

U.S. DISCUSSION BULLETIN

11/83

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Announcement: The next Bulletin will be coming out the second week in December. Please send branch reports to the Center by December 5.

If there are any amendments to the P.C. Statement on the Jesse Jackson campaign or alternative positions, please send them to the Center by December 5. If you cannot make this deadline, please contact someone on the P.C. to see what can be worked out. Thank you.

PC MEETING 9/29/83

A Letter to Conference Attendees (non members) Rediscussed

MOTION: To send an evaluation of the conference to the summer school attendees along with a copy of Changes to those who do not take a subscription. Kim to do another draft.

B Internal Problems in the ISO

We learned that there are internal problems brewing in the ISO and that they are having a convention or meeting the weekend of October 2 to resolve some of these problems. Evidently, there is displeasure with Cal and Barbara Winslow and there are some who want to demote them to ordinary members status.

It was decided to try to collect more information and re-discuss this matter. Frank to try to get documents. Invite H. from Cincy. to come to Detroit for a visit. H. was a former member of the ISO.

C Beginning Discussion of Marxism and Feminism

Dave F. made a presentation of Laurie Landy's document entitled "Women in Capitalistic Society", 1972.

MEETING 10/13/83

"Unhappy Marriage..."

A Presentation and Discussion on Heidi Hartman's Article/Continuation of Discussion on Socialism Feminism (summary elsewhere in bulletin)

Discussion on Attitude Toward Jackson Campaign

The PC discussed the ideas presented by Kim in his paper on the Jackson campaign, the paper in the October, 1983 Bulletin.

MOTION: To endorse the politics and method laid out in Kim's Jackson paper. 4-0-2.

MOTION: To send both Dan's and Kim's papers on Jackson to membership. 6-0-0.

MOTION; That if Jackson does not run that we run an article in the next Changes on why he didn't run. 6-0-0

C Report on Changes in ISO Leadership

At a recent national meeting, the ISO voted Cal and Barbara into regular members' status thereby removing them from the leadership. It is our understanding that there were no political differences which precipitated this move on the part of the membership of the ISO. The newspaper is to be put out in Chicago.

D. Elissa Report on Her Visit with NY ISers

Elissa attended the R2N2 National Conference in New York and while there she visited with comrades in the NY IS.

E. Report on Reproductive Rights National Network Conference -- Elissa

R2N2 held its national conference on October 7-9 in New York City. The theme of the conference was "Combatting Racism" and although only 35 of the 200+ participants were women of color, significant progress was made in making

race a major focus of R2N2. A Women of Color Task Force was formed, which met frequently during the weekend, and resolved to hold a one-day conference before the next national meeting. There was some discussion of whether Black women should work in majority white organizations, but by and large the feeling of the Task Force was that they wanted R2N2 to be their organization, and would work to change its composition.

Overall, there does not seem to be much change in the organization. It has not grown too much, and several of its key groups are floundering (most notably Chicago). A subscription drive last year was modestly successful, but did not make the magazine financially stable. It will be put out in NY in the future, not Chicago, and will be less slick in order to save money.

Several of the older leaders have either dropped out of the group, or given up leadership roles, including women who are distinctly socialists. New women have stepped in, which is a good sign. The new national staff person is a Black woman, Vienna Carrol, who did a terrific job organizing this conference.

PC MEETING 10/27/83

A. Report from TUC Meeting

Jane reported that the Trade Union Committee (TUC) discussed the needs of the labor paper and the labor paper milieu. She reported that the TUC felt that some type of event should be planned for the summer or fall and that the TUC was concerned about conflicts with the organization in terms of resources. The PC agreed that the needs of the labor paper would take precedence and that the IS would accommodate itself to whatever they planned.

B. Members to Be Contacted

The National Office has been out of touch with some of the members for quite some time. Members agreed to make calls to these members in the next few weeks.

C. Changes Subscription Project

Carole sent a free copy of Changes to all members who do not subscribe to Changes. The PC members who make calls to the members will mention that we want everyone to at the very least take a sub to Changes.

D. Invasion of Grenada

Dave F. made some preliminary comments on the invasion of Grenada. Report to be prepared for Bulletin. We might even consider doing a bulk mailing on this to the Changes sub list.

E. Socialist Feminist Discussion Continued

Dave F. made a presentation from Iris Young's article. (Summary of all socialist feminist readings to date in this bulletin.)

PC MEETING 11/3/83

A. Financial Report from Summer School

Income from registrations and from donations and fundraising was \$8,135. Expenses included the fee that we paid for rental of the rooms at the conference center, the food they prepared, the food we prepared, the printing of the brochure, partial staff salary for Dan, phone, etc. The expenses totaled \$8,108. Given that many scholarships had to be given, it is remarkable that we came out about even on the event overall. Thanks to all of you who helped with the fundraising which enabled us to give scholarships to some of our members and friends.

B. Small Regroupment Flurry

Kim reported on some developments in the SWP. A minority caucus is being formed called Socialist Action. Some comrades in Cleveland are aware of this development. When we know more, we will include in the bulletin. It seems that those in this caucus are more positive inclined toward the labor paper and possibly some joint work.

Carle reported that SSFN (which we previously reported is no longer a national group) in the Bay Area is working with WP; Bay Area Socialist Organizing Committee (BASOC), remnants of the Guardian, and with Peter Camejo's group which left the SWP some time ago to put on some forums. The Camejo group is reported to be difficult to work with and are primarily trying to push their position on Cuba.

One of the leading members of SSFN, Eric C., joined the Socialist Party, but reportedly he is not working with them in the Bay Area. Eric is presumably the only person who has joined the SP from SSFN.

The Left Unity Committee in Detroit is planning two forums -- one on the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements and the left and the second, a public forum on directions for the left (left unity) with Manning Marable, DSA, John Trinkl from The Guardian, and someone from the IS as the participants.

We have heard reports from Pittsburgh that they plan to re-organize their regroupment type network. We will be looking forward to the December reports from different parts of the organization.

DSA had its National Convention and reports in The Guardian and In These Times will be included in this bulletin with some initial comments by Kim for the PC.

C. What's Our Attitude Toward the Invasion of Grenada

Dave F. presented a paper on Grenada. The PC asked that it be shortened and more substantiated for enclosure in this bulletin.

D. Socialist Feminism Continued

Carole presented Vogel's article from Women and Revolution. The Young article and Vogel articles were discussed together. (Summary included in this bulletin.)

PC MEETING 11/10/83

A. Who Should Speak for the IS at the Left Unity Meeting in January?

It was decided that Elissa should be our spokesperson at the January forum with Marable and Trinkl.

MOTION: That what we present as the position of the IS at the January forum be the collective responsibility of the PC. 5-0-1.

Dave F. to come in with an outline of a proposed talk to next PC Meeting.

B. The Jesse Jackson Campaign

Dave reported on differences expressed at the editorial board committee meeting on how to conduct the Jackson discussion in our organization. The PC had additional discussion on how to present our position in Changes and how to carry on a discussion with our members and with others on the left.

Dave F. to re-write Kim's article (in last bulletin) for the next issue of Changes.

NOTICE: Any amendments to the position which will be expressed in the Changes article on Jackson or any minority position should be sent to the National Office for inclusion in the December bulletin. Deadline for the December Bulletin is December 5. If you cannot make this deadline, please contact the office to see what can be worked out. Thanks.

FURTHER REMINDER: We have asked each area for a report of activities for the December bulletin. Please have that to the National Office by December 5, same date as above.

MIKE U.'s RESIGNATION

Mike U. has resigned from the IS and has joined DSA. In his letter of resignation, Mike says that "This was purely an individual decision, based on my situation in Washington... It is not the result of political fatigue or disillusionment with our politics. Rather, I joined DSA in order to remain politically active, and to avoid becoming just another 'progressive trade unionist'. I still share the fundamental politics of the IS, our world view, which has enriched us all and provided guidance in all our political work. I remain committed to revolutionary politics, and to the building of a third camp tendency."

Mike feels that (at least in his personal situation) a commitment to building DSA as a public socialist presence in the labor movement is the best way to advance socialist politics. He also says that, "I no longer believe the IS is the organizational vehicle for that tendency (i.e. third-camp revolutionary socialist politics). ... To move forward in building support for our politics, we must explicitly reject any specific organization's embodiment at this time."

Mike suggests that an independent magazine or journal of revolutionary third camp socialism could best meet this need. It would not be published by an organization, and "clearly the chances for such a publication would be enhanced if other publications, like Changes or Against the Current, would cease publication... I am not offering the above as a new perspective for the IS. It is, in effect, an alternative to having an IS perspective."

The letter concludes, "While I am leaving the IS now, I fully expect to continue working with members of the IS in the years ahead."

"I had many wonderful years in the IS, and don't regret any of them."

Mike's resignation is a great loss to the organization, and we deeply regret it. Few comrades did more to build the IS, including several years of working fulltime as National Secretary as well as in other capacities such as branch organizer, and in developing the organization's theory of unfolding crisis of capitalism. In the past couple of years, as political differences developed in which Mike argued for a perspective not shared by the majority of the organization, Mike continued to contribute to the IS by helping to clarify important issues in that discussion, and by writing for Changes on issues of great importance for socialist activists in the labor movement.

in DSA

We do not believe that Mike will find much future/for the kind of revolutionary socialist politics that Mike and the IS hold in common. Mike's proposal for the broad third-camp left -- an unaffiliated journal -- also seems unrealistic precisely because of the lack of a strong organizational center which could raise money for such a journal. Likewise, publications, however desirable and useful they may be, cannot substitute for organization.

We regret Mike's decision to leave the IS, but we welcome a continued working relationship with Mike in the years to come.

The PC

I.S. Theory on Women's Liberation--Elissa

The Political Committee has begun a project to revise and update our theory on women's liberation. The initial stage of this project is underway in the form of reading and discussion at PC meetings.

Thus far, we have read "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union" by Heidi Hartmann; "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual Systems Theory" by Iris Young; and "Marxism and Feminism: Unhappy Marriage, Trial Separation, or Something Else?" by Lise Vogel. As you might guess from these titles, these three essays appear in the same book, Women and Revolution, edited by Lydia Sargent. (South End Press)

Our next reading is "Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism" by Zillah Eisenstein. We are considering reading essays by Nancy Chodorow, who writes on mothering, Ann Foreman, author of a book titled Femininity as Alienation. We have written to a number of socialist-feminist writers for suggestions on what else to read (copies of that letter were sent to women in the I.S. who are particularly interested in this topic).

We on the PC urge other members to join us in this reading project. We would be glad to discuss, by phone or letter, the readings we are doing. Detroit members are welcome to attend the discussions (if you're not adverse to meeting at 8:30 in the morning).

From time to time, we will write up notes from our discussions for the Newsletter. At the conclusion of this project, we hope to have a document that revises and updates our theory on women's liberation.

A few notes from the first three discussions:

Women and Revolution is organized around Heidi Hartmann's essay. The other 12 essays in the books are critiques or amplifications of Hartmann's theory. Hartmann says, essentially, that capitalism creates empty spaces in a hierarchy, but that marxism cannot tell us who will fill the spaces. Patriarchy, Hartmann says, defines which particular people will be in which spaces.

There are glaring holes in this analysis. Racism, and the differences between women of different classes, leap out. In one sense, Hartmann, through overstatement, is trying to illustrate that marxists make a mistake in de-emphasizing the role that men --"ordinary men, men as men, men as workers" (as she says in another essay, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation")-- play in determining women's oppression. Iris Young's rejoinder criticizes Hartmann and other "dual systems" theorists, for seeing women's oppression as separate and parallel to economic oppression. Young says instead we need to see "capitalist patriarchy as one system in which the oppression of women is a core attribute." Young tries to develop the division of labor (along lines of sex, race, age, sexual preference, handicaps, etc.) as the key to integrating women's oppression with economic oppression. Lise Vogel's essay deals with the old debates over whether housework has "use value" or "exchange value." She says that the value of socialist feminist theory is that it insists that women's oppression has a material basis, and criticizes marxism for not analyzing precisely what that basis might be.

One of the striking things about the reading thus far is the search for a universal explanation of women's oppression that preoccupies not only radical feminists, but socialist feminists as well. An assumption is made that because the oppression of women is universal in class societies, the explanation for that oppression must be universal as well. We would argue that the explanation is not universal, but is specific and different at different times in history, and for different classes. Women's oppression in the bourgeoisie is rooted in inheritance, as Engels said. But that is not an explanation for the oppression of working class women. What are the material roots of women's oppression? Are they in the labor market (or in women's particular relationship to the labor market), or the family? In its ascendancy, capitalism clearly needed the oppression of women. In its decline,

Women's Discussion--2

will the same hold true, or will women be able to improve their status?

Another mistake that many of the socialist feminist writers seem to make is in not challenging the radical feminist charge that marxism is "sex blind." Capital theory is sex blind, but historical materialism is not, and cannot, be.

One thing that is slowing down our progress is our lack of knowledge about what to read. Suggestions will be most appreciated.

NOVEMBER 12 NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION - Stop U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean

There were between 30,000 and 40,000 people in Washington on November 12th to protest U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean. The demonstration also called for an end to the conventional and nuclear arms race and for Jobs, Peace, and Justice.

The turnout of 30,000 to 40,000 people is still a success given the generally isolated nature of left politics in the U.S. today. It was hoped that the Grenada invasion would have resulted in a larger turnout, but the confusion, and lack of information about the situation there, both before and after the U.S. invasion, helped keep people immobilized.

Both the demonstration and some of the publicity done to build the demonstration, raised the profile of the anti-intervention movement. In cities around the country (Detroit never got its act together though), CISPES chapters did door-to-door canvassing to raise funds to purchase billboards and bus signs, warning of "Another Vietnam in Central America."

The November 12 Coalition was largely the work of National CISPES, along with the Nicaraguan and Guatemalan national solidarity networks. Another important component to the coalition was the Mobilization for Survival.

Size wise, it was not significantly larger than the March 27, 1982 Central American demonstration. And the movement has yet to surpass the 100,000 that went to Washington May of 1980. The composition of the rally was rather narrow. Labor was clearly absent and Black participation was very low. Students, the left, and some church activists accounted for the vast majority. One encouraging aspect was the number of young people there. There were clearly many students for whom national demonstrations were a new experience. There was a contingent on the two Detroit buses from Albion College -- all of them were new to political activity.

The rally itself, reflected CISPES's learning from experience. Fewer, more focused speeches at the three different morning rally sites made the program far more interesting. Also, the extensive use of music to break up the program made for a far more bearable program, even at the afternoon rally site in front of the White House.

The demonstration was planned before the Grenada invasion, but the invasion became an important theme of the rally. Lebanon was not officially part of the rally issues reflecting the politics of some of the groups in the coalition, although not CISPES; however the participation of the left and various Lebanese and Palestinian groups made Lebanon a defacto issue. So much so that when groups were told to line up to march from the State Department to the White House, Lebanon solidarity groups were put second in line.

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH PROLETARIAN UNITY LEAGUE ON DEM. PARTY--

As part of comradely debate on the left, Kim has submitted to the magazine of the Proletarian Unity League (PUL), Forward Motion, a critique of some of the theoretical assumptions underlying recent articles in the magazine on electoral politics. (A sample of the PUL approach is Jonathan Hoffman's response to Dan La Botz in the October Changes.)

Kim begins by challenging Hoffman's assertion that Reaganism and "New Federalism" have brought about a change in power relations which has made state and local governments more powerful in relation to the central state. On the contrary, says Kim, "the so-called 'New Federalism' is the opposite of what Reagan claims. By starving the states and cities of funds he is reducing their autonomous power...strategically, it is important to recognize that the new (urban) Black or Latin administrations will be more dependent on the framework of national politics and budgetary processes."

Taking this as an example of the contrast between "appearance and essence in American politics," Kim goes on to critique the implicit assumption that the Democratic Party is an empty vessel to be filled with the content of whatever social force gains the upper hand in its policy-making and electoral institutions. The arguments are familiar to I.S. members and will not be reiterated at length here.

Kim briefly states one theme from his summer school talk, that "the Democratic Party is not a passive phenomenon, simply acted upon by various social forces (but) is itself a social and political force, an actor and shaper of the consciousness" of workers, Black and Latins, etc. He refers to the Party's role in the political derailing of the CIO.

Finally, Kim urges the comrades of PUL to "consider four ironies of U.S. history before plunging into a political framework that has demobilized countless thousands of leftists before you." These are (1) the loss of labor's political influence during the very period, the last 15 years, that the unions have spent more money and put more campaign workers in the field than at any other time; (2) the Black community's shrinking influence in the national DP even though there has been an increase of thousands of Black government officials; (3) the fact that the women's movement won its few legislative and court battles in the early '70s, at a time when the movement possessed no electoral machinery; (4) the CIO won its major legislative goals before it had any form of effective electoral organization--"after it formalized the alliance with the Democratic Party (from 1936-43) it was unable to win any significant piece of social legislation."

The article concludes by arguing that the Democratic Party's agenda in 1984 is dominated by "industrial policy" in which corporate capital is sure to be the dominant influence. Rather than the left having its "eyes glued on Harold Washington or Jesse Jackson," it should be arguing for independent politics. This could include raising the argument for Jesse Jackson to run an independent campaign (as sketched out in the position adopted by the PC in the Jackson campaign).

Comrades interested in PUL's magazine can write to Forward Motion, PO Box 2394, Boston, MA 02107.

NOVEMBER 12 NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION contc.

Jesse Jackson was the day's biggest name speaker. His positions on Central America and the Caribbean were of course completely in line with sentiments of the day. However, he had some problem appeasing the crowd on Lebanon. At first, he stated the need for a peace keeping force, which drew boos from the crowd. The crowd continued to disapprove even after he said it should be a multi-national or U.N. peace keeping force. In the end, he changed to say that the most important thing was ^{for} the U.S. marines to get out -- this finally drew approval from the crowd.

The local November 12 Coalition, initiated by Detroit CISPES, took two buses to Washington. Through this we met some new people as well as worked well with a lot of DSA people, whom we hope will now get active with CISPES in an on-going way.

Rumor has it that DSA nationally is again toying with the idea of starting their own anti-intervention Central America network. I believe that many of their actual activists are more inclined to work with CISPES, and this should be encouraged wherever possible.

Foss T.

STATEMENT ON LEBANON AND GRENADA--Dave F.

At this stage, the invasion of Grenada seems to have been a major victory for the Reagan administration's foreign policy--at least to the degree that militarily overwhelming 600 Cuban construction workers, and crushing a revolution that had already been destroyed from within by a military coup, can be described as a "decisive show of American determination." On the other hand, U.S. military intervention in Lebanon's civil war shows every sign of being a massive debacle, in both military and political terms--a self-inflicted defeat for U.S. imperialism if ever there was one.

Whether victory or defeat, however, both these interventions are incalculably dangerous and pose immediate critical responsibilities for the anti-war movement. At a later point we will publish our analysis of the tragic destruction of the Grenadian popular revolutionary process; and of the detailed reasons why the U.S. has placed so much of its prestige in backing a Lebanese regime whose politics are the surest guarantee of that country's total disintegration. Right now, we only want to point to the potential consequences:

1) A full-scale U.S.-organized war against Nicaragua seems imminent. There are some analysts who believe the effect of the invasion of Grenada will be to postpone "decisive" action against Nicaragua, but this is a distinct minority viewpoint. Most solidarity activists anticipate a three-pronged invasion of Nicaragua from Honduras, the Atlantic coast, and possibly Costa Rica, with aerial bombing of the Pacific industrial and port facilities. This would also be the cover for U.S. bombing of the rebel-controlled regions of El Salvador, which are growing at a rate that has alarmed and shocked the U.S.

2) The U.S. military involvement in Lebanon leads to one of two results: (a) an American-Israeli military confrontation with Syria, or (b) the construction of a political deal with Syria for the carve-up of Lebanon into Israeli and Syrian spheres, to be carried out after Syria completes the process of liquidating the Palestinian movement as an independent force. Among these two choices, there is no "lesser evil." They are "both worse," as Lenin once put it. The first entails a small but real potential for a U.S.-Soviet military showdown (and as Noam Chomsky put it in Changes: "Once the two superpowers come into direct military conflict in the Middle East, you can forget everything else"). The second possible result would entail the repression of anything resembling popular-democratic or revolutionary forces in the region, while at the same time laying the basis for new reactionary regional wars.

Again, this is only the most cryptic summary of a much more in-depth analysis than can be coherently written just now.

There is a chance for the anti-intervention movement to become much more focussed, broad-based and militant in the coming crucial months. This depends in part on the formation of local coalitions capable of reaching beyond the pathetically small shock forces the left can put in the streets in response to emergencies. In Chicago, we know a coalition against U.S. intervention in Grenada and Lebanon has been formed, in which I.S. members are actively participating. We encourage this development and seek ways to broaden its base. We ask that comrades in other cities investigate what possibilities may exist--it is not essential that each local coalition follow some prescribed blueprint, the important thing is to get the work started, and see what kind of coordination and national focus makes sense based on that.

Finally, we should bear in mind that in every single significant case, the rush to military intervention by the U.S. does not reflect

Grenada, Lebanon--2

political strength, but political weakness and bankruptcy. Nowhere is this more true than in the Middle East and Central America; but it is also true in such crises as the Philippines and Chile where U.S.-backed dictatorships are crumbling under massive democratic or popular-revolutionary pressures. The truth of the matter is that there is a generalized critical weakening of American imperialism's ability to control its part of the world--we have argued elsewhere that in its own way, Soviet-bureaucratic imperialism is also eroding--and this provides both enormous dangers but also openings for Third World revolutionary processes in the world and for solidarity and anti-war activity in the U.S. The kind of crises we are seeing today can be expected to grow in the months and years to come, and the urgency of revolutionary socialists doing whatever we can to build an independent, politically conscious anti-war movement has never been greater.

On the Left

John Trinkl

DSA EMBARKS ON A LONG MARCH, BUT WHERE TO?

It may be drifting, but it's still afloat—and maybe even moving to the left.

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) was launched with high hopes a year and a half ago out of the merger of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and the New American Movement (NAM). As the largest social democratic grouping, and one of the largest socialist organizations in the U.S., DSA is growing slowly at a time when many other left groups are sputtering hopelessly, have run aground or have sunk. The organization now has some 7000 members in 80 local chapters plus a youth organization of 1000—mainly students—in 40 chapters.

While it is large, by the standards of the U.S. left, the group has not taken off in the way many had hoped following the merger. It faces something of an identity crisis, trying to work out of the relationship between the ex-NAM and ex-DSOC forces, remedy its lack of a coherent political program and build a socialist movement in the face of the worldwide crisis of capitalism.

All of these difficulties were discussed at the first DSA national convention, held in New York City Oct. 14-16. "The crisis of socialism" was as much a topic of debate as the crisis of capitalism.

LURCHING TO THE LEFT

In the midst of its agonizing over political direction—something much of the left is going through—the organization took several strong lurches to the left, relative to its history. The convention mandated strong minority representation in leadership for the first time, expressed explicit solidarity with revolutionary organizations in Central America and elected a highly visible feminist as DSA co-chair.

A number of important resolutions were passed by the 300 delegates. On electoral politics, DSA voted to endorse no one in the Democratic primaries. While maintaining their overall perspective of coalition building among progressive forces within the Democratic Party, Michael Harrington, DSA co-chair, told the convention: "There is no serious candidate who represents an anticorporate program that would be necessary to resolve the problems in the U.S. in an anti-capitalist way. . . . There is no candidate who is our candidate."

Harrington and others pointed out that a number of labor forces in DSA were supporting Walter Mondale, a number of peace forces in the group were supporting Alan

Cranston. Still others were very favorable to a Jesse Jackson campaign. In light of this it was decided that any official endorsement of a candidate could seriously fracture the group. DSA locals will not be permitted to endorse candidates, although individuals are free to work for whomever they choose. After the Democratic convention, however, DSA's leadership body, the National Executive Committee (NEC), has the authority to make an endorsement if it so chooses.

The electoral politics resolution states: "The paramount task of the 1984 election is to replace the Reagan administration and the Republican Senate that affords it the political space in which to operate." Along with other progressive groups, DSA committed itself to heavy involvement in voter registration drives. A proposed amendment stating that there is "legitimate, non-sectarian independent motion outside the Democratic Party"

was dropped. Whether their organization takes an official position or not, it seems probable that many DSA members will be working for the Democratic Party nominee next fall.

In one of its most significant actions, the convention voted that at least six (three men and three women) of the 24-person NEC to be elected would have to be from minority groups. (It was already policy that half of this leadership body be women.) Given the past histories of DSOC and NAM, which were virtually all white, this was a significant step forward. In addition, it moved the leadership body to the left, since minority members of DSA generally come from a more militant, activist background than the old leadership.

The small but effective National and Racial Minorities Commission of DSA also spearheaded a number of other resolutions on enforcing legislation against racist organizations, against the death penalty, in support of Native American liberation, in support of full employment and in support of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee.

Members of the minorities commission, along with others, also played a major role in getting DSA to place on record its solidarity with liberation movements in Central America. Writing in the new DSA journal established by the National Racial and Minorities Commission, Black activist Duane Campbell had argued, "DSA . . . has played a vacillating, and at best, weak role in support for the Central American Revolution. . . . Little concrete support by the organization has been evident."

A strong resolution of solidarity with the

Sandinista government of Nicaragua, with the FDR/FMLN of El Salvador and with the revolutionary movement of Guatemala was passed. New York local member Patrick Lacefield argued that "solidarity should not be expressed in such a blanket way" and said that criticisms of the Sandinista regime should be included in the resolution. Others, however, while acknowledging that many DSA members had criticisms and differences, argued that a solidarity statement was not the place to express them, and criticisms of the revolutionary movements were omitted from the resolution by an overwhelming vote.

In another important development, the strong socialist-feminist perspective that NAM brought into the organization was further cemented when longtime activist in the women's movement Barbara Ehrenreich was elected co-chair of the organization along with former chair Michael Harrington.

There was candid discussion of DSA's problems. "There is a sense that we are drifting," Harrington told the delegates, "that our goals are not well defined, that we lack a driving purpose." In what was referred to throughout the convention as the "donut

problem"—or what the New York delegates preferred to call the "bage! problem"—the lack of an organizational center was noted, and the consequent failure to direct, consolidate or give a socialist character to work in mass movements. The problem—not unique to DSA—of building mass movements and at the same time building a socialist presence was addressed throughout the conference, with no easy answers forthcoming.

The program that had been a major commitment of the old DSOC, and DSA after it—the building of a Democratic Agenda, or a coalition of forces in opposition to a liberal Democratic administration—has been abandoned under the Reagan administration; the potential allies are all fighting a defensive battle against cutbacks. DSA has no one program to take its place, but the convention focused on a number of priorities: strengthening leadership and building up political education; having a DSA presence at the Democratic National Convention this summer; holding a national conference on feminism; increased work against U.S. intervention in Central America and more vigorous outreach to minorities, labor, women and youth.

MULTI-TENDENCY

DSA defines itself as a "multi-tendency" organization. What this means is there are a number of fiefdoms within DSA. One—the extreme right wing—has all but lowered its flag. Strongly anticommunist and militantly pro-Zionist, it cares mainly about support for Israel. At the convention it helped turn back a resolution which would have offered implicit recognition to the Palestine Liberation Organization, while maintaining DSA's "two state" position on Israel and Palestinian rights. This group's overall influence has declined however. Another, much larger grouping is made up of the DSOC traditionalists, grouped mainly around the New York office. They represent a less rigid variant of social democracy, but are to the right of many of the chapters around the country.

A growing current is made up of former leftwing DSOC members, as well as most of ex-NAM people. This group is more oriented to social movements, more supportive of third world struggles and more forceful in support of minority rights and feminism. A small and eclectic new current has emerged among recently-joined members who previously belonged to Marxist and Marxist-Leninist groups and from the Black movement. Black activists have already triggered a shift in the center of gravity of the organization. A number of activists from what used to be the party-building "trend" have joined DSA, as have some individuals who have left the Socialist Workers Party and other left organizations.

One longtime activist said, "I remain a Leninist, but to build a party it is essential that there be a mass-based socialist movement. In the long run DSA may not be relevant, but I don't see any other organization right now that has any hope of building a socialist movement." This is a perspective shared by only a tiny handful in DSA.

DSA could go in a number of different directions. Manning Marable, who as head of the National and Racial Minorities Commission has played a major role in some of the recent shifts in the group, was optimistic: "There are more people with a history of grassroots activism in the leadership now. This will open up some space in the organization." But what fills that space remains to be seen. ■

By John B. Judis

NEW YORK

ONE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED that the 300 delegates to the October 14-16 convention of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) had much to cheer about. Since its formation last spring from the merger of the Democratic Socialists Organizing Committee (DSOC) and the New American Movement (NAM), DSA had increased its membership by half—to about 7,000. Convention delegates represented local chapters in 60 cities, including such left-wing backwaters as Dallas and Salt Lake City. A small yet committed core of black socialists also attended. And the convention was held in the wake of the surprising showing of black socialist Mel King in Boston's October mayoral primary.

But an uncertainty pervaded DSA's high councils. There was a sense that the American left was disintegrating. And there was considerable doubt about what role, if any, DSA should play in national politics.

"If anybody here has a unifying project that will bring us all together in a national campaign that can play a serious role in American society, tell me," DSA chair Michael Harrington said in his convention keynote address.

Talking to *In These Times* afterward, former DSOC national director Jim Chapin made a play on one of Harrington's favorite phrases. "We used to be the left wing of the possible, and now we're the right wing of the highly improbable," he said.

Reasons for pessimism.

In his address, Harrington argued that DSOC's successes with Democratic Agenda—an organization of party activists and trade unionists that it formed in 1976 and that played a notable role in developing the program for the 1978 Democratic midterm convention—was the result of a unique conjunction of circumstances. "In the '70s we discovered a certain space in American society," Harrington said. "You had the new left of the '60s moving toward the Democratic Party. In the trade union movement, you had the antiwar trade unions following their own policy and looking for bridges to the new left. We had the opportunity to be a bridge to serious constituencies."

But, Harrington noted, Reagan's victory shifted domestic politics to the right ("full employment is now an improbably radical demand"), AFL-CIO Presi-

dent Lane Kirkland brought the left unions back into the fold and united them in a national political strategy and the new left groups that DSOC had helped bring into the Democratic Party adopted coalition strategies of their own. "We did our job too well," Harrington said.

Harrington rested his hopes for DSA on the revival of mass movements in which DSA could position itself as the socialist wing. Remarking on the decline of American capitalism, Harrington predicted that such movements would arise again. "We would be ill advised to say that next year there will be a tremendous political response to the crisis. That's silly. What we can say is that there will be a response. So many lives are being shattered that at some point this situation will lead to mass movements."

Despite growth, DSA is unsure of its political role

According to Harrington, DSA's current quandary is deepened by an international crisis of socialism. Harrington, who spent the spring in Paris, said that although he believes French President Francois Mitterrand has been sold short by many of his own followers, the French failure has had a devastating effect on the viability of socialist politics. "You can't go around France and think that socialists have the answers," Harrington said.

Critic Irving Howe, a founder of DS-

DSA now has two tendencies—reds and greens. The reds stress labor and the greens focus on culture and social issues.

OC, put the matter more philosophically but no less pessimistically in a workshop on socialist identity. Exasperated by statements from DSA members that both assumed a given meaning to socialism and viewed DSA's problem as getting the public to relate to that meaning, Howe declared that socialism had never overcome the crisis wrought by Stalinism and the "inner disintegration of social democracy." "What is the idea of socialism that DSA members have in their heads?" Howe wondered aloud in a workshop.

At least two more perspectives were expressed that were more optimistic at the convention. One group of people, which included New Jersey tenant organizer John Atlas, political scientist Francis Piven and Chicago electoral activist Roberta Lynch, stressed the importance of local electoral coalitions and the surge of new voters. They viewed the recent successes of black mayoral candidates, the victories in 1982 of left-wing Democrats like Connecticut Rep. Bruce Morrison and the growing role of the citizen action organizations in electoral politics as indications of a left upsurge rather than a decline. DSA members Atlas, Peter Dreier and John Stephens articulated this perspective in a recent issue of *The Nation*, which was reprinted in the convention bulletin: "Contrary to popular assessments, the last decade has seen a tremendous amount of progressive political activity."

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The Atlas-Dreier-Stephens idea is to weld these local coalitions of labor, minorities, environmentalists, peace proponents and feminists into a national "party within a party" that could eventually transform the Democratic Party. In the article they concede that the left will not be able to affect the choice of an opponent to Ronald Reagan, but insist that local Democratic campaigns and voter registration drives will tie into a national anti-Reagan effort in 1984.

But these DSA members have trouble answering the question of what role the organization will play in this process. At the convention, Atlas told *In These Times* that DSA members should consider joining Citizen Action groups like Illinois Public Action. But he acknowledged that this strategy would leave little for DSA itself to do.

Another, more optimistic view was espoused by author Harry Boyte and an unlikely coalition of DSA members that have flocked to a Communitarian Caucus. While Boyte identifies the hopes of the left with neo-populist community organizing (his current model is San Antonio's COPS), other communitarians, like Santa Cruz DSA's Sue Reynold-

son, see the future in communal living and land trusts. The communitarians share a conviction that both socialism and electoral politics are at best incidental—and at worst impediments—to the left's growth. Boyte calls on DSA to accept a "plurality of expressions" for its "vision" (his own favorite is "cooperative commonwealth") and to reject the "totalizing" implications of socialism.

But Boyte's communitarianism, while addressed to genuine left problems, hardly gets DSA out of the jam that Harrington believes it is in. Indeed, Boyte's proposals amount to a call for dissolving DSA in favor of a far different non-socialist organization.

Reds vs. greens.

At the convention, a plethora of resolutions were passed on everything from Campbell's Soup to Nicaragua. Against the wishes of some of DSA's labor members, the delegates decided to bow to the membership's divided loyalties (between Walter Mondale, Alan Cranston and Jesse Jackson) and not endorse anyone in the Democratic presidential primary. Harrington told *In These Times* that if Mondale did win the primary, he expected that DSA would "support" him, perhaps without "endorsing" him. (The difference between these should be left to William Safire to define.)

Numerous backroom squabbles over staff and who would run for DSA's National Board absorbed many of the dele-

DSA co-chair Michael Harrington rested his hopes on new mass movements, while co-chair Barbara Ehrenreich stressed individual transformation.

gates. The most controversial resolutions, like those on Israel, were compromised before they reached plenary debate. There was also a highly successful Friday night forum, attended by several thousand New Yorkers, at which freeze leader Randall Forsberg, Salvadoran rebel leader Guillermo Ungo, Rep. Ronald Dellums and feminist writer Barbara Ehrenreich spoke.

But an undercurrent of debate kept surfacing over what general direction DSA should take in the next years. Sociologist Bogdan Denitch described two tendencies in DSA as the "reds" and the "greens"—which correspond in part to differences that existed between the old DSOC and NAM.

The reds, loosely identifiable with Atlantic Seaboard DSOCers like Harrington, Chapin, Denitch, labor political operative Marjorie Phyfe and former DSOC youth organizer Joe Schwartz, see the labor movement as DSA's most important potential constituency. They stress

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traditional political-economic issues more than cultural or social issues. Their reference point for socialism is the European left, particularly the Swedish socialists, and to the extent they see these socialists in disarray they become uncertain themselves about the meaning and prospects for socialism.

The greens are loosely identifiable with former NAM leaders and current DSA staff members Holly Graff and Leo Cassey and with former NAM members from northern West Coast locals (from Esalen to Bellingham). They are more concerned with making DSA hospitable to social and cultural movements than to labor. ("The key for DSA is looking at barriers that keep women, gays and lesbians, and people of color from our organization," Portland's Beverly Stein declared at one of the main convention workshops.) They see personal transformation as integral to socialism. If they see a crisis in socialism, they identify it, as Graff does, with the difficulty of integrating feminist and anti-racist concerns into the concept of socialism.

At last week's convention, the greens played a prominent role. The elevation of Ehrenreich to DSA co-chair reflected in part a successful attempt to equalize the two tendencies. Ehrenreich is a brilliant and provocative proponent of personal transformation. Ehrenreich told *in These Times* that "to say you are a socialist is to commit yourself to personal transformation."

Ehrenreich thinks that many ostensibly

cultural issues must become political. "We have to find a way to take gay rights out of the gay ghetto," she said. "I want to take it out of being a special interest. I think it is in every person's interest to have their notion of sexuality expanded."

The reds' role in DSA and their point of view seemed to have been downgraded in other ways as well. Harrington's keynote address was scheduled for Friday morning before many of the delegates and the press had arrived, and, in contrast to past practice, no copy of it was available for the press or the delegates. Several prominent reds, like Chapin, did not participate in any of the panels and workshops.

Perhaps the most striking indication of the reds' lessened influence within DSA was the absence of any major labor future from DSA's public forum. Such an omission would have been unthinkable at a DSOCC convention. Remarkingly, upon the convenors' omission, DSA member Carl Shier, a United Auto Workers official from Chicago, said, "They just don't think that way."

DSA's future.

Neither the pessimism of DSA's leaders, nor the difference between the "reds" and the "greens" necessarily portend ill for the organization. DSA's growth and the vitality of many of its locals outweighs the gloom of Harrington and other leaders. But the question raised by Harrington and others is serious: what role, if any, can a socialist organization now play in American politics?

Many DSA members are on the staff of unions and of politicians. They head important lobbies and interest groups. They have no doubts about their ability as individuals to affect their own local

political scene. But they harbor doubts about doing so as members of DSA and as socialists. When they look at what role DSA can play in American politics, they become seized by feelings of despair and impotence.

Many NAM members had considered themselves to the "left" of DSOCC members, but they are now finding that when they say what organization they are from, they must automatically acknowledge that they are socialists. Sometimes the results are discouraging. When former NAM leader Barbara Ehrenreich came to Philadelphia to speak at a public health association meeting, she was also scheduled to speak on behalf of DSA. When the public health officials learned in this way that she was a socialist, they tried to cancel her invitation.

A very small minority of DSA members share Boyce's view that the left should simply abandon the "Eurocentric" and

"totalizing" language of socialism. Most agree with Harrington that they will simply have to tough it out. "There is no way you can evade the issue," Harrington said. "Any serious left in this country is going to be attacked as socialist."

But in so far as DSA has not developed a socialist politics, the organization finds itself at sea. Those members who might most effectively advance DSA's fortunes work for labor unions or public officials. And even the best local chapters feel their existence is somehow tenuous.

At this year's convention, DSA was clearly suffering from this malady. Yet it will not collapse if it cannot find a cure. Socialist organizations have a religious as well as political character that allows them to survive worldly impotence. But when DSOCC and NAM merged, they did not hope to found another sect, but to inaugurate a new era of socialist politics in the U.S. That era has not yet begun.

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DSA DRIFTS TOWARD DOLDRUMS

As the attached reports on DSA's first official convention, ^{revel} (reprinted from ITT and The Guardian) DSA has run into problems. An admittedly limited number of additional conversations added some insight into the complex nature of DSA's apparent difficulties. It has been clear for a while that the initial optimism and triumphalist predictions of mass growth that accompanied the DSOC/NAM merger a year and a half ago have given way to a focus on day-to-day work for the majority of DSA members and a political malaise among the older line DSOCers and those NAMers who swung rapidly to those politics. Rather than moving toward a common strategy, the old DSOC strategy has collapsed (for the foreseeable future), while the former NAMers have simply continued their political entropy. The possibility of developing a common upbeat strategic definition for DSA seems more remote than ever.

In a similar vein, and unlike most other socialist groups, DSA does not share a common or even central idea of what socialism is. As one DSAer told me, "DSA contains everything from Browder to Shachtman." That is, not only does it not share a vision of what it is supposed to be fighting for, but it contains antagonistic views of that goal. This is not new, of course, but it does have an effect on the morale and growth potential of the group.

This might not matter in the short run if some of the "models" of socialist transition and/or development dear to the hearts of various trends in DSA were not bringing this question to the forefront. A large part of the malaise apparent in the older DSOC leaders can be explained by the growing difficulties of virtually all of the social democratic governments elected in Europe in the last few years. Foremost among these is France. Harrington spent the Spring in France and was most certainly effected by the political malaise produced by the failure of Mitterand's reflationary (big spending), nationalization-supported, strategy. The chaos and dislocation that have accompanied the European-wide restructuring of that continent's steel industry has also taken the blush off the rose of "democratic planning."

Probably the most central to the malaise of the old DSOC leaders, however, is the collapse of their age-old strategy of transforming the Democratic Party. To put it another way, the national Democratic Party may or may not see some significant changes in the next few years, but these will be accomplished without the coalition building services of DSA. The unity of the labor leadership forged by Kirkland in the 1984 elections, along with the new party rules and declining importance of both mid-term conventions and primaries, effectively preclude any role for DSA at the national level. The attention of DSA for some time now has shifted to local Democratic Party activity. As one member told me, there are more DSA members in state legislatures, city councils, and local office than ever. Most DSAers are probably quite content with this local focus, some have even elevated it to a sufficient strategy, but for old DSOCers like Harrington et al, this is little comfort. They, unlike most ex-NAMers, are accustomed to thinking in strategic terms and their strategy is no longer viable.

Harrington and the old DSOC leadership had a three-pronged perspective for rapid growth, mainstream contact, and a leftward face. These were: The projection of DSA as a relevant factor in the DP with important ties to the labor leadership; the identification with an apparently left-moving European social democracy (Euro-socialism); and an identity with Third World revolutionary movements. The first of these was probably most important in terms of growth among liberals concerned with the rightward drift of the DP and with electoral solutions to that problem. The dynamism provided by a visible national presence and unifying strategy is no longer there. Locally, DSAers are not always even on the same side. From the vantage point of the old DSOC leaders, the two aspects of international identification face serious problems.

DSA DRIFTS TOWARD DOLDRUMS contd.

DSA, as a national organization is drifting politically. Not to the left or right. Its drift seems to resemble entropy - diffusion in all directions - more than fission. In spite of these difficulties, it would be wrong to imagine that DSA is in crisis. For many of the newer DSAers, the convention may have seemed a step forward. For example, those whose main political activity is around Central America, the stronger statement on anti-intervention work was a good development. Similarly, the resolution calling for the formation of caucuses in unions along the line of TDU, while even the watered down version was tabled to the labor commission, was seen as a step forward by those with a more rank and file orientation. I was told by a labor activist in DSA that the labor commission meetings at the convention were not particularly good or optimistic. Furthermore, the lack of a labor presence was disappointing to many. But the same person felt that the commission would help DSA members in various unions make some links. It seems likely that in terms of some sort of coordination or at least common policy in work such as the anti-war and labor movements, many DSAers are taking a patient attitude toward slow progress. Furthermore, many of these newer DSAers do not define their own views by DSOC's old Democratic Agenda strategy or by identification with or even belief in Euro-socialism. So long as there is no viable alternative outside DSA, with a credible strategy, most of the ex-NAMers and newer DSAers are likely to be tolerant of political vagueness and gradual entropy.

On another front in left developments, the long expected split in the SWP appears near completion. A "public faction" of the SWP calling itself Socialist Action was announced recently at a meeting of the 4th Int'l's United Secretariat. Socialist Action (SA) has about 140 members, most of whom have already been expelled from the SWP, leaving about 600 in the SWP. It will have its own publication and will identify itself as the real 4th USec group in the US - the SWP having drifted away from USec politics in the last few years. According to knowledgeable sources a large portion of the SA members are serious trade unionists, which is a major reason for the split. There are some in SA who are open to a broader conception of left cooperation and unity than has ever characterized the SWP. Furthermore, most SAers, we are told, reject the hegemonic style of the SWP as well as its bureaucratic version of democratic centralism. It is simply too early to tell whether SA will move in a healthy direction or become yet another Trotskyist sect. There are, however, good individuals in the group. The IS center will establish some contact with SA. If you know people in this grouping or have information on SA in your area, please contact the center.

The difficulties arising in the SWP and DSA are not a cause for us to rejoice. They are symptoms of the immense difficulties facing the left in general throughout the advanced capitalist world. The SWP split, for example, is simply the latest crisis produced by the impossibility of classic "party-building" at this time. It is to be hoped that SA will draw this lesson and not attempt to project itself as the "American section of the World Party of the Proletariat." DSA, in a different vein to be sure, is also running up against the difficulty of projecting itself as an explicitly socialist trend in an explicitly anti-socialist political framework - the DP, local or national. The debate of a year or so ago, about running as open socialists in the DP, has most completely disappeared. This, however, has left a political question mark about the relevance of being a socialist in the DP -- ie, what do you need a socialist organization for to operate in the DP? Isn't it just a hindrance? The answer being, yes!, it is not clear what future DSA has unless it finds a broader or different way to define itself and its role in mainstream politics. The desire to be in mainstream, DP politics is the one thing that is not in question in DSA at this time. There is a contradiction here, but it is not one most DSAers see or feel at this point. For the time being, at least, entropy, not crisis, will be the state of that political milieu.