareness of the organized political strength they have shown themselves able to muster and exert in recent elections, to support a line that will deepen and sharpen the conflict of interests between the bureaucracy of the official capitalist parties and the labor leadership that has attached itself to these parties, thereby contributing to a separation between them. Consequently, it should not be identified with any of the customary agreements by means of which the official party machines promise their support of a trade-union leader for a minor office in exchange for the support by the trade-union movement of the machine candidates for major offices. It is precisely the major and outstanding offices which the left wing should propose that trade-unionists, responsible to the unions and chosen by them, shall contest against the capitalist machine candidates.

This being a new policy for the ISL, and one which is subject to opportunist interpretation, it is important to emphasize that:

- a) it is permissible under certain conditions but not mandatory or even applicable under others;
- b) it may be employed only in highly proletarianized and organized localities, where it can be reasonably expected to gain significant support from trade-union militants, where it can force the official leadership and above all the unions themselves to the left, where the presentation of such candidates would constitute in the mind of the people a labor ticket counterposed to a capitalist ticket, and in general where it would contribute to the only positive purpose that the proposal aims to achieve;
- c) nowhere may members of the ISL sponsor or support such a proposal without the preliminary approval of the Political Committee.

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E. Garrett amendment (defeated by plenum):

While we do not participate in Democratic Party primaries, or urge the entrance of labor unions into such primaries, we hold that, in considering particular instances, it is proper to support such

candidates appearing on Democratic Party tickets who are of a kind and the product of a situation as described in the Shachtar motion.

* * *

R. Ferguson motion (defeated by plenum):

1. Join the Democratic Party? No!
2. Support labor-supported Democratic politicians? No!
3. Support Democratic machine-supported laborites? No!
4. Support individual labor- (or pro-labor-) Democrats merely running in primaries against official Democratic machine candidates (like Edwards)? No!
5. Support individual candidates who declare the need for a separate national Labor Party but run in elections on such a platform on Democratic ticket under the mistaken belief that this will lead to building a sufficient segment of labor Democrats to launch later a Labor Party by subsequent split. These reject the liberal-labor coalition in favor of a Labor Party perspective and enter candidates to give more concrete meaning to their demand for and activity in behalf of promoting the slogan "Build labor's independent machine" on a non-bureaucratic, democratic basis of rank and file participation? Yes!

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