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REPORT ON POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS IN THE NEW AMERICAN MOVEMENT

On August 8-12, 1979 in Milwaukee, the New American Movement will be holding a national convention. It is a convention that we should take note of because of the internal discussions that they are having.

NAM has about 800 members nationally- most of them concentrated on the campuses and in as they say "white collar professional jobs." Political opinions within the organization- even on a national level vary greatly. They label themselves a "socialist-Feminist organization," and seek to make a socialist-feminist revolution. They lament their almost complete lack of minority members and ties to the ~~rank~~ workers in industry. In arguing against industrial colonization and the strategic role of industrial workers they say " We do not believe in socialist strategies that concentrate on a "key" sector of the working class to "lead" the revolution. This only intensifies the existing divisions within the class."

The two major debates within NAM are on the question of their desire to fuse with DSOC, and the question of a labor party vis-a-vis the Democratic party.

Richard Healey, the NAM National Secretary reports on the past DSOC convention's decision to "explore the possibilities of merger" with NAM. He cites as their reasons "we share a democratic-socialist perspective; our theory and practice of socialist feminism is very impressive; NAM is very involved in grass roots organizing; we have more developed political education." In Healey's conclusion he says " I would urge the March Exec. National Interim Committee mandate an exploration of joint work with DSOC, and that our National Convention pass a resolution similar to DSOC's."

Marilyn Katz, NAM's National Political Secretary holds a different position. She says "NAM is moving ~~a~~ in a direction antithetical to the revolutionary tradition from which it emerged.. the question of a merger with DSOC is only one aspect, and, frankly, it is difficult to see it happening in the short run. Would NAM join the infamous Second International?" She says "The dominant strategy for "socialism" in DSOC, typified by Harrington's positions, is indistinguishable from various bourgeois strategies for maintaining capitalism." She is opposed to a merger. As I understand it, from attending a San Diego NAM meeting, there are three motions that will go before the convention: 1) merge with DSOC; 2) Work with DSOC for ~~while~~ with the idea~~s~~ of merging; 3) Do not merge and do not establish any special relationship with DSOC because it is too closely tied with the Democratic Party.

The second major debate in NAM is over the labor strategy- as formulated by Stanley Aronowitz. He essentially says that if anything the "left" has played a negative role in the labor movement in recent years- that it played a part in "depoliticization in the working class." He points to the Teamsters for a Democratic Union as a model of what to do- which also explains NAM's desire to merge, ultimately, with IS. He urges a "Turn" for NAM: " NAM is an organization composed principally of members of the middle strata of professional employees... unless this composition is substantially modified in a few years...it cannot play it's full potential role in the labor movement." He argues against the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" as the goal. "If we have ~~commitment~~ to democracy as an end and not just a slogan, can we speak of the dictatorship of any class and expect American workers to respond affirmatively to our program for socialism? I think not." He says he thinks that the ideas of "euro-Communism"

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may offer some assistance in developing their own program. He ends up by saying that workers (and especially industrial workers) would not feel comfortable in NAM and they should consider setting up labor branches of NAM.

The most interesting debate in NAM is around the idea of a labor party. This is in the context of their support to liberal Democrats. Richard Healey says "To write off all Democrats as "bourgeois politicians" is like writing off all reforms because they legitimize the system- that would be a one-sided, inaccurate analysis. . . I would suggest, that is, that we support a DeAlums because he is a positive good, not a lesser evil." Others in the discussion bulletin argue against supporting any Democrats.

In an article by Political Committee member Judy Maclean, she responds to what she says is a growing discussion in NAM about the need to build a Labor party "the idea comes up as if something called a Labor Party were possible now and in the future and clearly better than existing parties. These assumptions seem questionable to me." She goes on to convince NAM members that it is a pipe dream- and NAM wouldn't really want one anyway- they want a social-democratic party. "Hoping for the appearance of such a party, and working to bring it about, is about as useful as waiting for a UFO to bring outer space creatures who will untangle our earthly political mess. And the appearance of such a party is about as likely. "

Under the impact of the growing radicalization of workers, NAM is trying to develop a political program. They are looking for ready-made solutions thru mergers- that would put them in contact with workers. They do not seem to be really discussing a political program for workers, and the concept of a labor party in that context. It is clear that there are separate wings of NAM emerging, and I would not be surprised if there were a small split this summer when NAM voted to begin the process of working closely with DSOC with the aim of merging. All indications are that this motion will carry- it has on the whole West Coast.

The existence of some more radical minded people in NAM who want nothing to do with the Democratic Party, provides us with some openings. In San Diego, we worked with some of them around our anti-Weber work. I think that in many cities there will be opportunities to get close to some of these people in the anti-nuke movement and on the campuses where they have their main base. We should approach them with the PULLEY-ZIMMERMAN campaign and especially go after them on the question of the objective need for a labor party. I think that there are some openings for recruitment, and also we can help eliminate an obstacle in the path of the workers and socialist movement.

cc: YSA

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