

**INTERNATIONAL  
SOCIALISTS**

# Newsletter

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## Women's Retreat Report -- Elissa

Sue began the Women's Retreat by asking each participant to say what she hoped to get out of the weekend. Among the things listed were: developing the group's understanding of women's issues, deepening the commitment of the I.S. to women's liberation, sparking interest in writing, getting to know other members, and passing along to newer members a sense of the group's accomplishments in women's politics.

Several people spoke about their concern at the convention that the I.S. had put women's issues on the back burner, and wanted to turn that around.

At the conclusion of the Retreat, everyone spoke again about whether the weekend had accomplished these tasks. To the person, everyone agreed that their expectations had been exceeded.

Hosted by the Cleveland branch at a camp in southern Ohio, the Retreat was aimed both at explaining our past work and politics, and moving forward in developing our understanding of the women's movement today.

Twenty-one women attended from New York, Massachusetts, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago. Pam, from Mass., joined the I.S. at the conclusion of the weekend. Concrete plans were developed for writing projects, and a convention discussion on the working women's movement.

There were five main discussions during the weekend. The first was a "panel discussion" where Carol represented the radical feminist movement, Adela the middle class movement, and Margaret (playing herself) the I.S. Gay moderated the panel, asking questions that drew out the different political approaches of the forces in the women's movement, and how that compared to the work that the I.S. focussed on.

The second discussion was on the working women's movement. Unfortunately, this discussion was weakened by the lack of participation of women who had been central to it, due, in part, to the fact that the Retreat conflicted with the USW Convention. There was discussion about what is happening in different industries, and the role that issues such as comparable worth and organizing the unorganized may play in the '80s. The role of Black women in this part of the movement was discussed, as well as the relationship of issues such as health and safety, and unionization, and whether I.S. members ought to be more active around these issues. It was clear that a more thorough discussion was needed, and a motion was passed to that effect at the end of the Retreat.

The third discussion was on the family and was the most theoretical and satisfying of the sessions. Ilene's presentation discussed the role of the family in raising the issue of the family, and what the left ought to be saying about the family. The discussion talked about the function of the family in advanced capitalism, the ascendancy (once again) of the extended family, as opposed to the nuclear family, how the left can shift the ideology that surrounds the issue of the family and survival from individuals to the state.

The final theoretical discussion was about the women's movement today. Enid began by leading a discussion about what the women's movement looks like. To demonstrate the diversity of the movement, everyone listed different activity that they were aware of around women's issues. Elissa's presentation outlined possible foci of the women's movement in the '80s, and what role

employment issues may play, and how socialists can use those issues to advance the participation of working class women in the movement.

The last session was a discussion of the I.S. and our work around women's issues. Carole began with a presentation on regroupment. Some initial research had been done about the attitude of specific groups towards women's oppression, and gay and lesbian oppression. There was discussion of the pros and cons of the regroupment project sponsoring a national conference of socialism and feminism. Concern was expressed that such a conference not be a conference of groups, but be broad enough in conception that women not in groups feel welcome and interested. A motion was passed that the discussion on the family be worked up for an article in Changes. Ilene, Margaret, Gay, Pam, Mary, Sue and Carol volunteered to work on it. Another motion was passed that the PC prepare a convention discussion on the working women's movement, as it was clear that people wanted direction in choosing arenas of activity. There was discussion of the joint issue of Changes on feminism with Solidarity, and writing on international women's movement for Changes. Women working in the health care industry met together for lunch, and decided on several writing projects as well.

#### In This Mailing...

Along with this issue of the I.S. Newsletter, you will find 1) a letter from the organizer of the upcoming conference telling you what we hope to get out of the conference. All members are encouraged to attend what we predict will be a very exciting and useful event. 2) A letter (on Changes stationery) for a meeting on regroupment to be held in Detroit November 15. A few members from other cities were invited to this; if you know of individuals who should be invited, please let us know. 3) A copy of a letter sent to Solidarity: Socialist Feminist Network on the Socialist Party. Feedback so far is that the letter was very much appreciated by those who share the sentiments expressed in it... SSFN is considering merger with the SP. The letter outlines why, in our minds, the SP is not a good regroupment candidate.

#### Coming in Changes -- David

1. Regroupment. The Dec-Jan double issue will be devoted to revolutionary socialist unity, including a major statement by the I.S. We hope to have several short responses and comments.

2. Women in the '80s. A special joint issue published with SSFN. Will include a major theoretical article on the Family by IS, an exchange on perspectives and theory, and (we hope) an article on gay and lesbian liberation by SSFN.

3. The American Working Class. We will be working toward a series of articles discussing theories of the American working class, and why building a socialist current within it poses certain unique difficulties.

And don't forget to buy those gift subs now at \$7.50 each for fellow (and sister) activists, friends, and family members.

#### Welcome New Members

Since the last newsletter we have two new members to announce. Rick, a laid-off auto worker, now working in the rank and file movement, joined last month. And Pam, who joined at the Women's Retreat. Pam is going to be working on the project started at the Retreat to write on the family. She is interested in women's issues and has done community organizing. Rick is a member of the Detroit branch, and Pam is a member at large from Massachusetts.

Welcome Rick and Pam!

PC Meeting 9/9/82

1. Report on URPE Conf--Frank. Frank gave a workshop on socialists in the trade union movement. Presence of the left minimal, despite the fact that the left was the theme of the conference.
2. Changes (Ed Bd invited to this discussion). Dave: Changes thin on questions of American politics. Article assessing first two years of Reaganism needs to be written, looking for author. Most of the discussion about the importance of bringing the regroupment perspective into Changes, Dec-Jan issue targeted. Also discussion about implementing year-long project on the nature of the American Working Class. Dave M. suggests introductory article should be a restatement of our theory of rank and file-ism. Kim and Dave to implement.

PC Meeting 9/20/82

1. Report from Baltimore--Kim. Kim spoke at a meeting jointly sponsored by RWH and DSA in Baltimore on labor movement. DSA chapter formerly NAM members who were against merger, but joined for lack of an alternative. Have 60-100 members, and dominate movement activities, but also have same method of functioning that DSA has--don't work together, etc. Four DSAers attended meeting, 20 in total. Trend and RWH made up rest of audience.

Also spoke at a Progressive Student Network meeting of 25. Small PSN chapter of 15-20, about 30% in RWH. A couple in ISO, who seemed very interested in split history, open and friendly.

2. Regroupment--Assessment and Next Steps--Dan. General feeling that regroupment is "on schedule." Groups are cautious but positive. On every level that we have made approaches, response has been good.

175 copies of "Why Socialists Need Organization" to be mailed to each member of CPML. 100 distributed to Solidarity. First run of 500 sold out.

Regroupment seen in stages. First stage included travelling by us, all at our initiative. More trips planned to Toledo, Bloomington, Madison, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Charlottestown, Indianapolis, Iowa, DC.

Second stage has to involve others. Plan to hold a national meeting on regroupment mid-November by invitation. Will launch "road show."

Proposed that I.S. hold National Meeting in January to assess progress on Regroupment, and make plans. Possibly in combination with one-day school.

Discussion on needed publications: Changes article reprints on economy, plus ask Mike (DC) to write on why it won't make any difference when liberals get back in power. Feminism--possibly reprint "Revolutionary Feminism" with update, or other articles. Tasks and Perspectives--Kim and Dan to implement. Revise and print in Changes Third Camp Statement.

3. Proposal from Solidarity for meeting in the fall. Motion: Send open letter about Socialist Party, discouraging merger. Positive attitude towards proposal for meeting.

PC Meeting 10/4/82

1. Assessment of Women's Retreat--Elissa. (See separate report.) Need to have some kind of women's caucus. Discussion of motion to have convention discussion on working women's movement--positive attitude towards this. Discussion of socialist-feminist conf.--importance of learning more about radical feminist groups, how to get this information.

2. Regroupment--report on trip to Indianapolis, Bloomington. (Separate.)

Next meeting: 10/18/82. Agenda: "Timetable" on Regroupment. National Regroupment Meeting plans.

September 25, 1982

We are aware from your recent national conference that some members of your organization now view regroupment and the future of Solidarity: A Socialist-Feminist Network (SFFN) in terms of merger with or entry into the Socialist Party U.S.A. (SP). We in the International Socialists (IS) understand the difficulties for socialist groups in these times: fragility, small size, lack of resources, lack of political perspective; we understand them well for we share them.

We also understand some of the attractive features of the Socialist Party: a well recognized name, an established organization, financial resources, publications, contacts, a larger membership than other left groups with a broad geographical and social spread. We know that many in the Socialist Party consider themselves revolutionaries, are involved in important political work (particularly in the anti-militarism movement), and that some are leaders of stature, like SP Chairman Dave McReynolds. So we can understand why the possibility of a merger of the SFFN with the SP may seem to some like a way forward. Nonetheless, we think it would be a mistake for you--and a loss to all of us on the revolutionary left--if you were to merge or enter the SP. We think this would harm the possibilities for a broad, non-sectarian revolutionary socialist regroupment.

Despite the attractions of the SP, in a very real sense the Socialist Party is a sect and is sectarian. Just as much as any of the revolutionary sects of the 70s, such as the Revolutionary Communist Party, or old left groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party conceives of it self as the party. Dave McReynolds has said that the Socialist Party would not be prepared to change its name in order to be part of a broader regroupment. The unwillingness to change the name is the symbol of a broader problem--that the Socialist Party would not be prepared to change its self-conception and definition in the process of a broader regroupment. We think it is to the credit of Solidarity that, unlike the SP, it would be willing to give up its name and some of its particular points of definition to become part of a broader group. That is the meaning of regroupment, precisely the willingness of an organization to put some things aside in the interest of building a bigger, more effective revolutionary socialist movement. McReynolds has made it quite explicit that the SP does not want and will not accept groups that it regards as "Leninist" or "Trotskyist." That would apply not only to the IT, but also to Workers Power and to groups out of the Maoist tradition. The SP takes this position despite the fact that many left groups are in the process of rethinking political and organizational questions and have already changed their organizational forms. By focusing your regroupment on the SP, you would in effect narrow the field to the SP and yourselves, and on the SP's sectarian terms. The unwillingness on the part of the SP to consider a broad regroupment that includes others out of various traditions in which all would be prepared to change their names and a good deal more for the sake of an effective revolutionary left springs from their sectarian self-conception.

The self-conception of the Socialist Party might be called "sentimental socialism." The Socialist Party calls itself the party of Debs and Thomas, and those names are yoked together for sentimental reasons rather than political reasons. The Socialist Party--which was originally formed, by the way, out of a process of broad regroupment of activists from the Socialist Labor Party, the Bellamy Nationalist Clubs, the American Railway Union, and the Populist Party--contained in the period from the turn of the century to the 1920s a revolutionary wing of which Eugene Debs was the renowned public

public spokesperson. The international split in the socialist movement in the 1920s saw the creation of the Communist Party USA, and the majority of the revolutionaries left the S.P. Norman Thomas became the leader of the S.P. in the 1930s when it was already a declining organization. Thomas dropped the party's revolutionary language (its revolutionaries by and large already having left), and turned the party toward middle class liberalism.\* During the 1930s and 40s the SP was a battle ground for other political groups--Trotskyists and Communists--who succeeded in winning away whatever revolutionary elements grew inside the SP. During the 1930s the old guard of the SP from the needle trades unions carried off the reformist socialists into the New Deal coalition of the Democratic Party. The party became a Stalinophobic sect. Thomas defended the role of the U.S. in World War II, the Korean War, NATO, spoke for Voice of America and became an unwitting dupe of the CIA.\*\* Michael Harrington later carried off a section of the SP in the 1960s which became the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. The names of Debs and Thomas are a political contradiction when put together as they are by the SP, since they embody two different politics: revolution and reform. They are put together to evoke the sentimental notion of the continuity of American socialism. Unfortunately revolutionary socialism in the U.S. has a discontinuous history, and the SP cannot in honesty claim to be the continuing vehicle of the revolutionary tradition.

If the SP's tradition is only "sentimental," then its perspective is understandably "nostalgic." The Socialist Party's one area of coordinated national work is the running of Socialist Party candidates. We in the IS are not syndicalists and believe that electoral campaigns can play an important role. We played a role in both the 1968 Peace and Freedom Party and the 1980 Citizens Party. However, the Socialist Party campaigns are not an expression of a social movement or the work of an organization expressing any real political forces. They have no relation to the realities of the political situation in the U.S. The Socialist Party ran political candidates yesterday, runs them today and will tomorrow, with no regard to the political realities. A sentimental party doesn't need an analysis of American society today or a perspective for American politics because it has its nostalgic campaigns. The nostalgic habit of running political candidates in fact substitutes for developing a perspective for labor work, for anti-militarism work, for work in the women's movement and so on.

The party is sentimental, its campaigns are nostalgic, and its members are to a great degree symbolic members. The 800 members of the Socialist Party include both dedicated revolutionary socialists and political activists. However, they also include hundreds and hundreds who are only symbolic members. Even a symbolic stand against capitalism is, of course, admirable. The question is, do the members of an activist organization like SSPN want to be part of an organization which includes many members who are only symbolically opposed to capitalism and are not working to build a social movement to oppose it and do not call for its revolutionary overthrow?

\*"Thomas was proceeding on an utterly new plan, seeking to broaden the base of the Socialist Party by moving away from the old insistence on immediate nationalization of basic resources and industries, hoping to tap a large constituency of middle-class liberals....Thomas campaigned not for Marxism but for progressivism; not for revolution but for reform." Swanberg, Norman Thomas, p. 111.

\*\*see Swanberg: 259, 303, 327, 339, 355, 451, 467.

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Some members of Solidarity apparently look forward to being the "left wing" of such a group. Well, you have already had that experience in the New American Movement, which had the advantage of wanting to be the party of Debs alone (i.e. no Thomas). NAM moved to the right in part because it was a living group seeking political relevance. We suspect the SP will not change much at all unfortunately even with you in it.

We think there is another possibility for political relevance. We think there is the possibility of a broad left regroupment that would include the IS, the SSF and several other groups coming out of a variety of political traditions. More important, a process including local collectives and some of the thousands of individuals who consider themselves socialist, are activists, but aren't affiliated with any organization. We believe that Solidarity can bring important political experience in the reproductive rights movement, in the anti-militarism movement, and in other areas to this process. As we in the IS engage in talks and common work with a growing variety of organizations and tendencies, we are discovering a wealth of political experience in areas, geographic or political, where we have been weak. We are learning as a result. Comparing experiences and joint work are the first steps in the regroupment process. There will be more collaboration and more formal discussions in the future. Solidarity has as much opportunity to influence such a process as any other organization. We think your ideas and contributions to the building of a perspective will be more important and influential in a broad process of regroupment than they would be in the SP. We think the SSF can be an important part of building a new socialist organization with revolutionary politics and that that is a far more attractive alternative than the Socialist Party.