

Democratic Party are simply dupes waiting for some theoretician to enlighten them, with a "correct" program. That is a contemptuous, utterly un-Marxist response to a complex social reality (that it is held by good and decent people—that I once held it—does not change the fact). I have some hopes for learning from the experience of a socialist immersion in the actual mass movements of our times—and for a socialist programmatic undertaking which will relate visions of the far future with the problems of today. I am chastened, tentative, conscious of the problems that could subvert my own perspective.

And I believe that those who see this possibility should commit themselves to it, heart and soul. It is only a possibility—but it is also the only possibility for the next step on the socialist journey of ten thousand miles. That is what we have begun to do, modestly but quite effectively. In the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.

MICHAEL HARRINGTON, noted author and lecturer, heads the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.

2. George Novack and Stephanie Coontz

THE EVENTS OF THE 1960s PROFOUNDLY CHANGED the American political scene. Radicalism extended into layers of the population that had hardly been tapped before—women, GIs, prisoners, Native Americans, Chicanos, gays. It also penetrated new geographic areas like the deep South.

The radicalization challenged the anti-communist ideology of the Cold War and created a mass sentiment of solidarity with the colonial struggles for self-determination and social liberation. It created an alignment of forces that cannot be turned back without a fierce offensive by the ruling class. And after Watergate, such a move could easily backfire on its instigators.

For all its advances, the turbulent movement of the '60s had manifest shortcomings. The upsurge was objectively limited by the absence of organized labor from the arena of opposition. And it exhibited serious internal weaknesses.

The television generation brought up on miracle ingredients looked for shortcuts to its goals. For instant relief and revolution, just add rhetoric and stir with confrontation. Some believed that courageous examples of individual moral witness could shame the American people into acting. Others raised the ante and tried to scare the masters of capital into reforming their system. Still others scurried from one issue to the next, seeking a magic formula that could bypass the prolonged preparatory work of party organization and mass education.

Meanwhile the Social Democrats and the Communist Party reinforced the liberal illusion that the Democratic party could be converted into an agency of peace and progress, while many New Left neophytes scorned the methods and conclusions of Marxist theory as a useless possession of the Old Left.

No wonder that many activists experienced self-doubt and bewilderment by the early 1970s. They were frustrated by Washington's seeming inattention to repeated demonstrations and the fluctuations in the turnout of antiwar forces. Some people who had earlier thought they could brush off the role of the working class now chafed at the disinclination of the workers to respond at once to their sudden overtures.

A further source of disheartenment was the cynical acquiescence of the major powers in the destruction of Vietnam, capped by the total inaction of the Soviet and Chinese leaderships in face of the mining of Haiphong harbor. The futility of individual acts, either of moral witness or of violence, became increasingly obvious.

The McGovern campaign had a tremendously disorienting influence, pulling his supporters out of the antiwar mobilizations and involving them in one compromise after another. Since then the liberals, instead of acknowledging the bankruptcy of their "New Politics," have heaped self-righteous invective upon the American voters for failing to share their infatuation with McGovern.

Despite the current temporary downturn in activity, however, the mood of radicalism has not diminished in strength. People are beginning to vent their anger about high prices against big business and its government. Watergate has revealed how much the White House feared the effect of mass demonstrations—and how it used provocateurs to blunt their impact. While the scandal provides no immediate focus for mass action, it is undermining faith in the two-party system and making millions more receptive to an alternative political course. The spontaneous meat boycott indicates that many Americans who wouldn't dare sign a petition in favor of the Bill of Rights during the 1950s now readily resort to street demonstrations and picket lines. The '60s taught them how to organize and fight.

HOW IS THIS RESERVOIR OF RADICALISM to be given organizational expression along socialist lines? The negative experiences and disastrous experiments of the past decade, not to mention earlier history, warn that attempts to channel it into an amorphous conglomerate with "some kind of socialist framework" would be a step backward.

At the first march on Washington in 1965, SDS leader Carl Oglesby defined the problem as one of identifying the enemy. "We have to name this system," he said. SDS then correctly characterized the enemy as imperialism, or capitalism in its imperialist stage. But its leaders failed to progress beyond the elementary point of name-calling. SDS never developed a program and strategy to assemble and train the cadres of a revolutionary party. This default led to its self-destruction.

The various groups and tendencies on the left cannot be fused by waving the wand of an abstract unity. The specific differences among them are too deep-going. How can those like Michael Harrington's new "socialist caucus," who consider it permissible to work in the Democratic party and back capitalist candidates, be in the same organization with Marxists who regard that as treacherous and self-defeating? A genuine socialist movement also has to have clear and consistent positions on such issues as Black and Chicano nationalism, feminism, Zionism, and what methods and slogans to propose and implement in united-front actions.

Insistence on sticking to tested socialist and working-class principles in such matters cannot be written off as the self-indulgent fetishism of purist sects. The elaboration and application of correct positions on such crucial questions can spell the difference between success or failure, victory or defeat, for the revolutionary cause. The twentieth century abounds in instances of the catastrophic consequences of incorrect policies, including the capitulation of the Social Democrats to their respective imperialist governments in two world wars, the failure of the German CP to press for united action against Hitlerism, and the suicidal support accorded to Sukharno by the Indonesian CP with Mao's blessing.

The United States of the '60s has contributed its quota of bad examples: The horrendous price paid by the Panthers for their ultraleft errors, the disorientation of the antiwar forces caused by the McCarthy and McGovern campaigns, the Social Democrats' endorsement of the Israeli oppression of the Palestinians.

Fundamental questions of socialist strategy will not have lesser importance or urgency in the coming period of sharpening economic tensions and complicated maneuvers among the big powers. Any socialist grouping, large or small, that gives evasive, ambiguous, or incorrect

answers to these questions will be built on fragile foundations that are bound to crumble under stress. One part of a movement can't organize for the Democrats while another part hunts for a coalition with some progressive antimonopolist businessman, and a third privately assures prospective recruits that all these maneuvers really pave the way for a break with the bourgeois parties sometime in the future. Socialists cannot pursue a consistent course or formulate an effective strategy by trying to reconcile diametrically opposed views on coalitions with bourgeois politicians, nationalism, Zionism, etc. A movement brought together on such a basis may come up with an eloquent condemnation of the evils of capitalism but nothing more.

DOES THIS MEAN THAT SPECIALISTS of different persuasions with fundamental disagreements on program and orientation cannot act together under any circumstances or for any purposes? Not at all. The tactic of the united front was intended to cope with this problem. It allows each organization to maintain its own views and organizational independence while agreeing to cooperate in action around specific issues in which they have a mutual interest.

The antiwar coalitions constituted a united front of this type. Despite unavoidable frictions, they did succeed in bringing millions of Americans into the streets to protest imperialist intervention. The Pentagon papers and Watergate revelations should lay to rest any doubts about their efficacy in hampering the capacity of the warmakers to carry on their operations.

The Socialist Workers Party takes initiatives on its own account in many fields, from election campaigns to literature sales. But it always stands ready to participate in and support united front actions in a battle to win demands directed against agencies of oppression and exploitation. This is indispensable for educating people about the nature of capitalism and the need to replace it with socialism.

Such occasions and opportunities exist today. The struggle of the United Farm Workers Union requires full support. So does the fight to ensure passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Every encroachment upon civil liberties has to be combatted in accord with the injunction: "An injury to one is an injury to all." This embraces joint participation in defense of Latin American political prisoners, support to the suit against government repression filed by the Political Rights Defense Fund, and the activities to extend the rights of minority parties sponsored by the Committee on Democratic Election Laws.

These and other areas of cooperation among differing radical organizations and individuals, however, do not justify the attempt to

form a jerry-built combination of heterogeneous tendencies with a "do your own thing" tolerance for activities that miseducate and mislead the working class. A "pro-socialist current" with an eclectic set of positions that hedge on decisive questions cannot promote clarity; it can only compound confusion.

We do not offer any new recipe for the creation of a socialist movement. We believe it is essential to build—year in, year out—a democratically disciplined party on a principled program that, through continuous involvement in struggle, can transform itself from a group of propagandists for socialist ideas and goals into a mass factor.

THOSE WHO RECOGNIZE THE NECESSITY for such a revolutionary organization do not have to start from scratch, as though the field were vacant and no definite conclusions could be drawn from past experience. Throughout the world over the past half century, three main ideological tendencies have been contending for the allegiance of socialists. These are the Social Democrats, the variants of Stalinism from Moscow to Peking, and the Trotskyists.

This contest has been proceeding in America as well. The Socialist Workers Party does not have the political backing of any state power; it has only the power of its ideas. With their aid the relationship of forces among the groupings on the left has shifted in our favor between the 1930s and the 1970s.

The endurance and growth of our movement can be attributed to steadfast adherence to the program and perspective of the Fourth International. The method of the Transitional Program that guides our work is designed to mobilize all sectors of the oppressed for action in defense of their interests and point the way to replace capitalism with the institutions of workers' power, avoiding both entrapment in the net of capitalist politics and ultraleft adventures.

Such an orientation enabled us to play a leadership role in the anti-war movement, where more than once we were the sole organized force that resisted efforts by the Communist Party and the liberals to hitch the movement to the Democrats or water down its demands, as in the debate over "immediate withdrawal" versus "negotiate now."

Until the organized workers start moving again in sizable numbers against the bosses, one of the best criteria of the viability of a socialist formation is its capacity to attract, educate and integrate young militants. American Trotskyism has taken advantage of the radicalization to do this. Since the demise of SDS, the Young Socialist Alliance has become the largest, most cohesive and energetic national youth organization of a socialist character. Its members are not in the least confused. They

have confidence in their convictions and in the prospects of the Trotskyist movement. It is worth investigating why.

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3. David McReynolds

WITHIN THE PAST TEN YEARS three major developments have occurred which suggest to me there is now a real possibility of an American Left. Not a "New" Left, or a "pro-Soviet" Left, or a "British Labor Party" Left, but an *American* Left, built on the realities of *this* country, and standing quite clearly for the actual seizure of power from the corporate/military state and the redistribution of that power to the American people.

One development is what I would call the end of the "Russian Question." From 1917 on the question of the Soviet Union divided the Left in America. Where in 1917, despite harsh government repression, we had a mass socialist movement, after 1917 we did not. Debs' historic vote in 1920 while he was in Atlanta penitentiary was a tribute to a unity which had already passed. To one group of American radicals—those in and around the Communist Party—the Soviet Revolution became the pattern. Lenin was the master of revolutionary theory and the concept of a vanguard party was substituted for the mass movement of Debs. Even when the American CP split over the question of Trotsky, it did not split on the question of the Soviet Revolution. The basic theory remained intact—the question was over which year things went wrong and who exactly should be blamed for the foul up. As late as the Soviet invasion of Finland the official Trotskyist position was still that of unconditional defense of the Soviet Union if it was attacked or, in the Finnish case, even if it did the attacking.

At the same time that one wing of American radicalism accepted the Comintern's leadership, another large body of American radicals