

A RESOLUTION REGROUPMENT: WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

Regroupment, as opposed to recruitment, means a genuine fusing of political groups, a merging of members and the adoption of common political positions.

Regroupment is an absolutely necessary condition for socialist revolution in every country, for in no country, least of all the U.S., is there a revolutionary group with the numbers, the experience and the social weight to play the critical leadership role. The absence of such a party was a crucial stumbling block to completing the revolutionary process in Portugal and in France in 1968 to name just two dramatic and recent examples.

Unfortunately, recognizing the necessity of regroupment is not sufficient to put it on the immediate agenda. What it does mean is that we have to think about practical transitional steps toward the goal of organizational regroupment.

Let's look at some examples of actual regroupments and consider the social and historical conditions under which they occurred. Then we will consider to what extent those conditions presently exist in the U.S. or are likely to exist in the near future. We also need to consider the forces available for the process.

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Major regroupments or realignments of revolutionary groupings and political tendencies have taken place a number of times in the U.S. in the 1900's. They have taken place in response to major events and great upheavals in this country and abroad when these events have shown the need for a new turn and a new orientation for Left forces.

When World War I graphically illustrated the decay of world capitalism and its unreformability, left socialists in this country realigned along anti-imperialist and revolutionary lines. When the 1917 Russian revolution established the first successful workers government and state power, revolutionists in this country responded by forming the early communist organizations oriented toward class struggle and a soviet America.

The degeneration of soviet power abroad and the massive labor upsurges here in the 30's brought together those on the left who were committed to class struggle unionism and socialist democracy into a regrouped organization. (Trotskyists, Musteites and the left-wing of the SP)

The 1956 Khrushchev 20th Congress speech elucidating the monstrous crimes of the Stalin regime coupled with the revolutionary uprisings of the Hungarian and Polish workers led to massive defections of CPers and fellow travelers. Many of them who did not become demoralized began moving in a regroupment direction with American Trotskyists. (This process was extremely significant in Europe.) While less deep-going in the U.S., it nevertheless manifested here in extensive discussions about workers' democracy, independent political action and class struggle trade union policies. In the process of discussions, joint activities were undertaken in the form of united socialist electoral campaigns in a number of States, political exchanges in left magazines, and in some unions it led to joint rank and file caucuses particularly in auto and steel in California where Trotskyists and dissident CP industrial and Black leaders worked jointly.

Even the IS came about as part of a regroupment process of new left SDS members and old left cadre who came to a common understanding of the centrality of the working class, workers' democracy and socialism from below coupled with a strategy of getting into basic industry and building autonomous rank and file groups.

There is nothing unusual or unprecedented about the regroupment process. It is simply a non-sectarian response to the dynamics of new events and re-evaluations that lead to common outlooks and strategies; varied forms of joint activities; united actions, including united fronts, where differences may need to be expressed while participating jointly; and, finally, joint revolutionary organization as a culmination of the regroupment process — if the preceding steps have shown the possibility of a viable socialist unity.

But regroupment is more than this. For in the process, the attractiveness of socialist unity may win over many independents and movement types who refrain from organized sect life and not always for bad reasons. And finally the new numbers involved may bring a critical mass together that can play a qualitatively different role in initiating and developing mass actions among people who are not yet socialists or revolutionary in outlook.

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While regroupment may be propelled by events, it is not a spontaneous process. A conscious assessment is necessary of developments, the effects these have and will have ideologically, and the tactics needed to aid the process of bringing about a revolutionary socialist unity. We stress — **revolutionary socialist unity** — for we are not interested in an all-inclusive mishmash that can lead to lowest-common-denominator politics and centrist organization.

The IS has much to contribute toward the building of the mass revolutionary party of the future. Our intransigence on the concept of socialism from below, workers' control and militant rank and file activity in the plants and unions, as well as our considerable experience in the working class, will be in good stead for the entire movement of the future.

We have never had the notion that we were "the party" or even "the party of the future". Or that such a party could be built by steady recruitment to the IS until we achieve dominance or hegemony on the left. Or further, that we have all or even most of the ideas necessary to make the American revolution. Such sterile notions and self-defeating deceptions we leave to others - and there are many of them.

We know the future revolutionary mass party will be built through the long process of splits and unifications, fracturing and rebuilding through the multitude of class struggles and self-activity of the working class. We know that program is never finished or complete and that revolutionary ideology will have many contributors. At best we hope to aid that process and be a part of it, including that last chapter of American capitalism when the workers close the book on it.

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The question now posed for us is what events are aiding the prospect of socialist unity and what steps should we take to aid the regroupment process along.

Today, no big external events have created an impulsion toward regroupment. Nor has a major reassessment of the period by many socialists posed the need for regroupment as a way to more effectively intervene in events and as a method for gathering forces and aiding the process of building the revolutionary party of the future. What has happened is more modest, at least from a regroupment perspective.

The recent upsurges in the mines— a superb demonstration of the self-acting ability of workers who were challenged by the bosses, the Government, and by their own union officials; the recent partially successful electoral oppositional formations in Steel; the relatively widespread national rank and file developments in the Teamsters has compelled a new look at the potential for labor action and for socialist activity in the trade unions.

Hence the turn of the SWP into industry and the major unions. Pushed also by the partial drying up of the SWP's usual arenas outside the unions, they have sent some 500 people into the shops over the last year and a half. More recently, NAM has set up labor committees in a number of cities open also to non-NAM members. NAM is a New Left social democratic milieu, and has relatively few people in industry (most are in the white collar and public sectors). Nevertheless, that does not preclude a posture on our part in favor of political exchange and exploring common areas of work with them *or* others.

In addition, a number of Maoist collectives are giving new attention to the unions at a time when they are forced to reconsider basic tenets of revolutionary perspectives. Add to these the increasing, but still small, numbers of unaffiliated working class individuals who are more open toward militant actions and radical alternatives.

Taken together, it would be the height of sectarianism on our part to ignore these fresh left cadre entering the arenas we are so much involved in — the shop floor and the trade unions.

But participation in a common arena does not necessarily lay the basis for a common organizational framework — that is, a regroupment. What is more important than where we all are is our respective programmatic outlook and political orientation. So let us consider now the views and attitudes of some of these groups.

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1) The SWP holds the views that workers are ready for direct socialist recruitment and that autonomous rank and file formations, other than electoral reform groups tied to one or another reform leader, are premature. Under the nostrum that "the boss is the main enemy", they generally support without any criticisms whatsoever virtually all reform leaders and remain mute toward their anti-rank and file conduct until it becomes impossible for them to ignore. Thus they would not criticize Miller until the very end of the miners strike (and then mildly) and pushed strike relief only through the national official union structure — bypassing the local rank and file support organizations.

As for Steel, their paper to this day has not carried a word of criticism of Sadlowski on ENA, his lack of any real encouragement toward independent rank and file fightback groups or any other matter. Their attitude toward other reform leaders is the same. And while they claim to hold a *regroupment* perspective, they actually have a *recruitment* perspective. Their *modus operandi* is to clear the other left groups out of the way by assimilation and absorption and thus achieve left hegemony. They really believe they already have all the essential ideas and organizational tools required to achieve worker's power — all, except one — sufficient numbers. While proposing regroupment, their internal view of a party is essentially homogeneity — allowing for no differences that really matter.

2) NAM today has few people in industry and has recently set up "Labor Committees" in various cities. They are presently in the process of drafting a document stating their labor perspectives.

They recently were invited and attended the Labor Coalition meeting called by Doug Fraser and keynoted by him and reform Democrat Ron Dellums (who, incidentally, spoke to the left of Fraser). While NAM was the most left group invited, they participated uncritically. At a recent California meeting of the NAM Labor Committee, Paul Schrade, among others, voiced concern over NAM's possible soft attitude toward the UAW bureaucracy.

While not working from within to reform the Democratic Party as DSOC does, NAM has no principled position against work in capitalist parties or for their "progressive" candidates. And while not a homogeneous organization, there is no coherent left wing at present (although there are left wings on different particular questions.) The most substantial "left" in NAM is, in fact, composed of ex-ISers.

NAM does, however, have an open attitude toward working with others who differ from them on these questions.

3) The Maoist collectives oriented to working class work have no real national framework; where they participate in the labor movement they do so as separate entities. While many of these collectives are grappling with the question of workers democracy, forced on them by recent events in China, they still have problems about working with Trotskyists. Many of these collectives may cut off any of their members who err in that direction. All this makes joint work difficult, but not impossible; and it is difficult to see how they can hold on to this hardened attitude toward Trotskyists when joint work in the shops and unions can be beneficial to both sides.

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Present differences with all these groups prevent any short-term organizational fusions with them. Central questions to be clarified will revolve with one or another of these political tendencies around their attitudes on workers' democratic rule, the labor bureaucracy (including the reform layer), and the reformability of the Democratic Party plus support for their so-called liberal candidates. In addition, there are the many differences on theoretical and foreign policy issues that we have with all of these groups.

Nonetheless, we must not assume that their present positions are immutable. Once they enter the labor movement as their primary arena they are bound, as we are and have been, to be affected by the experiences of this work as well as by future class struggles which can and will have a profound and deep-going effect on all serious revolutionary-minded people — an effect that we can only hope will bring us together in a united and massive revolutionary workers party.

We do not view the regroupment process as a short term, get-rich-quick scheme nor as a recruitment campaign to get new members nor as a raiding operation against another organization. In real life no one is fooled by these shabby maneuvers. We *do* see regroupment as one aspect of the process, and an important one, of gathering forces for building the revolutionary party of the future which will be viable enough, both programmatically and organizationally, to challenge capitalism at its core.

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There are two critical aspects to the process of building towards regroupment: common work and political debate and discussion.

1) As a first step toward regroupment we should declare publicly our view that it is beneficial for socialists of whatever persuasion to enter the shops and the trade unions and help build a rank and file led class struggle left wing. We should urge them to join and participate with us in a collaborative way in the rank and file formations we are in, where possible to jointly build new formations and extend local ones toward national groups. This includes possible cross-union formations which may exist in different locales or unions (such as the CCU in Pittsburgh, the rank and file organization in the Bay Area, and CWA Fightback in Los Angeles).

We should propose joint activities that will further union democracy and shop floor activities which can lead to a semblance of workers control over production speed and methods, and over safety and environmental hazards.

We should collaborate with them where possible over contract campaigns.

We should try to work jointly on strike support work. This kind of work can and should include members from our respective organizations who are not in the shops or the unions.

We should attempt to work in common on electoral reform campaigns within the unions supporting common candidates — while at the same time de-emphasizing electoral activity oriented toward pure and simple power fights which replace the "ins" with the "outs" before a sufficient rank and file base has matured; a base which can control or hold in check the actions of the reform leaders.

In addition, joint activity where possible in non-workplace areas such as reproductive rights, international solidarity campaigns (for example, demonstrations against Ian Smith) can be important.

2) But joint work will not of itself generate regroupment. Joint work *can* teach, but not all its lessons are necessarily salutary — especially in a relatively slow period such as today's. Today, joint work can provide an opportunity — indispensable to regroupment — for ideological exchange.

(a) We should therefore propose joint discussions and friendly debates and common political activities outside the shops that involve the respective memberships.

(b) And as an important step in the development of program and a dialog of political outlooks, *as well as the ideological re-arming of our own cadre*, we should participate in and promote an open analytical journal sponsoring different political views and literary exchanges.

If the IS takes the initiative on these matters and projects a deliberate and forthright policy of these steps leading logically toward socialist unity; and if future events and likely class struggle developments press that logic to its organizational conclusion we, other revolutionists and the American workers as a whole, will be a big step closer to the kind of revolutionary working class party needed to achieve a socialist America.

Carl Feingold
Nancy Holmstrom
New York
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Addendum: Since the original draft was written only a week ago, a certain “softness” toward NAM on the part of some IS leaders has become apparent. This makes it necessary to emphasize or stress several points about regroupment:

While the main arena for our common work and discussions with NAM may primarily be the trade unions and/or labor publications, it is extremely important not to look for superficial “agreements” as meaning an ideological coming together. Particularly if an eventual and enduring organizational regroupment is desired, ideological clarification must be deep going and thorough — though not in a dogmatic sense.

For example, we have in addition to labor questions, major if not fundamental differences with NAM on a whole series of political questions. These include among others; work with or in capitalist parties and views on independent political action, the nature and role of a revolutionary party and its relationship to the workingclass and its self-activity, the importance and role of reforms and how to struggle for them under capitalism, attitudes toward the Stalinist type bureaucracies in Eastern Europe and China, attitudes toward the Communist parties in the U.S. and in Western Europe.

As a case in point. NAM, or at least many of their members and leaders, is sympathetic to Eurocommunism. While in the U.S., to many new left types, Eurocommunism may seem quite radical and even a revolutionary strategy against capitalism — to us, and to thousands of revolutionist in Europe, Eurocommunism represents a logical course for Stalinist parties toward social democratic reformism. This shows the absolute need for thorough and rigorous ideological discussions as a basis *even* for durable and long term common work, not to speak of regroupment.

In the absence of such a political dialog for clarification, there will eventually develop a tendency to lose clarity and increasingly obscure the revolutionary thrust of our politics. That this danger is not an abstract one can be seen from Kim and Joel’s report (Bulletin 9) of their meeting with 2 out of 3 members of the NAM political committee. Kim and Joel state that these NAM leaders “stated that they had full agreement with our Convention Labor Document. They felt its analysis was sophisticated, and its perspectives were ones they would be happy to see NAM adopt”.

How is it possible for NAM leaders who are soft on the labor bureaucracy, including Doug Fraser, to read our central convention document on labor strategy and find “full agreement”? How does it happen that two of our leaders apparently don’t find this remarkable? And why didn’t they probe more deeply to see just how full their “full agreement” was? It boggles the mind!