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# FORUM

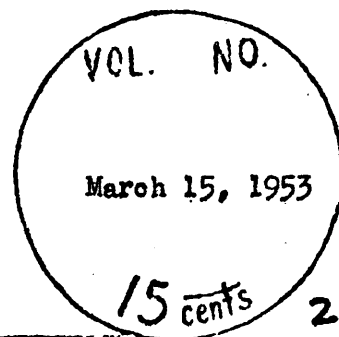
Discussion & Information Bulletin  
of the Independent Socialist League

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A CRITIQUE OF MAGNUS' "SOME REMARKS ON THE WAR QUESTION"

It is a good thing for the Magnus article to have come out just now, when the war question is being discussed formally by our leading members for it will aid in the refutation of its largely silent supporters in the League. It attempts to deal with key problems, but does so in a manner unacceptable to socialists. It is contradictory to the real events that it seeks to appeal to in overthrowing the "sectarians" and "ultra-leftists". It is vulgarly empirical, throwing away the historical insights gained at costly expense by the socialist movement.

It has been particularly difficult to deal with Shachtman's recent position on the war question because of its ambiguous character, which presents a gradual moving away from the Socialist position on imperialist wars, cloaked in Marxian terminology. Magnus' article is more blatant. It points up the weaknesses inherent in the Shachtman position by seeking to "concretely apply the "democratic war" concept to the world situation.

1. Marxists must base their politics on the needs of the international situation. In WWII this means seeking to achieve solutions to the problem of war between the contending imperialist powers, primarily Stalinist Russia and capitalist U.S. It is incorrect to say

"...that for socialists the most important element in this process is the consciousness of the revolutionary class as expressed through its organization, political intervention and active struggle..."

In the beginning of such a struggle, it will be the consciousness of the socialist vanguard that is the most important element. If it sees the problems involved and the direction in which to move, then the episodic manifestations of the class struggle can more easily be modified. Socialists cannot tail-end the masses if they intend to lead them. This is not abstentionism, nor is it empiricism either. The theory of the permanent revolution (the call for a "labor dictatorship") developed even before the first (1905) revolution in Russia by Trotsky was not abstentionism. The consciousness and the mood of the class as a whole does, of course, have everything to do with the tactics chosen by the vanguard in pursuit of its strategic aims.

2. If Magnus does not want to clutter up the discussion of the problem of imperialist wars it is regrettable, but beside the point. It is necessary to recall "(3) the basic strategy of internationalist socialism relies not on the weakening of the class struggle for the pursuit of the class struggle 'in other ways', as some delicately put it) but on the active solidarity between the forces of the exploited in each camp..." (Berg)

As we intend to prove, it is precisely the abandonment of the socialist internationalist viewpoint on war that Magnus is taking for his position.

3. Without entertaining illusions about the state of the revolutionary movement, it is nevertheless meaningless "...to enter the mass movement as a loyal left wing..." (Magnus). Socialists enter mass movements, loyal to socialist ideas and the working class' historic interests, however imperfectly workers or workers' leaders might understand these interests. They do not lose themselves opportunistically in politically alien movements behind clouds of "loyalty".

That is why on the one hand socialists must struggle for a labor party in the U.S. today, and on the other hand must prepare to do battle with the leadership that will usher in such a labor party.

Whether a "long-term transformation of social democracy" (Magnus) is either possible or necessary will be partially spelled out by the demands of the war situation, as well as socialists' attitudes toward their new found "Loyalty". At present it is necessary to function through social democratic movements. We look forward to jumping over this step as soon as practicable, and it is precisely the war needs that pose the possibility - in England and elsewhere - of cutting this step short.

This does not mean that we have not absorbed the lessons of the experiences of the 4th Internationalists in the 1930's, whose ultimatic and military-conspiratorial attitude toward broad parties that they entered, effectively prevented them from making the contribution toward revolutionary regroupment that could have been so valuable in view of their superior training in Marxist theory. The idea of a small sect moving in and out of other organizations with military discipline is absurd. But the idea of a revolutionary party (not a splinter beating its chest and calling itself the "World Party of Socialist Revolution") is not absurd. We are loyal in the sense of loyally sharing the experiences of the ranks of the mass parties, but we cannot be basically loyal to parties that have taken responsibility for defending capitalist imperialism, including its most barbaric colonial aspects.

4. Recognizing the contradictions of American imperialism, and attempting to take advantage of them, is of course an important element in socialist strategy. Internationally this means pressing the fight for colonial self-determination, for instance. Faced with a successful colonial revolt (that is, not stalinist dominated) the U.S. must generally tend to accede to the fact. If its allies' "Possessions" are involved, the U.S. will "tread its way in a circumspect manner" (Magnus) enough to support its allies down the line, grind its bourgeois-democratic teeth as it may. This, too, is born out of the need of the U.S. for major European ...i.e., ... imperialist allies.

Domestically, the process of preparation for an all-out military struggle a-la hydrogen bomb will call forth an unprecedented authoritarian state in the U.S. As a target area, and as the center of manpower and materiel, a capitalist U.S. will drastically tighten up all sectors touching upon a free labor movement - with the assent of the labor bureaucracy where possible, and without it where necessary. This does not mean fascism, in all likelihood, but fascism is not the only form of debilitating the working class and the democratic form of capitalist rule. It does mean, however, a drastic curtailment of the arena of allowed social struggle short of direct assaults touching on the power of the state. To postulate the continued "strength" (Magnus) of the civilian economy tomorrow is to ignore the reality of what the situation must bring forth tomorrow, short of successful intervention by labor and socialists. Because

"...the political direction of the U.S. war camp is determined by the overwhelming weight of the politics of the bourgeoisie...(so that) its war camp thus far affect(s) only the tempo, the forms and the methods of the U.S. mobilization, rather than its fundamental imperialist-reactionary direction..."(Magnus);

therefore, it is precisely the needs of the objective situation that formulate the policies that the bourgeoisie must resort to if they want to continue and extend their world conquests. The threat of international Stalinism and the bankruptcy of American foreign policy impose the reactionary solutions that will have to be advanced to domestic and foreign problems. To miss this point is to miss the entire character of the struggle that lies ahead.

4. In general, socialists propose the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the various countries they now occupy. We are for the immediate withdrawal of American, British, French and Russian troops from Germany. We are for the immediate withdrawal of Chinese troops and Russian military missions from Korea, along with the armies of the U.S.-UN forces. If Russian troops cannot first be forced out of East Germany, we are still for the immediate (unilateral) withdrawal of U.S. troops there. We do not make our demands contingent upon the other imperialist powers' simultaneous withdrawal from the foreign lands they now occupy. We hold this attitude because the occupation of these frontier countries is a step in the preparations for the Third World War by the U.S. and we consciously seek to prevent these preparations from reaching the stage where war becomes more and more possible. We favor the same (unilateral) withdrawal of U.S. troops and air bases from Japan, England, North Africa, Etc. Think of what conditions will surround such steps if they are forced in these countries - the heightened consciousness and organization that will precipitate such steps and the international repercussions set in motion by such events. This seems to us to be the official position of the ISL; Magnus' position the abandonment of it.

What about Korea? In Korea our attitude, of course, is for the withdrawal of all foreign troops, but since we are in the U.S. and have less chance to immediately affect Stalinist troops, and because of the absolutely unchoosable alternatives presented there, and because of the continued destruction of the Korean people and their economy for absolutely no purposes apart from pre-WW III maneuvering on the part of the U.S. Russia and China, we are for the unilateral withdrawal of American troops if it boils down to that. Rather a cessation to the slaughter than continued destruction by the two powers contending in Korea. We suggest Magnus re-read Labor Action on this matter, and recall conversations with the national office figure recently through the Bay Area.

This unilateral withdrawal - admittedly a harsh problem which permits no hedging - is not proposed for general disarmament purposes. Along with it must go a call for independent, socialist defense of Germany - all of Germany - from both foreign imperialism, capitalist and Stalinist. This is not simply trade-union control of the arm, or trade-union defensism, a concept demolished in the Independent Socialist movement 12 years ago, but the struggle for working class and socialist power.

We have deliberately used the term unilateral in order to put the problem most bluntly. In our slogans the word has been absent and properly so. We are for international working class action; but our demands are unilateral in the sense that they are not conditioned upon a prearranged simultaneous withdrawal by both sides. We struggle for the withdrawal of troops sent by the government of our ruling class. We appeal to the workers of the other side to do likewise.

Magnus refers to the Berlin air lift. Will he now state that Shachtman was wrong a few years ago to reject the Garrett-Judd position, which specified that we advocated only simultaneous evacuation of Germany by all occupation troops? Our slogan properly was "withdraw all occupation forces" but we did not renounce our own (unilateral) struggle in the absence of guarantees of a simultaneous withdrawal by both sides.

5. Franco Spain: the 'graciously permitted' revolution. Because Franco Spain does not play an important part in American policy (his paper divisions are not seriously envisioned as allies), and because there is no Stalinist threat at home; and because

"...Both its geographical position and its internal situation fate Franco Spain to play the role of a subordinate vassal, a military base and a completely undefendable country from any major invasion" (Magnus);

and because the Western powers cannot militarily intervene to "settle" (Magnus) Franco's internal policy beyond "limited military aid and political commitment" (Magnus); therefore those POUMists who look to the ISL for political support and encouragement, may now go ahead and overthrow Franco's dictatorship regardless of the military consequences to the regime's defense of the country. What kind of a position is this for a Socialist to take?

Certainly, the struggle against the regime should go on until Franco is overthrown and the possibilities of establishing a socialist Spain have been fully explored by socialists opposed to both major imperialisms! What else can internationalist socialists say to the beleaguered revolutionary militants in Spain? However, we say this regardless of the fact that Magnus overlooks the possible strategic importance of the Iberian peninsula, should the first Stalinist onslaught occupy Europe to the Channel and the Pyrenees!

In such a case it is not impossible that a military intervention might be undertaken by the "free world" to support either a tottering Franco, a reactionary mélange, or simply a substitute force that would settle the question of the state later, in its own good time and in its own reactionary way, rather than see a political vacuum (absence of reactionary power) endanger its own outposts.

Certainly it is not a question of "reimposing Franco" as Magnus puts it, but of Franco's allies preventing his overthrow by the anti-fascists. Magnus may feel, as he states, that only limited political and military aid would be extended to Franco, but this would certainly be shortsighted on the U.S.'s part. If the U.S. really wants the area which the Pyrenees protect from the Russians as a defense bastion, it would seem pretty wasteful to take a chance on another civil war with another million dead and the country prostrate; instead of jumping in with an effective amount of aid at the first sign that it is genuinely necessary.

Extended to its full logic, Magnus' position would not allow even the Spanish anti-fascists an unconditional struggle against their regime. After all, one has to consider the possible military consequences for the "West" as a whole, and also the alternative for the Spanish people represented by Stalinist conquest. The difference between the bumbling Franco regime and a bloody Stalinist occupation is not insignificant. American liberals are less consistent than Truman and Acheson on this point, because of a sentimental hangover that is in contradiction with their basic strategy to an all-out military defense. Magnus fundamentally shares this inconsistency, and evades the problem simply by pooch-pooching any possible value Spain could have either as a base or as a source of manpower.

6. A slight contradiction occurs in Magnus' attempt to deal with the English situation, apart from certain errors of fact and policy.

(A) "It is impossible to assume, in the face of the post-war developments, that the Labor Party will be either unable or unwilling to take full power and full responsibility for the fate of the nation either before or during the war. The temper of England is not such that the Labor Party will hide behind the skirts of Toryism, or turn the fate of the country and its foreign policy over to Churchill once again." (Magnus)

(B) "...the definite social-imperialist tendency in the BLP...cannot be denied; it must be studied, fought and finally destroyed within the BLP...Not to see and understand this tendency is to be disarmed in the face of possible future 'national coalition' of right laborites with the Tory imperialists, or a repetition of the policy of 'class peace' in England in the face of a world-wide imperialist war." (Magnus)

It is precisely the groundwork of such a national coalition that we are now wit-

nessing in England, directed against the Bevanites' increase of influence within the BLP, that will surely be strengthened by the right-wing laborites given the war situation as a problem and excuse for such an action. With the presence of American armed forces in and around Britain in mind, and the increasing isolation of the right-wing laborites from the forces that supported them in '45-'50, it is by no means excluded that should the right wing be irrevocably barred by a Bevan victory, in the conditions close to WW III, we can anticipate a decisive change in the basic character of the British social struggles. The dynamics of a now-being-split labor political movement open the door to a more typically European development.

Today the conservative press is filled with the denunciations of the Bevanites by the right-wing leadership. "A special correspondent" describes the minutiae that occur behind presumably closed Parliamentary Labor Party meeting doors. Bevan has to fight hard to be able to continue holding caucus meetings. The elections to the "shadow cabinet" -- Parliamentary Labor Party's executive committee -- are rigged to prevent substantial left-wing representation.

All this takes place within a BLP committed as a whole to a social-imperialist foreign policy. Bevan has as yet drawn no fundamental cleavage between himself and right-wing laborites on Kenya or Malaya, not to mention the German Social-Democracy. In contradistinction to Magnus' posing of the question, there is only an internationalist tendency within the broad Bevan wing of the BLP, instead of a just measurable social-chauvinist tendency within the party as a whole.

Should Bevan adopt a clearer socialist policy (e.g. clear-cut workers' control) domestically and a more internationalist position on foreign policy, by so much would the right-wing be driven further toward the conservatives.

As revolutionary socialists we are vitally concerned with this most important sector of the international socialist movement. We work within the Bevanite wing for a consistent socialist position on all questions. However, the united BLP is not "our party" (Magnus), and should it carry on an imperialist war as America's junior partner, we would oppose these war aims, seeking to carry on the class struggle toward the aim of establishing a socialist government in England. Our role in the British working class and in its political organ, the BLP, does correspond to Trotsky's WW I formulation that "In war as in peace we are a party of opposition, not a party of power." The character of the arena, and international complexities do bear on how we conduct ourselves, but in the last analysis, "our party" has not yet come into being in England.

In the conditions of WW III it is rank opportunism to give critical support to a Labor government carrying on an imperialist war under U. S. domination.

Some comrades have attempted to explain away Magnus' proposal to vote war credits for a labor government in a world war by pointing to his use of the term "under certain conditions." These conditions could include complete freedom for the colonies and other necessary items. But in the previous sentence, he poses no conditions in his rejection of "abstentionism" or "defeatism." Having then clearly a defensist position, and assuming that the labor government would not allow the British Magnuses to build their own separate army, how would he translate his defensism into action in any meaningful way if he opposed the credits needed to carry on the War? Obviously then, the use of the phrase "under certain conditions" in the next sentence has little reference to the truly democratic nature of the labor government, but refers rather to the immediacy of the Stalinist threat to this hypothetical labor government allied with the U.S.

7. Both of these examples of "concrete thinking" by Magnus (Spain and England) illustrate the application of the essentially unfruitful Shachtman position on the "democratic war" concept.

8. Stalinism and the War. Here is the major foundering point of Magnus' empiricism and opportunism on the war question. All the concreteness that was advanced in examining capitalist imperialism ends up as a deadweight on Magnus' legs as he sinks in the sea of subjectivity in dealing with this question.

"...It is utopian and suicidal to base socialist war strategy on any effective help from the Stalinist-terrorized proletariats. Berg's dictum...enjoins socialists to build their strategy on a romantic-utopian vision...instead of a recognition that there are only potential 'forces' in the Stalinist camp...The problem is what to do now, in the conditions of the approach of imperialist war, and without any aid from this long-suffering mass?"

It might be noted that this is the WW II argument of all the war supporters of that day, pointing with equal justification to the Nazi success in wiping out completely any effective armed working class underground.

According to "The Russian Ukrainian Underground," by Vs. Felix, in The New International, April 1949, p. 100 --

"October, 1948, marked the fifth anniversary of the organization in the northwestern forest regions of the Ukraine of the first revolutionary divisions which took the name of Ukrainian Revolutionary Army (UPA). ...The first detachments of the UPA, organized deep in the German rear, since the Germans at that time had reached Kharkov, immediately began to carry on a struggle on two fronts; against the German military and civil power and at the same time did not permit the Bolshevist (Stalinist) 'red' parachutists to gain influence over the population.

"The first slogans of the Ukrainian partisans were: 'Against Hitler and Stalin,' 'For the Independence of the Ukraine.' The success of the partisan movement was so great that as early as 1943-44 whole territories of the north and west Ukraine lay under their control: Volhynia, Galicia, Carpathia and a large part of the territories to the west of the Dnieper. Deeply penetrating raids were conducted across the Ukraine, even reaching White Russia (Byelo-Russia...).

"When toward the end of 1944, all the territories of the Ukraine once more fell under Stalinist occupation, UPA continued to carry on the struggle. The Bolsheviks (Stalinists) conducted their operations against the partisans only with the aid of MVD and MGB (secret police) troops, as a part of the ordinary Red Army troops kept coming over to the side of the partisans. ...the Ukrainian Revolutionary Army in 1946 transferred the main part of its work to underground activity of separate small groups throughout the territories of the Ukraine. The underground revolutionary work consists in the strong development of anti-Bolshevik (Stalinist) propaganda and in the preparation of the people for a possible revolutionary uprising."

Thus "concretely" it was possible for an underground to grow up in Western Russia and Poland under war conditions and the impacts of defeats sustained by the Stalinist regime. That this underground was able to continue as late as Fall, 1950, we know from the UPA dispatches recorded in Labor Action. An even more recent mention of the UPA occurred in Labor Action January 12, 1953 in the editorial box alongside the article "Discussion in the Ukrainian Forest."

"At the present time the UPA still exists and operates in the Ukraine within the USSR, but the Ukrainian authorities in exile were asked by the UPA command, about a year ago, to refrain from giving out abroad any kind of information about the UPA's present activities because



such information often becomes exaggerated and arouses disbelief, on the one hand, and, on the other, it leads to carelessness which helps the Russian police to piece together certain facts and data which it otherwise would not get. So the editors of Vpered inform us."

How then can Magnus state:

"...Although we know of persistent underground activity under Fascism, the new collectivist bureaucracy has thus far been successful in stamping it out."..?

Remember that Russia had at least 15 years of consolidation and could not prevent an underground functioning on a wide scale for at least 9 years, while there was no significant Nazi underground after only 6 years consolidation of the Hitler regime prior to WW II.

How then is it possible to rule out a "second-generation" underground in Russia, under WW III conditions? And more pertinently -- in the satellite countries which have only had about 7 years consolidation under Stalinism, and have not been completely excluded from past association with western Europe?

Can we have forgotten so soon the phenomenon of mass desertion from the Red Army that characterized the first months after Hitler's invasion of Russia? Out of these desertions, including in one case an entire division, was built the Vlasov army that fought with the Nazis, and also the foundations of the progressive Ukrainian movement that refused to choose between Hitler and Stalin. It was only the stupid racist fanaticism of the Nazis applied to their rule of the first occupied areas in Russia, that antagonized the long-suffering Russian people and made it impossible for the Nazis to capitalize on the opposition to the Stalin regime. The assumption that even at the beginning of World War III, only the Western side will have to worry about its political and military solidity is utterly false.

The only answer that socialists can give on this question is that it is possible for underground movements to grow up in Stalinist dominated countries, and that it is worthwhile and possible to attempt to coordinate international working class opposition to the coming WW III. Whether such a reciprocal movement can win or not will be settled by the play of live forces and not by a pseudo-objectivity that bars these potential forces from coming into being.

9. On the consequences of a Russian victory for the Russian people Magnus is again incorrect. I.e. "...It is the duty of the slaves of Stalin to continue their 'struggle' regardless of the military consequences, for they have nothing to gain and everything to lose by a victory of Stalinism." On the contrary, the Great Russians have experienced a rise in standards of living as a result of Stalinist imperialism after WW II, and if Stalinism should win out in WW III, they face all the advantages that any other imperialist mother country has had access to in the past. It is certainly logical for Stalin to cement his main base this way, at the expense of the new "peoples democracies." But also if they have nothing to gain by a victory of their own country, if that is so obvious, then one would expect mass desertions a la Vlasov. But then, why, earlier in the article, did Magnus dismiss as utopian any reliance on fissures in the Stalinist war machine?

10. The failure of the "democratic war" concept. Magnus recognizes the lack of appeal that western imperialism has in helping call a resistance movement into being. He proposes the halfway measure of a "democratic war" to remove this flaw. If there is one fact that can be gleaned from the history of imperialist countries, it is that the social question at home, i.e. the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and its state by the working class, has always been the pre-requisite problem to be solved before any democratic internationalist policy can be undertaken. A capital-



state, besieged by a social-democratic party, and even transiently taken over and run by a social-democratic party (including England) has never been able to make this sharp demarcation in the past, nor does the present situation show the likelihood of such a possibility. Only a workers' state going toward socialism will be able to have a democratic foreign policy, or wage a democratic war.

However, the fact that a workers' state may in the end have to wage a democratic war does not mean that the struggle for workers' power should be waged on the basis of advocating a democratic war, any more than it means that socialists in Russia should advocate the reestablishment of workers' power there for the purpose of waging war against capitalist imperialism in order to free the colonial peoples of Asia and Africa. The Bolsheviks in 1917 hoped that the spark of the Russian Revolution would light a flame throughout Europe, and they were prepared to urge the exhausted Russian people to carry on a revolutionary war against Germany provided this war was made necessary and possible by a clearly existing mass social upheaval in Germany. Yet the Bolsheviks came to power on the slogan of peace.

We do not maintain that a workers' government may not carry on a democratic war. But our struggle against imperialist war must be based on a struggle for peace.

Examining all the points already raised, it is clear that Magnus has a double standard for workers' intervention in WW III. Basically his strategy deals in the last analysis with only half the world. This must not be the attitude of socialists for the period of history now ahead of us if we are to successfully replace capitalism and Stalinism under the conditions leading up to the third World War.

Jack Walker  
Saul Berg

January 25, 1953

## POLITICAL PROSPECTS

(The following article was sent in as a discussion article on the political trends and prospects following the presidential elections. The views contained in it are, of course, the views of the authors. We trust with the publication of the views of Comrades Magnus and Beilas, a discussion will follow in subsequent issues of FORUM.  
Editor)

To the Editor:

We thought that by raising certain questions in our letter concerning the Democratic Party convention, the role of the "labor-liberal bloc," and the treatment of these problems by Labor Action; that by putting these questions to the League we could initiate a solid discussion on what we consider a crucial problem for socialists in America. Unfortunately, either because we did not make ourselves understood or because Comrades Draper and Berg are carelessly reading things into our statement, the discussion has gotten completely off the track.

First--a couple of factual corrections. No place in our letter did we even hint at supporting the "Fair Dealers" as Draper suggests in his lengthy answer to our letter. It is certainly disloyal to accuse us, as Comrade Berg does, of trying "to justify the gigantic and powerful American labor movement's policy of kowtowing to the Democratic Party." In fact Draper was forced to "correct" this invention of Berg's but by again suggesting that we advocate support to "liberal Democratic candidates against right-wing Democratic candidates." Let us clear this matter up once and for all.

Today the American labor movement and its political machines, PAC and LLPE, operate within the framework of the Democratic Party. There is as yet no labor party (except in New York) and no nationwide movement in this direction. Yet at the recent Democratic convention a left-labor bloc appeared. Call it what you will (faction, bloc, group, etc.) this left faction operated in a different way than in the past. From a position of merely supporting the New Deal, the labor movement seems to be moving toward a position of more and more active participation in the Fair Deal. The reactionaries and many sections of the capitalist press point to these "creeping socialists" with dismay. Socialists know that this bloc is merely the familiar labor leadership intruding itself in a more organized fashion into the Democratic Party which it has loyally supported for decades. This left bloc is intimately connected with the labor machines, the American trade unions, etc. It is closely tied up with such organizations as the ADA and NAACP, constantly makes useless deals with the "center" against the "right" (city machines and southern Bourbons), generally capitulates to "Fair Dealism" ("permanent war dealism" would be a better name), and, of course, presently opposes any mention of an independent labor party.

So as not to be misunderstood, we tagged this left coalition in which we are interested with the ungainly name "AFL-CIO-ADA-NAACP bloc." Later on we shortened this to "Democratic labor-liberal bloc." It is this bloc in the Democratic Party which we wish to examine, and it is the growth, development, political strategy and tactics, etc., of this group which is especially significant for American Socialists. The Abner case is an example, in our eyes, of a conflict between this labor faction and the old line Democrats. Another conflict, on a different level to be sure, occurred at the Chicago convention. Given its roots in the labor movement, this bloc is, we believe (or at least may become) the embryo of a labor party on the American scene. While we wish to closely analyze this bloc and "support" it in some positive way, we are accused of "justifying" the political backwardness of American labor and of supporting the "Fair Deal." As a matter of fact

this is the farthest thing from our intentions and our policy.

We asked the question: "what is the relationship of the growth of this labor-liberal bloc to the development of a labor party in America, and what is the task of labor party supporters vis-a-vis that bloc?" The word "growth," we admit, is rather ambiguous, but the general nature of our question is entirely clear and will remain to plague American socialists unless it is answered---not stamped on, but answered. Comrades who wish to settle this question will find themselves unable to do so unless they address themselves to it. So far no one has done so.

Let us underline the most important part of this question: "what is the task of labor party supporters vis-a-vis that bloc?" This problem bothers us most of all for we believe that the League's policy is somehow out of focus on this question. Our future political relationship with this labor-liberal bloc (the word "liberal" is used in its American, not European, sense), obviously depends to a great extent upon understanding the future of Labor-Fair Deal relations, but it is not identical with this latter, overriding question.

In his answer to our letter Comrade Draper seems to suggest that there are only two real possible policies for socialists in this matter. He seems to present the alternatives in this manner: either support the present CIO course or simply advocate a labor party; either capitulate to the backwardness of American labor or spend one's time calling for a break with the Democrats; either support the Fair Deal or indict labor's participation in the immoral chaos of Democratic machine politics; either advocate entrance into the Democratic Party or advocate leaving it. Since no one likes to accept the idea of the "abandonment of socialist class politics," we are forced to the conclusion that there is really only one policy for socialists---namely the present policy of the ISL.

This seems to us much too neat. We are attempting to discuss the problem of how to carry through the labor party perspective in the present situation. To intimate that there is really only one rigid way to do this is to indict the supporters of the Willoughby Abner candidature in the ISL of either political light-mindedness or anti-socialist activity. This would prove to be rather difficult.

To illustrate the type of question we are attempting to discuss, we will return to the statement in Labor Action which "supports" the AFL endorsement of Stevenson. Supports, that is, in the sense of pointing out quite correctly that entering politics (anti-Gomperism at the level of the Presidential candidate) is progressive as compared with the previous level of "anti-political" behaviour. Even though supporting a capitalist candidate, the AFL has at least entered politics on this level. Now it can be moved onto the field of independent labor politics, etc. This argument is, it seems to us, sound. Unfortunately, there seems to be a certain reticence in applying it all the way around.

If the extremely limited move of the AFL of endorsing Stevenson was progressive, how shall we characterize the weak-kneed attempt of the labor-liberal bloc to oust the South from the Democratic Party? Progressive? Reactionary? Neutral? Of course it is possible to obscure this issue by asking the question: why couldn't they succeed in ousting the Bourbons? This, we admit, is a highly significant question and certainly should be dealt with. We socialists usually answer it by referring to the famous "kowtowing" pointed out so lucidly by Comrade Berg. But this is not the point! Here we have "kowtowing" of a different fashion. It is certainly the responsibility of Labor Action and the socialists to say something about this type of "kowtowing." The Editor of the New International at least recognized that there is a problem here. It is possible to ignore this problem for a time, but only for a time.

It is our opinion that insofar as there was an organized, independent move by the labor-liberal wing to actually fight the South, to oust it from the Democratic

Party, that it was a progressive move. We would certainly point out that what hampered this fight, what transformed it into a more or less useless gesture, was the political and organizational dependence of the bloc on the "center," --- the Stevenson-Truman forces. Insofar as the labor movement frees itself, even within the Democratic Party, of its loyalty to the premenent-war-dealers, insofar as it independently strikes out against its reactionary enemies, it is taking a progressive step. Any real independence on its part will sooner or later produce a split with its democratic-imperialist allies which is precisely what we want. In short, any really independent move within the Democratic Party leads out of the Democratic Party despite the intentions of the "labor statesmen." This is the point to keep in mind.

Of course, there are various other interpretations that could be given to this fight by the labor bureaucracy and its allies. Let us hope that no one in our movement will maintain that it was a "phoney" fight "staged" for the benefit of the television audience. Although many of the labor delegates were merely appointed by the Democratic big-wigs, some at least won their way into the Convention against the old-line Democrats through joining Kefauver "anti-corruption" delegate slates. This was especially clear in California. Besides, this interpretation does not really explain why the Democratic Party moguls felt such a great need to introduce these labor delegates in such quantities and from so many areas of the country. It was obvious that the Democratic bosses wanted to tie Labor once again to their Party but the price exacted by the labor leadership was at least some participation in making policy, some tiny say in what is going on. How actually miniscule this influence still is has become increasingly obvious as the campaign evolves.

Another interpretation would present the matter somewhat differently. It would maintain that it is ridiculous to speak of any progressive moves being made within the Democratic Party except the act of leaving that Party and setting up an independent labor party. Any attempt to capture the Party is utopian and senseless. Any move of semi-independence on the part of Labor within the Party is completely insignificant and cannot gain anything for Labor. Every such act must be utilized by socialists to show the futility of remaining within the Party and the necessity of immediately breaking organizationally and forming a labor party. The idea here is: withdraw completely from the Democratic Party; anything else is reactionary. If this is the point of view of the ISL then Labor Action should have publically branded the fight to oust the South from the Party as illusory and reactionary. Why does it not do so?

Let us approach this idea from another angle. In our letter we very carefully phrased our question so as to ask about the "relevance" of the British experience of lib-labism for an understanding of the present operations of the American labor political machines. Draper answered this by saying: "It is also, perhaps (?), a very mechanical conception that the American development 'must' duplicate the British in every detail." Berg, rushing in where editors fear to tread, accuses us of trying to establish "a historical parallel between the British 'lib-lab' period and the present political policy of the American labor movement." In other words, Berg transforms Draper's tentative interpretation of our position into good coin and then excoriates him for letting us "off too easily." A continuation of this type of discussion is certainly not going to clarify this important problem.

Let us ask again: what is the RELEVANCE of the lib-lab period for an understanding of how socialists can push the labor movement toward asserting its class independence? Draper sums up this important question by speaking of "the specific SOCIALIST role in warning the labor movement in advance and of drawing the lessons of independence at every stage..." We object to the purely propagandist emphasis throughout his discussion. We are, to be sure, a propaganda league, as were the Fabians, Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation and the Independent Labor Party. One thing we have learned, however, since those days, is the importance of the

whole conception of transitional demands and the role of such concrete demands at all stages of the growth of class consciousness. Let us take up this question in more detail.

One of the great errors of Eugene V. Debs (and the left-wing of the Socialist Party in general) was the sectarian character of its struggle against reformism. Debs, for example, in his great battle for industrial unionism and the organization of the unorganized, made the serious error of leaving the work of "boring from within" the AFL to the right-wingers and set up the "pure" IWW outside of the actual development of the class forces. This sectarian approach was a blow to his entire struggle for it separated the revolutionary forces from the main stream and allowed the Right socialists to subordinate the Party to Gompersism. The ILP made the same type of error in the 1930's when it abandoned the Labor Party (that is the class conscious workers) to the Right wing. This type of sectarian error is common enough and harmful enough, especially when the Marxists are a tiny minority, to merit a great deal more attention than we can give it here. We believe that it can only be successfully combatted by the whole, rich notion of transitional steps and its practical application through transitional demands.

The ISL has a series of transitional demands designed to implement socialist strategy at the present stage of the American labor movement. They revolve around the conceptions: (1) democratize labor's political machines and involve the ranks in the political struggle; (2) unify the labor movement organizationally and politically; (3) support all moves towards leaving the Democratic Party. Around these conceptions, reduced to specific demands in specific situations, it is possible to organize workers in a practical way. These specific demands do not contain an ultimatic proviso that those who fight for them must accept the idea of an independent labor party, much less our program for that Party. They are, on the contrary, a means to move workers towards the acceptance of this idea. They all assume that the socialists are operating within the labor movement in its present backward, miserable condition.

We have no objections to these excellent demands, all of which point toward the increase of the class consciousness, the independence, the organizational and democratic strength of the political expression of labor's power. But what about the real attempt to oust the South from the Democratic Party? What about the Willoughby Abner case? What about all those transitional cases, all those "disillusioning experiences" (Draper), all those cases where the present labor movement does come into conflict with its allies, "friends," and partners-in-crime (the South), within the framework of Democratic Party politics? How can we intervene into these actual political processes in order to help move labor toward independent labor political action?

Before we go on, let us attempt to scotch one common vulgarization of Marxism which is still rampant in the movement. This is the idea (really dogma) that the labor bureaucracy is always necessarily behind the ranks in terms of political struggles, class consciousness and independent action. In America today this is just not true. Our miserable, backward, bourgeois-minded labor leadership is far ahead of the average worker in all these respects and not very far behind the most conscious militants in many of them. This is unfortunate but true. The labor leadership is not moving into conflict with sections of the Democratic Party in order to "head off" any really strong development for a labor party. In order for a sentiment to become really effective it must have some organizational expression. Who in the ranks of labor (besides the handful of socialists) are fighting for a labor party? No one. That is the fact.

Marxists base themselves not only on their general theoretical understanding of the nature of the class struggle, but also on its concrete stages at every step. A labor party must develop. That we know from an overwhelming mass of evidence

which can leave no doubt in the mind of anyone who analyzes the situation honestly and thoroughly. How socialists can help this development is a practical-scientific problem which must be examined and re-examined at every stage of the complex, actual process. Our tentative ideas in this direction must be tested through the political struggle. In terms of the development toward a labor party, this means that we socialists cannot counterpose our ideas as to how to initiate and organize a "pure" labor party against the forward moves of the labor-liberal bloc. On the contrary, taking those forward moves as our point of departure we must put forward a series of demands the logic of which is to lead towards a labor party. This is the problem and in this respect the League, instead of representing "the future of the working class in the present," is beginning to lag behind the actual course of events, to refuse to come to grips with present developments.

Draper asks if we are "suggesting something really new." This depends upon what he means by "really new." We are suggesting several things. First, that Labor Action take a sympathetic (not necessarily a favorable) interest in the political struggle within the Democratic Party. Secondly, that no one should shut the door in advance upon the possibility of a labor party developing through a struggle within the Democratic Party. Thirdly, that socialists should actively participate in such a struggle. And finally, that Labor Action take a forthright position on what is new---namely the Convention struggle to oust the South.

We are not proposing, by the way, to shift our base from the militants in the unions to the leadership, from the advanced politically-conscious elements in the UAW, for example, to the Murrays and Greens. That would be a criminally short-sighted and narrow approach which would transform the present relationship into an eternal verity and would really mean becoming "socialist" advisors to the labor leadership. If there is no organized rank-and-file discontent against the present CIO course, there is, at least, a discontent which can be organized. That is still our job. We are trying to come to grips with the problem of how to carry on this job in the present situation.

In the final analysis the present approach of the ISL seems to come down to this: in each and every case of a new political move by labor (participation in convention, AFL endorsement of Stevenson, resigning from the government boards, etc., etc.) we have one, fixed and unalterable criterion -- is this, or is this not, an organizational move out of the Democratic Party, toward the setting up of a labor party? If it is we applaud; if it is not, we condemn it or ignore it. The best recent example of this rigid criterion carried to its logical extreme is contained in Jason's articles on the UAW in Michigan. Another is the silence of Labor Action on the conflict at the Chicago convention -- a conflict, by the way, viewed by veritably millions of American workers through their famous television sets. What is the meaning of this conflict? Is there a trend, a real possibility, to "take over" the Democratic Party, expel the South and later the center? Even if it is a utopian idea, as the Editor of the New International so cogently argues, what will be the effects of an attempt in this direction? Etc., etc. Not a real, thoughtful word on this in Labor Action.

The fact is, of course, that the UAW has taken over the Democratic Party machinery in Michigan. This is attested to by Jason who can only fulminate against this fact, propping up his lack of any positive orientation toward this situation with a metaphysical theory of how the UAW must become tools of the bourgeoisie in the process. The Editor of the New International argues that if the labor movement actually used this machinery in its own interests it would end up by capturing itself. Precisely! But assume that the labor movement refuses to take our excellent advice about how to form a labor party and goes about foolishly capturing the machinery in this or that State. What shall the socialists do then? Our present policy forbids us to demand that the UAW in Michigan actually use this machinery in labor's interests. All we can demand is that the UAW, now that it has succeeded in capturing the machinery, must get out and form its own Party. Jason must limit

himself to proving the corrupting influence of capitalist politics, to carping at the UAW leadership. While a militant might say: "Well, now we have captured the Party; let's start electing our own people," Jason says: "You see, we warned you about the evil effects of capturing the Party; get out and form a labor party." This, it seems to us, is not Marxism.

This entire line of a priori argumentation is simply incorrect. Where is it written that the labor movement cannot foolishly go about taking over the functions of the machines in electing the "liberal" capitalist politicians? Where is it written that once having captured this function the labor movement cannot utilize this position to elect its own people to high office, that is, provoke a split in the Democratic Party? Let us ask this question: in what real way does the present UAW operation of the vote-getting function differ from the early days of the New York Liberal Party when it looked upon itself as an auxiliary crutch to the Democratic Party and the Roosevelt administration? Until Jason really thinks through the difference, and comes forward with a series of practical proposals for operating in that situation, he should stop reading lessons to all and sundry on the matter.

There is a distinction, of course. We socialists can support Counts of the Liberal Party in New York, despite the fact that he is not a real labor candidate, because, as Labor Action points out, a resounding victory for him is a step in the direction of independence for the Liberal Party and therefore for the labor movement. This is so because of the logic of development of a union-based Party organizationally independent of the Democratic Party as a national organism. What about the case of the UAW in the State of Michigan? It seems to us that an equally resounding victory for a similar type of politician would have just the opposite effect. It would prove that labor can elect its "friends" by hiding behind the liberal politicians, by "kowtowing" to Moody and Williams. This would not advance independent labor political action.

What prevents the UAW from putting up Walter Reuther as the Democratic Party candidate for Governor in the next elections? Jason would truly argue that it is the UAW's political subordination to the "liberal" Democrats. What is the fundamental reason for this subordination? Jason would probably falsely argue that it results from its success in taking over the machinery, in getting out the vote. As a matter of fact, the UAW has the power to run its own candidates against the right wing Democrats and it does not do so because of its continued operation as a "pressure group." It is afraid to lose the elections by openly putting forward labor as the representative of the community. It hides behind the liberal facade of the Democrats, elects them to office and then tries to squeeze something out of them through corridor pressure and lickspittle maneuvers. It prefers to make deals with the Democrats (as does the Liberal Party) and does not think that it is capable of operating on its own. That this eminently "practical" (that is, stupidly self-defeating) policy is the proudest boast of the American labor leadership is no secret to socialists. It is nothing but the generalized expression of the backwardness of our labor movement, of its political subordination to capitalism in all spheres. It is the basic reason for the growth of reaction in this country and of the constant capitulation of the Democrats to that reaction.

But Marxists cannot remain content with merely pillorying the "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class" for this "crime against the working class" while offering the ONLY SOLUTION of ONE BIG INDEPENDENT LABOR PARTY. They must seize hold of the handle offered to them by the capture of the machinery to propose, for example, Walter Reuther for Governor. This type of demand should help to exacerbate the latent conflict in the Democratic Party and help to move the UAW onto the road of independent labor political action. But won't Reuther become a Democrat, a social-imperialist? Of course he will, but this time he will not have the shop-worn excuses of lesser-evilism to prop himself on. The socialists can then fight for a real labor candidate, etc.



Does this mean that we advocate entering the Democratic Party or even staying in the Democratic Party? Absolutely not! The labor movement is already in the Democratic Party despite our persistent advice to the contrary; the UAW has already captured the machinery despite our mistaken belief that this was utopian; the labor-liberal bloc tried to oust the South without our help, encouragement or even interest.

Does this mean that we advocate the truly utopian idea that the labor movement can capture the Democratic Party, that is, its class enemy? It is certainly not necessary to do this. We should point out, on the contrary, that any success in this direction which does not actually result in a fierce struggle within the Party can only be gained at the price of political subordination to the Democratic politicians and a continual downsliding toward reaction in the country.

Does this mean that we tone down our work for a labor party? No! "The advocacy of an Independent Labor Party remains unequivocally the principal political slogan, the axis of all the political work of the ISL..." (Quoted from ISL resolution, Social Forces and Politics in the U.S.) Our problem (it is a problem not an answer), is to be with labor in its present struggles and to point up the blatant contradiction between actually controlling and running the machinery and letting the machinery be used for anti-labor ends. This cannot be effectively done merely through advocating a labor party, however; or of supporting only those moves which directly lead out of the Party. We should also support those kinds of moves which tend to split the Party, to produce a struggle within the Party. The putting forward of labor candidates in Democratic primaries is certainly one means of doing this. Support to an independent fight to oust the South would be another.

In the last ISL resolution mentioned above, there is a parallel drawn between Labor's participation in the War Boards and Labor's participation in the bourgeois political machines. We think that the parallel is specious. This is proved, for example, by the fact that the British Labor Party was able to try out its wings in the Liberal Party and that a demand for more "participation," that is, more labor candidates could continue for a certain length of time before it finally split the lib-lab coalition. To put the matter differently: British labor could have gained much more in a shorter time if it had broken earlier and not subordinated itself to the Liberal Party. But it is impossible to deny that it gained a great deal from this participation. The same dynamism does not exist in the bourgeois State which cannot be "split," which cannot be squeezed of the same type of advantages.

In any case, our refusal to participate in (to help split) the Democratic Party should not be based on an analogy with the struggle against the bourgeois State and the Truman administration. A political party is an animal of a different order and should be treated that way. The UAW has had little difficulty in capturing the machinery of the Democratic Party; let it attempt to capture the bourgeois State and it will find a problem of a different order.

The UAW operates as a slavish vote-getter for the Democratic hacks. The leadership attempts to involve the ranks in electing its "friends." In this process it manages to accumulate many positions, set up all types of machinery, etc. We warn in advance: "the friends you ask us to vote for are the enemies of labor and will betray us to the reactionaries; labor must have its own Party." The UAW says: "No, we will control the candidates by 'capturing' the Party." We answer: "Your ability to capture the Party without difficulty is the result of your actual political subordination to the betrayers; they are willing to accept you only as voting cattle." The UAW answers: "Then we will elect the right people who really will carry out our program." What is our answer? It seems to us that our answer must be: "All right, put up real labor candidates. We deny that your so-called friends will continue to cooperate with you, if you do so. Since we believe labor must have its own independent party, we will support real labor candidates in order

to split the Party and show where the 'friends' really stand." What is wrong with this line?

We are aware only too clearly that this type of politics includes within it all of the dangers of reformist degeneration for socialists. We understand that it means getting tarred with the brush of the rotten and disgraceful politics of the corrupting capitalist system and its unprincipled parties. This has never deterred Marxists from getting up to their elbows in all the muck in which their movement, the labor movement, is involved. The danger of isolation is greater than the danger of participation, especially for our tiny movement. We should operate inside the Democratic Party just as we should operate inside of a Fascist "trade union," the British Liberal Party during the late nineteenth century, the French UGT (ugh!) or any place else where the active labor movement finds itself, in order to seize hold of the actual forward moves to turn the working class in the direction of socialism. No amount of "moral scruples" should prevent us from trying to move our class out from under the influence of capitalism.

If we are to maintain "a positive orientation toward a living labor party" we must keep up with every new development, seize upon every new event and utilize it for socialist purposes. The presence of the labor-liberal bloc at the Democratic Party convention was just such an event. We cannot continue to refuse to acknowledge its existence, or to play down its significance, or to scornfully reject its timid and faltering steps. We must support labor's forward steps in a socialist manner and move it onto the road of separation from capitalist politics, even though this road moves for a time within the framework of the Democratic Party.

We introduced some of these ideas through the form of questions to be discussed by the League. We did not, and do not, intend to push these ideas as courses of action until after the coming elections and that for several good reasons. In the first place, as Comrade Berg pointed out, the great objective contradiction between the huge potential strength of our labor movement and its actual political role invests labor politics with an explosive character. Sudden changes are possible, even probable. We certainly cannot look forward to a half-century of lib-labism in America or to anything approaching the tempo at which events occurred in England. It would be ridiculous for socialists to argue about a strategy if the next turn of events would suddenly explode the entire question into thin air. Deliberation and scientific judgment are therefore called for. For these reasons, we will await the verdict of the elections and the possible post-election realignments before we propose any serious change in our present strategy.

If there is a real trend to capture the Democratic Party, to oust the South, to fight for control in state conventions, to take over the machinery in certain states, to run labor candidates in Democratic primaries, to involve the ranks in a struggle within the Democratic Party, or anything of this fundamental import, then we must be there! For the Marxists to isolate themselves from such a development would be the height of political stupidity and almost as great an error as refusing to really move on the question of the formation of the CIO.

We never want it to be said that our tiny group (which has learned a great deal during the last ten years), consciously and stubbornly refused to recognize, aid and lead a tendency which it has been predicting and fighting for during many years. The line where flexibility and opportunism meet is sometimes a narrow one, but we are convinced that our organization, at least, can find the way. The recent crop of weak-sisters, liquidators and rationalizers, sobbing over the facts of existence, feeds on the inability of the socialist movement to root itself in the working class. Giving up the scientific criteria of Marxism, they measure the great events of history by the beating of their own feeble hearts. The Marxists, however, if they want to be strong, begin with the facts and move forward. There is no other way; there is no short cut.

We therefore wish to continue this discussion of how to relate ourselves, in a significant and correct manner, to the new trends as they are developing. A thorough discussion of this matter will help rearm the League for its future, great tasks. That is the only reason for introducing it.

R. Magnus  
S. Beilas

October 23, 1952