

SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY

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Telephone (415) 494-1532

October 20, 1978

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Mr. Jack Barnes
National Secretary
Socialist Workers Party
14 Charles Lane
New York, NY 10014

Dear Comrade Barnes:

Our National Executive Committee has now thoroughly reviewed and carefully considered and discussed the contents of the several letters received from you and Syd Stapleton representing, we understand, the views of your Political Committee and presumably your National Committee as well.

Our NEC also has made an objective review of the additional documents that you and Comrade Stapleton made available to our national office, and again reviewed several basic SWP publications including Prospects For Socialism In America and The Transitional Program For Socialist Revolution.

Having done so, it is compelled to conclude that the "convergence" you see "in the views of our two organizations" is entirely superficial. Far from emphasizing any convergence on "important political questions," the letters, documents and literature reviewed serve to emphasize basic differences between our organizations both in-principle and program.

We realize that these letters represent no small effort on your part to open a dialogue between our two parties on the question of convergence. We find, however, no convincing reasons advanced in support of your effort. No attempt is made to show systematically that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the De Leonism of the SLP can be reconciled with the Trotskyism of the SWP. We do not find any reason to believe such reconciliation is possible. We do not find the few areas of struggle in which our two parties are employing similar tactics or in which our positions resemble one another as demonstrating any growing identity of basic interests and objectives, or as holding out any promise for arriving at "a common approach" and/or "a common strategy for the achievement of socialism" that would establish "the basis for a transformation of the SWP and the SLP into a common party."

In our view, the very minimum requirement for a discussion or an exchange of any kind between organizations is a positive

demonstration of a convergence of views or a growing identity of interests in areas of basic principles, primary tactics, fundamental theory and programmatic concepts. Admittedly, Syd Stapleton made some effort to do that in the letters of January 19 and April 8. The net effect of that effort, however, was to call attention to very fundamental differences--irreconcilable differences in our view.

For example, in his January 19 letter he wrote: "...We both stand for a party clearly based on a consistent revolutionary program.

"We have both avoided the sectarian error of ignoring the opportunities presented by the capitalist electoral arena for socialist education."

Surely these would be areas where similar views would be of great importance, if indeed there were such similarities.

We readily grant that the SWP is active in the capitalist electoral arena. But we cannot agree that its political campaign activity has anything in common with socialist education. In our view, socialist education on the political field must promote clear, sharp classconscious understanding of the nature of capitalist society. It must also tie all the immediate struggles and problems of the working class to the necessity of creating revolutionary organizations to abolish capitalism and establish socialism.

The SWP professes to do the same--to hold the same anti-capitalist views and to seek a socialist goal. Its actions, however, contradict its declared objectives. Its 1976 "Bill of Rights" for working people is a fair example of the kind of consciousness and organization it is promoting in the political arena.

Among other things, it proclaims the "right to a job," but offers not a word of explanation of the capitalist cause of unemployment. Nor does it proclaim the right of freedom from wage slavery. To further confound the confusion, in the same breath with which it demands "full employment," it also demands "unemployment compensation at full union wages."

Another right proclaimed is the "right to an adequate income protected against inflation," a demand that completely ignores Marx's analysis of the system of wage labor. Instead of proclaiming the need to abolish the wage system (it doesn't even mention the need), the SWP "Bill of Rights" proposes that the price of labor be regulated through cost of living adjustments.

There are eight such "rights" proclaimed in this campaign document widely distributed by the SWP and repeatedly advocated by its candidates at every level. Any liberal could have proclaimed them.

Another example of how the SWP uses the political field for "socialist education" is the tax program its candidates propose at

every opportunity. "No tax on incomes below \$30,000," "a graduated tax on incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000," "a 100% tax on all companies that pollute." That's the tax program Richard Ariza, the 1977 SWP candidate for Governor of New Jersey, advocated. Its implementation, he added, "would be the top priority."

Recently, Fred Halstead the present SWP candidate for Governor of California advocated the same tax program. "In a nutshell, our program is to tax the rich," he declared. (The Militant, June 23, 1978.)

One final example of the SWP's use of the political arena for "socialist education." The September 29 issue of The Militant carried the August 24 speech of the SWP's current candidate for Governor of Pennsylvania, which it described as a speech that "outlines the Socialist Platform." That "outline" of the SWP's "Socialist Platform" included--

A call for a shorter workweek with no loss of pay as a cure for unemployment;

A demand for guaranteed cost-of-living adjustments for wages, social security, welfare, unemployment compensation, pensions, etc.;

Nationalization of the utilities "under the democratic control of the workers in that industry";

A free national health-care program;

A genuine tax relief program;

A demand for corporations to open their books;

A call "for the union movement to launch a mass party of labor."

But there was nothing of socialism in that "Socialist Platform."

The SWP's "main political resolution," adopted at its 1975 National Convention and published under the heading, Prospects For Socialism In America has a passage that states: "We do not begin by demanding that the masses understand what 'the system' is or that they reject any particular aspects of it..." And the SWP campaign strategy practically assures that the workers they reach through the political arena never will understand "what 'the system' is" and reject it. What socialism is, why it is necessary and how to get it remain well-kept secrets buried under the reformism that the SWP candidates push and that The Militant and SWP campaign literature nurture.

And therein lies a very important, a fundamental difference between our organizations. For the SLP does demand that the working class understand what the system is. In fact, promoting an understanding of the system and a conscious, explicit rejection of it in favor of a socialist society is the main content of our political activity.

In several instances, Comrade Stapleton also attempts to show basic similarities in the attitude of our two parties toward the union and the part that the industrial organization will play before, during and after the revolution.

In the Socialist Labor Party's perspective, the union plays the dominant role. It is in the SIU that we see the instrument of real and decisive proletarian power. Without minimizing the importance of the educational, agitational and recruiting role of the revolutionary political party, it is the industrial organization that not only constitutes the decisive revolutionary weapon of our class but that also provides the form for the mass democratic councils of workers which we consider the basis for the future socialist government. As briefly summarized in our recent pamphlet, After the Revolution: Who Rules?:

"This socialist industrial union movement would be rooted at the point of production, where the working class gains its strength from its strategic location in capitalist society. As the only indispensable and productive class, the proletariat, once it is organized, is capable of seizing control of the entire productive process and cutting off the fundamental source of ruling class power...

"...the SIUs would begin by mobilizing workers to fight the class struggle on a day-to-day basis, organizing the employed and the jobless, and fighting all the manifestations of exploitation. Their classwide solidarity, their opposition to racist and sexist practices of all kinds, and their general revolutionary outlook would make them infinitely more effective and more responsive to the workers' needs than the craft-type unions dominated by the labor fakers and capitalist ideology.

"At the same time, the SIU movement would be building toward a revolutionary goal, disciplining and educating its members to that end. Once it had amassed sufficient strength, it would challenge the very existence of capitalist rule, and move to take, hold and operate the entire economy.

"This revolutionary majority organized into SIUs would be the driving force behind the revolutionary socialist party which would mount the assault on the existing state power. Once that power had been captured, all its arms would be dismantled. In its place, the SIU organizations would become the government power and the source of all authority."

That is why Daniel De Leon described industrial unionism as "the battering ram with which to pound down the fortress of capitalism and the successor of the capitalist social structure itself."

The record demonstrates that the SWP's concept of the union's role in the revolutionary scheme of things is different, despite Comrade Stapleton's statement that by the term "workers state" the SWP means "'an industrial government composed of councils of workers democratically elected from the industries and social services.'" That generalization cannot negate the differences that the record shows between our two organizations on the role of the industrial organization and the form it must take. For example, Tom Kerry in one of his three lectures on "Class-Struggle Policy in the Rise of the Labor Movement" in discussing the IWW declared:

"Where the IWW went wrong, very wrong, was in their attempt to promote the concept of building revolutionary industrial unions. There was a fatal flaw in the basic concept..."

Arguing that "the trade union is the most elementary form of workers' united front" and that the "one overriding interest" workers had in common was the "sale of their labor power...at a rate high enough to maintain a decent standard of living," Kerry emphasized that--

"...giving a worker a red card that automatically certifies him or her as a member of a 'revolutionary' industrial union has little or no meaning to the worker involved. That is not how revolutionary workers are created." (SWP Education for Socialists Bulletin, May 1976.)

More recently, Frank Lovell of your Political Committee writing in the May 1978 International Socialist Review under the heading: "The Transitional Program, A Strategy For The Unions Today," stated:

"Unions alone cannot reorganize society. There are limits to what they can do..."

"The Transitional Program takes note of the limitations of the union movement. Unions represent only one-fourth of the workforce...; they are not structured to bring other layers of the working class into their councils in times of crises; and they cannot substitute for the mass political party that will champion the working class in the political arena."

In short, Lovell and the SWP generally fail to see the difference between the class-collaborationist unions that exist and the revolutionary unionism that will be structured on a class basis and aims to organize on a class basis. For contrary to Tom Kerry's contention the overriding interest of the workers is their class interest in abolishing the capitalist cause of their problems and establishing a viable system in which they will enjoy the abundance their productivity makes possible--socialism.

Your report to the February 1978 Plenum of your National Committee on "Leading the Party Into Industry" also emphasized the primacy of the party over the union. In part you stated:

"...The way forward is that of a proletarian revolution and the vanguard has to be the organized conscious vanguard of the proletariat.

"The most powerful, centralized ruling class in history has to be displaced. But that doesn't end the matter. There's an additional important problem: the proletariat is not homogeneous. If the proletariat--who are the big majority--were totally homogeneous, if every worker went through the same experiences and came to the same conclusions at the same time, a conscious political homogeneous combat party wouldn't be so needed. You could try to slip by through utilizing the broadest class institutions--the industrial unions, councils, soviets, whatever. These are the institutions that by definition encompass the great active majority of the whole class. But in reality, just when that stage is reached--the stage of the transformation of the gigantic industrial unions into revolutionary instruments of struggle, the establishment of workers councils, the establishment of soviets--it's just at that point that the heterogeneous character of the class, based on historic differences along lines of craft, race, sex, age, and political experience--makes the need for the party so acute."

Earlier in that same report the concept of the union as a factor in the revolutionary change is given even less importance.

"We have no reason," you said, "to challenge Trotsky's view that in certain circumstances, industrial unions could play the role of soviets in some parts of the country. We have no way of knowing, but we don't preclude it beforehand."

The report went on to emphasize the need to get SWP members into industry--into the unions--to do "Bolshevik trade-union work." And the description of those who would do that union work--those you designated "worker-Bolsheviks"--emphasized again how different are the concepts of our two parties on the all-important questions of the role of the union and the role of the party in the revolutionary equation.

"A worker-Bolshevik," you said, "is a worker for whom the party comes first, not the union. The party comes first. A worker for whom the party is everything. We're in industry, in the unions, for one reason: to build the party..."

In view of such facts, we believe it is absurd to equate the De Leonist concept of the SLP with the Trotskyist concept of the SWP. How could a concept that envisions an SIU that would 1) enable the workers to fight their day-to-day battles; 2) eventually render them capable of moving in to take, hold and operate the entire economy; and 3) provide the governmental structure for the new society be equated with a concept which calls for the political party to gain leadership in every workers' struggle and to seek

Jack Barnes
National Secretary

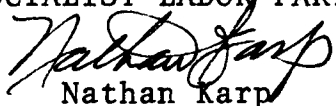
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hegemony over all other forces, groups and organizations, despite its occasional and not altogether clear references to soviets, workers councils and the like.

There are additional areas of equal import in which we see similar irreconcilable differences. We are convinced that those differences doom to failure from the start the stated objectives of the discussions you proposed. We therefore can see no constructive reason for devoting any of our resources to a hopeless project.

We intend, of course, to continue to participate to the extent that our resources permit in those class struggles and events that serve working-class interests and do not conflict with or compromise our Marxist principles or distract us from our socialist goal. If, in doing so, we find areas in which we can without compromise to ourselves cooperate with other organizations, we shall--as we have--continue to do so in fraternal and non-sectarian fashion.

Fraternally,
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY

Nathan Karp
National Secretary

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Mr. Jack Leiberan
Socialist Workers Party
8501 NW 8th Street, #102
Miami, FL 33126

Dear Comrade Leiberan:

We are in receipt of copy of Lee Smith's letter of October 5 to Section Greater Miami of the Socialist Labor Party, with copy of A.A. Albaugh's letter of September 18. Lee Smith's letter arrived when this office was very much preoccupied with matters relating to the annual session of our National Executive Committee. Hence the delay in responding.

Regrettably, Section Greater Miami's letter to you of September 18 presents a viewpoint that is contrary to the policy of the Socialist Labor Party with respect to those whose legitimate political activity have made them a special target of persecution by the minions of the capitalist class. For, as stated in our leaflet on democratic rights, we hold that "Democratic rights are vital to the working class, which must defend them at every point."

Leo Harris has become a victim of the reaction because of his political activity. While the Socialist Labor Party may not agree in every detail with Lee Smith, we do agree that Leo Harris's fight against the reaction should be supported.

A copy of this letter is being sent to our Section Greater Miami.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Bills,
Assistant to the
National Secretary

RB:DGB

cc: Lee Smith
Jack Barnes