

THE INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST COMMITTEE'S

Viewpoint in Brief

Independent Socialism stands for a policy completely independent of and opposed to both of the reactionary systems of exploitation of man by man which now divide the world: capitalism and totalitarian Communism. It stands for uncompromising support to every democratic movement of the people against all capitalist or Communist regimes, and to every movement for social emancipation from their power.

Capitalism is an outlived system whose lifeblood is private profit and corporate oppression, even when represented as a "welfare state" or mixed economy," and even when its government is administered by liberals or social-democrats. In the midst of a false prosperity based on a Permanent War Economy, it still perpetuates poverty, unemployment, racism and imperialism.

The so-called Communist regimes—of Stalin or Khrushchev or their heirs, Titoists, Maoists, or other—have nothing in common with our socialism. They represent a new type of totalitarian exploitive state, based on a social system in which the state owns the means of production but only the ruling bureaucratic class "owns" or controls the state. The various Communist Parties are essentially political agents of this class, not allies of socialism. This ruling class may concede reforms under pressure, like all other rulers, but the limits of such reform are set by the fact that it will not willingly give up its totalitarian state control or reform itself out of power.

Socialism—a new social system in which the people own and control the basic sectors of the economy—cannot exist without the fullest effective democratic control from below, of all social and governmental institutions. The socialist movement must be a movement of opposition and alternatives to the ruling Establishments, seeking to fight them from below, not relying on per-

meation from above. We look to the working class and its ever-present struggle as the basic progressive force in society.

We stand for a policy of complete independence from and opposition to both war camps, capitalist and Communist, which are engaged in an imperialist struggle to dominate the world. We are for strengthening all tendencies toward a Third Camp of those who reject both war blocs and their military preparations for a nuclear catastrophe. We advocate a democratic, anti-imperialist foreign policy, instead of the Cold War power-politics of either Washington or Moscow-Peking.

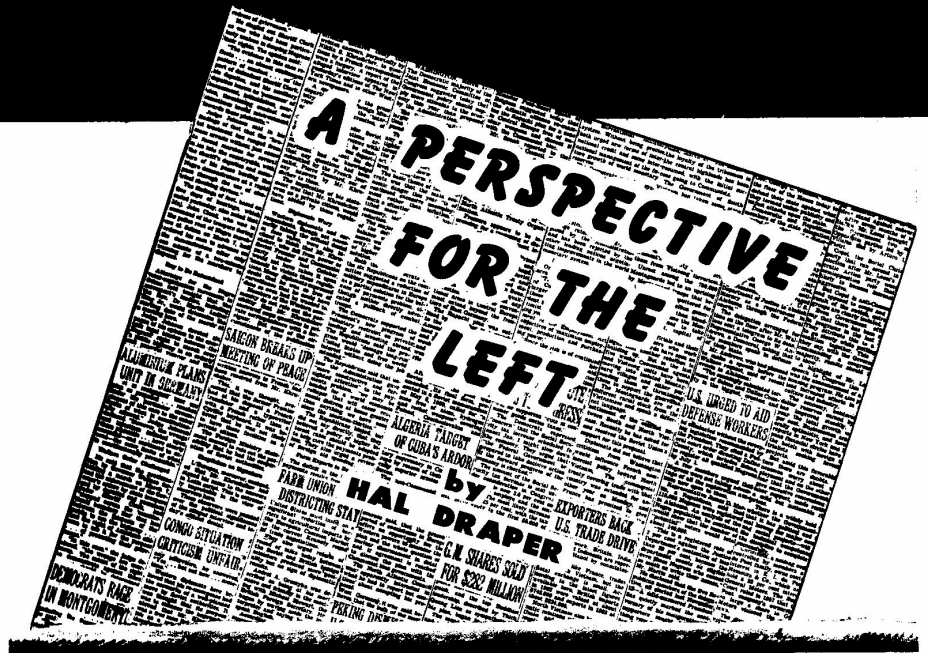
The Independent Socialist Committee is an unaffiliated educational center, not a party or action group, but its education, based on the ideas of revolutionary Marxism, seeks to aid socialists in their participation in every current struggle to better the people's lot now:

- For independent political action in opposition to both old parties, by the labor and civil rights movements and other progressive forces, looking to the building of a new party.
- For a left-wing and anti-bureaucratic force in the labor movement.
- For militancy and a Third Camp policy in the peace movement.
- For full support to all militant struggles for complete civil rights for Negroes, and against appeasement of either white-supremacism or white-liberalism.

• For full civil liberties to all, including Communists and fascists, and against the reactionary "anti-Communism" which is the American Establishment's mask for political witchhunting.

This view of socialism is both democratic and revolutionary, both humanist and working-class; and it is only as a revolutionary-democratic movement that socialism presents a third choice for the world, as the alternative to both capitalism and Communism.

INDEPENDENT SOCIALISM



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INDEPENDENT SOCIALISM A Perspective for the Left

There are many pamphlets and books explaining the general idea of socialism; this is not another one. For present purposes and for the sake of argument, we are assuming you know what the socialist idea is: the idea that the ability of human beings to live like men should not be dependent on the making of private profit; that the community of men can operate our economic institutions under social control rather than under the autocracy of moneyed overlords; that democracy can apply as much to the way we make a living as to the way we make a government, by putting the factories and plants under collective control.

It was once the common opinion among socialists that agreement up to this point was sufficient basis for a political movement, and that differences on other points were secondary and minor, to be soft-pedaled lest unity on the "general idea" be disrupted. But it has been one of the great lessons of socialist history that unity so based is an illusion. These lessons were learned in a bitter school, beginning with August 4, 1914 when mass socialist parties, all of which agreed on the "general idea," set about slaughtering each other because of differences on the "secondary and minor" issue of which imperialist camp to support in war.

Once it was realized that there were incompatible kinds of socialism, it was not only the issue of war and peace that cast light on what had happened. Some kinds of socialism had then (as now) oriented toward the working classes, others toward the middle classes. Some toward struggle against the capitalist authorities; others toward peaceful accommodation to them. Some toward emphasis on workers' control in economic life; others toward the organization of bureaucratic efficiency by the state. Some toward a consistent fight for social equality; others toward acceptance even of gross racism (as in support of Chinese exclusion) or mild racism (as in refusal to wage any special fight for Negro rights), both rife in American socialism.

With the rise of the Communist movement after the great Russian Revolution, it looked for a time as if the genuine socialism of the Left had pulled itself free at last of entanglement with an incompatible wing of social-reform; but the Communist movement, too, broke over inevitably divisive issues which could not be patched. The dividing

line was its transformation under the Stalinist regime into a totalitarian power, which also re-made the Communist parties in its own image.

One of the results today is that—in the eyes of most people, socialist or not—there are quite different political tendencies which are commonly regarded as “kinds of socialism.” This pamphlet will discuss three in the light of current problems.

One is that of the reform-socialists, or social-democrats, whose views and policies shade into ordinary liberalism. This is the traditional right-wing kind of socialism.

Another is that of the present-day Communist movement, which also presents itself as a “kind of socialism”—a left-wing kind, moreover—and is promoted as such by the forces of American reaction, which are eager to identify every idea of radical and revolutionary dissent with the largely discredited Communist Party.

But there has always been a third kind of socialism basically different from both of these. This is the socialism of the Left—which offers a thoroughly radical alternative to the capitalist status quo, which looks on socialism as a revolutionary-democratic opposition to the capitalist Establishment, but which also rejects the totalitarian Communism of today as alien to its own ideals and aims. This socialism of the Left rejects *both* the reformist accommodation with capitalism *and* the Communist rival of capitalism.

It is from this socialism of the Left that Independent Socialism derives its approach to the new needs and issues of today. In the following pages, we want to suggest that involved are not only questions of policy on issues of vital importance right now, but also the basic problem of what socialism itself means.

1 THE “THIRD CAMP” VIEWPOINT

Even if there were agreement on a new and better world to come, the fact is that this aim does not mean very much unless this old world remains in one piece. The danger of nuclear war hangs over everything.

Of course, almost everybody is against war and for peace. War threatens not because of men who *want* war, but because of governments that want peace (their own peace) and that want to impose their own peace (and power)—in a collision course that spells war. In our era of war and imperialism, the nation-states have been driven into one bloody war after another, by social forces that seem to be out of control even by the rulers themselves.

Now the reformist, or right-wing, socialists are usually quite willing to make ritual obeisance to the idea that the drive toward war derives from capitalism itself. But everywhere, including the U.S., they line up more or less solidly with one of the Cold War camps in the world, that of capitalism (“the West”). They argue that it is necessary to support the “lesser evil” among the Cold War rivals since only Western capitalism has the power to stop the danger of world conquest by the “greater evil,” Russian totalitarianism.

We believe this is a basically false approach; along these lines there is no way out of the Cold War impasse. This approach basically accepts the premise that the answer to Communist expansion is primarily a matter of military power. But since the end of World War II and the accompanying occupation of East Europe by Moscow (which itself was no mere military act but the outcome of a political deal with the Allies), the expansion of Communist power has taken place decisively through *political* warfare, not shooting wars; that is, through the effectiveness of the Communist appeal to peoples who are sick of what capitalism stands for.

Such sympathy for Communism is not at all a testimonial to the attractiveness of the Communists’ totalitarian system. In Asia, Africa or Latin America (aside from Cuba) the people have had no experience of what an established Communist regime means. What they do know, on their own backs, is what the world of capitalism and capitalist imperialism means for them, and how they suffer under the landlords, usurers and dictators who are bolstered up by this capitalist camp.

Support to the camp of Western capitalism, therefore, cannot stop the expansion of Communist totalitarianism: the latter feeds on the very existence of the capitalist camp. Only insofar as it can point to the sins and crimes of world capitalism can it garner sympathy for itself. After all, we live in a world where an overwhelming majority of the people of four continents are consciously anti-capitalist in their sympathies! This totally new fact about the world is almost incomprehensible to the typical American mind; yet it is one of the fundamental facts about the futility of the Cold War approach to foreign policy.

And so those who supported the invasion of Cuba organized in 1961 by President Kennedy's CIA were not only going along with a war crime as callous as Russia's crushing of the Hungarian Revolution; they were also proving that they had no political alternative to the disastrous course of State Department policy. When Kennedy in 1962 poised his finger over the Button and threatened the unleashing of nuclear war unless Russian ships obeyed his blockade of Cuba, reformists also lined up to support this, just as on the other side the Communists apologized for Moscow's provocative missiles in Cuba or for Castro's derailment of the Cuban revolution in the direction of totalitarian collectivism.

In China, the Communists won out, politically and then militarily, because the only visible alternative which the West allowed was the old, discredited, barbaric rule of the butcher Chiang Kai-shek. It did not avail simply to regale the Chinese people with tales (however true) about the horrors of Communism because there is little that Mao could do, or has done, that is much worse than the oppressive yoke of Washington's eminent ally.

The same pattern is being repeated in Vietnam, where the governments sponsored by the State Department—from Bao Dai through Diem and Khanh and their successors—have always been far more anxious to massacre any democratic popular forces than to fight against the Communist guerrillas, who seem to offer the people land reform and relief from exploitive extortions. Here too it does little good to tell the people that a Communist regime, once it has established itself, would be just as oppressive or worse, as long as this advice is tied to support of the U.S. puppets and protégés.

The reality for most of the peoples of the world is not so much a choice between a "lesser evil" and a "greater evil," but between a present oppressor and a potential one. For them, the *present* evil is represented by the local ruling-class hangers-on of the Western camp; just as in East Europe it is the Moscow camp that represents the present exploiter.

The reformist "lesser evil" approach leads them to endorse the going State Department line of Cold War "deterrence," that is, a policy alleged to preserve peace by intimidating the Russians with bigger and more fearful H-bombs and planet-killing super-weapons, in an

escalating race toward Overkill and the Balance of Terror. This course can "stop Communism," if at all, only by means of a nuclear catastrophe or the constant threat of one. But then it is not only Communism that would be stopped.

Turn this same coin over on its other side, and—like certain ancient mint-pieces—you will see the same pattern in intaglio; that is, a Communist Cold War policy that is similar, only turned inside-out.

We have seen, with indignation or amusement, the spectacle presented by those alleged peace-lovers who were unsparing in their denunciations of American bomb-testing as poisoning the atmosphere and endangering the very future of the race—and who refused to whisper a word in criticism of the Soviet bomb-testing which broke the temporary moratorium in 1961. Obviously, these "peace-lovers" are not at all against bomb-testing; they are only against bomb-testing by the war camp opposed to their own. They are political soldiers in the Cold War just as much as (say) the staunch "State Department socialists" who habitually write for the magazine *New Leader*. Naturally, they support their own war camp, they claim, because Russia represents the "general idea" of socialism—it *calls* itself socialist, does it not? But when this pseudo-socialist Russian despotism massacred the Hungarian workers' revolution for a genuine socialist freedom and democracy, then many learned a great deal.

Here in this country, as long as it is at sword's-point with Moscow, the Communists can hope to make time with genuine radicals by posing as radical enemies of the status quo. This period in the life of American Communism has been going on since soon after the end of World War II, and a whole generation has grown up which has seen the Communists only in this pose, enforced on them by the Cold War. They have never known these same Cold-Warriors (Eastern variety) when their own camp was in league with Washington: for example, in World War II after the breakup of the Hitler-Stalin pact, when it was the Communists who were the vanguard in policing the No-Strike Pledge, in repressing Negro struggles for civil rights and opposing the March on Washington, in cooperating with the factory bosses to frame up and fire trade-union militants who were "interfering" with war unity, in jamming down the surrender of overtime pay and working conditions when the corporations were raking in record war profits, etc.

Now this, to be sure, is history, and if there is anything we learn from history it is that people do not learn from history. They have to go through their own experiences, and in the last analysis there is no substitute. But it is otherwise with radicals who aspire to a deeper understanding of social forces.

Independent Socialism believes that there is a plain alternative road for socialists: *opposition to both war establishments*, as to both oppressive social systems. This is a "Third Camp" point of view.

We have already indicated some of the views which this entails. It

is the first duty of a militant American socialism to attack without let-up the sins and crimes of *this* government in international policy; but this, we believe, cannot be done either effectively or principledly, except by a movement which likewise condemns the sins and crimes of the rival Communist camp. It follows also that the expansion of the Communist totalitarian power cannot be held back by any force based on the outlived capitalist world.

Independent Socialism advocates a fundamentally different foreign policy for a new America: a consistently *democratic and anti-imperialist* foreign policy which can move the peoples of the world to *political* struggle against reactionary dictatorships—not only the Communist ones but such police regimes as those of Franco and Salazar and Washington's pocket-dictators in Latin America. This means recognizing and participating in the anti-capitalist revolution which is the reality of our times, giving it a revolutionary-democratic content rather than a Communist totalitarian one. Only the Third Camp approach points in this direction.

2

"ANTI-COMMUNISM" AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

But isn't "anti-Communism" the war-cry of American reaction?

It certainly is. The "anti-Communism" of the American Party Line stands for witchhunt and political persecution, a sinister erosion of basic civil liberties. This development over the years, only partially rolled back by the demise of McCarthy, has already gutted a significant part of the content in our touted American democracy.

Let us first be clear about the relation of the witchhunt to the "anti-Communist" mask which it commonly uses nowadays. During the World War II period, when Communism was not yet the devil, there was also a systematic witchhunt and persecution of militant socialists and trade-unionists. It was the New Deal (turned into the War Deal) which put through the notorious Smith Act, and a number of Trotskyists and Minneapolis trade-unionists associated with them were clapped into jail after a farce-trial. (The Communists applauded.) Innumerable Independent Socialists were harrassed and hounded by the FBI and other government agencies. But at this time there was *no* national outcry over the witchhunt; it was only the socialist left that was victimized. So much for the myth that witchhunt necessarily means "anti-Communism."

The second myth is that witchhunt simply means "McCarthyism." The plain fact is that the post-war witchhunt was launched not by Joe McCarthy but by the "liberal" Democratic administration under Truman (and continued by Eisenhower). It was Truman's government which found even the Smith Act inadequate, because it required embarrassing court tests, and which therefore initiated the system of outlawing-by-administrative-decree: the "Subversive List." Under this system, a concerted "loyalty" purge and persecution began. Even a file clerk in a government bureau became a "sensitive job" from which a radical could be fired by the Democratic witchhunters, whether he was a Communist or not. Under cover of persecution of Communists (who were now unpopular because of the intensifying Cold War), all types of radicals and left socialists were hounded. This is always the case with witchhunts, whether dressed up as "anti-Communist" or not.

McCarthy found his vocation *after* the Truman regime had already cast a pall of fear and intimidation over the country. Then there was this difference: the Truman "Fair Deal" witchhunters persecuted radicals

and Communists; *McCarthy mainly directed his witchhunt against the Truman Fair-Dealers themselves*, using anti-Communism as his stalking-horse.

In this devil's-brew—in which the McCarthy-type witchhunters witchhunted the Truman-type witchhunters, who had begun by witch-hunting the Communist witchhunters—there are few who emerged with a shred of honor. In the midst of it, a then top leader of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action, Hubert Humphrey, put through a “security” law providing for concentration camps for “subversives” in time of national emergency. (The concentration camps provided for are still in readiness at this moment.) In the depths of this period, only a handful of liberals or reformists could be found to take a principled stand in favor of such a thing as the right of the Communist to be a teacher. The leading theoretician for the assault on civil liberties (short of “excesses”) was Prof. Sidney Hook, a self-styled socialist. Even leaders of the American Civil Liberties Union began to abandon its traditional policies before the Cold War wind.

Independent Socialism continued, and continues, to insist on the unqualified rejection of any legal restrictions against the full civil liberties of any political or social tendency, including the civil liberties of Communists or fascists. This, of course, within the framework of the traditional “clear and present danger” doctrine, which was never really involved. This writer was then editor of the Independent Socialist weekly *Labor Action*, and we published what I think is the most consistent body of polemic against the practice and theory of the witch-hunt: against the Smith Act jailings of the Communist leaders, against the exclusion of Communist teachers, against the disgraceful police-actions against Communist organizations, and against the various laws and regulations, jointly supported by Democrats and Republicans or McCarthyites and “anti-McCarthyites,” aimed at the de-facto outlawry of the Communist Party.

This stand is not based on dewy-eyed idealism or naiveté, as should be clear. Moreover, it is important to understand that the still-pervasive climate of “anti-Communist” persecution is one of the few remaining sources of sympathy for pro-Sovietism, among elements alienated from the American Establishment. The same Communist movement which had become a stench in the nostrils of thousands of its own members in 1956, after Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin and the Hungarian Revolution's revelations about Khrushchev—this movement retained mainly one appeal. For anyone who aspired to oppose capitalism at home, it was the “enemy of your enemy,” therefore your “friend.” By donning heavy enough blinkers, one could blank out gnawing doubts about the Communist model by repeating “Our duty is to criticize only *American* crimes...”

On their side, the Communists naturally trade on this psychology to aver that any criticism of *them*, or even opposition to their influence,

is “red-baiting”; that if you are against witchhunting, you must also stifle all *political* criticism of the Communists themselves. Not a few good people have been morally intimidated by this irrational doctrine into sealing their lips lest they be considered “divisive”—and this in turn furthers the reaction's charge that all leftists must be stooges of the Communists. It is a vicious circle.

Pro-Communism or pro-Sovietism as a political ideology cannot be wiped out by police methods. (This is the domestic analogue of the truth that pro-Communist penetration of the world cannot be stopped by H-bomb brandishing.) It can be combated politically, but it is not the outlived system or governments of capitalism that offer any living alternative to its appeals. Hence their resort to the witchhunt at home, as to military intimidation abroad.

Lastly in this connection: the witchhunt reflects on the claims of the liberals and reformists to be the very paladins of Democracy vs. Totalitarianism. But nowhere and in no country have the reformists been consistent defenders even of capitalist democratic forms; and this is true not only when there was a threat of revolution from the left but even against dangers from the right. The consistent defense of full democracy in our world requires the methods of *revolutionary democratic opposition*.

THE TROUBLE WITH LIBERALISM

One of the touchstones of the “kinds of socialism” is their relationship to the political tendency known as liberalism.

We have mentioned that reform-socialism shades indistinguishably into reform-liberalism. That is, there is no great difference between the bourgeois-liberalistic socialists, whom we have been discussing, and the socialistically-inclined bourgeois liberals, who seem to be so prominent on the American political scene. The liberal rhetoric, it has been said often and truly, has been the *lingua franca* of American politics. But American liberalism, in all frankness, is one of the shabbiest articles in the political marketplace. One of the proofs of liberal openmindedness is that so many of them think so too.

There is a first-class political mystery here at first sight—in fact, two. In the first place, liberalism is (or at least has been) overwhelmingly the dominant political ideology in the country. If we had Independent Socialists to the number of one half of one percent of those who espouse what they call liberalism, we would have a movement of the Left that could move American politics. Yet organized movements representing American liberalism have usually been little more than letterhead concoctions (like Americans for Democratic Action), the only partial exceptions being regional and temporary. Liberalism simply does not seem capable of existing in organized form. There must be a reason.

The second mystery is that hardly any liberal even claims to be able to define what liberalism is. The exceptions try to do so by dint of vacuous generalities, like “Liberalism means Caring For People...” Now when a political tendency cannot explain itself *to itself*, there must be a reason.

In theory, liberalism and liberals are for All Good Things: more democracy and civil liberties, human rights rather than property rights, popular welfare rather than private greed, and other stands on the side of the Angels. In practice, however, there are always overweening, equally liberal, reasons why they can lead no fight for these goals.

The mysteries are partly explained by the disparate sources of American liberalism: like bellflowers there are many different things that answer to the same name. Historically (and still often in European terminology) liberalism meant freedom from state interference and

controls. The few consistent civil-libertarians left among liberals are among the last remnants of this strain. (Today, this cry of freedom from state interference is, ironically, mostly the property of the ultra-right in this country.)

This meaning of historical liberalism is mainly obsolete. Around the turn of the century, in the same period that saw the burgeoning of the socialist movement here and in Europe, American liberalism was transmogrified into an ideology advocating just the opposite: the expanded use of the state power on behalf of people’s welfare, but *within* the framework of capitalism. It thus became the left tip of bourgeois society, opposed both to the conservative status-quo ideology of the right, and to the alternative offered by socialism.

At the same time it is the heir of those aspects of Populism and Progressivism which tried to represent the aspirations of the intermediate social strata—small farmers, artisans, new-fledged workers—that were being squeezed by the development of big business and finance-capitalism, but which fought against the descent into proletarian status. Anti-trust rhetoric and suspicion of big capital were the legacy, but a fruitless one, since it could have no program to turn the clock back to the good old days of little business, prosperous family farmers, and such. Liberalism still has no definite program, but some of the rhetoric hangs on.

With the eventual dominance of big capital in the U.S., it was precisely the liberal *rhetoric* which came into its own. There is no social demagoguery which can hold a candle to the *sincere* kind—such as wells up instinctively on the lips of the middle-class liberal who wants to Do Good for the People, but who cannot even begin to buck the economic and social imperatives imposed by a system basically run in the interests of big capital. He cannot buck them without going over to conscious opposition to the whole system, as he gets to understand the implications of opposition—that is, going over to socialism. Now this conversion happened often enough in other countries, where a strong socialist movement based on a radical working class could exercise a magnetic attraction to pull over alienated bourgeois and petty-bourgeois idealists. In this country, where such a strong socialist movement never developed, such cases tend to peter out, give up, or settle for a maverick status on the periphery of practical politics.

But the typical liberal, who cannot break with the system, has to settle for something else: protesting the best of intentions (sincerely) while being dragged along by the system he supports, or busying himself with filing off the sharp corners or rough edges on the towing chain which drags him; and meanwhile congratulating himself on doing an indispensable smoothing job which the callous powers-that-be are too heartless to attend to.

We have here the basic contradiction of liberalism: the contradiction between its benevolent aspirations and the harsher realities of the

system which holds its *own* roots. Here too is born the rhetoric of liberal *Realpolitik*, the formulas of the Practical Politician who is going to Get Things Done and not be a Visionary Dreamer.

The final incarnation of decayed liberalism is the Social Broker. Whenever the ruling interests of society face dissent and unrest, they divide between two policies: "repress the mob," or "throw them a sop," that is, between the Club or the Carrot. The crude, troglodyte type of heavyhanded capitalist may incline to the first; the more intelligent and farsighted class statesman understands the uses of the second.

The same division, between the short-range and long-range views of the interests of the system, also applies to the problems of policing not only dissidents but also business practices, financial policies and economic strategy within the capitalist class itself. The socially operative meaning of liberalism in the U.S. is connected with those policies which orient toward the over-all and collective class interests of the system, as against the myopic and short-range profit-grubbing of individual capitalists or capitalist groups, which if unchecked would undermine the viability of the class as a whole. This, of course, also explains why Wall Street supports and finances the "liberal" wing of the Republican Party rather than the rightists.

But when dissent and opposition builds up from labor, the little people, or the minority groups frozen out of the "affluent society" like the mass of Negroes, and there is threat of struggle and conflict, then it is the broker-role of liberalism which comes into play, to advise the concession of sops, in order to blunt the militancy of the struggle. They will plead with the dissenters to go home and disband, and depend on them, the liberals, to deliver. Of course, as soon as they are successful in breaking the militancy of the struggle, they also break the main lever which might have forced real concessions out of the real rulers. They are then sincerely regretful that they cannot Do the People Good, as they would have liked.

One of those most basic of all social issues, then, is how the fight for immediate reforms and concessions is to be carried on: whether by dependence on "friends of the people" and "friends of labor" in the Establishment who chuck us under the chin; or by relying only on the independent organization of popular movements from below in opposition to the Establishment. The first is the line of liberalism and all reformism; the second is the line of any genuine militant socialism. This basic line of demarcation goes right down through the "kinds of socialism" also.

4 THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY TRAP

The main American political institution in which all this is acted out is the Democratic Party.

It is now a commonplace of orthodox American thought that our two political parties are not "ideological parties"; that is, they make sure that there is no basic choice in political policies to be voted on. (When, by exception, a Goldwater steers to the right of this consensus, he thereby loses the support of virtually all *responsible* capitalist elements.) The Tweedledum-Tweedledee character of the two-party system, originally described by radicals as an indictment of the system, is now smugly taught by the Establishment (political and academic) as its great contribution to political science.

Yet there *is* an important difference between the two parties. It is not in where they stand, but in where they face. It is the function of the Republican apparatus to keep the responsible centers of capitalist power inside the consensus; and it is the function of the Democratic apparatus to keep the working classes and underprivileged inside the same consensus. Which means: to keep them from carrying any struggle outside the framework of the status quo.

The power coalition which makes up the Democratic machine is cleverly structured to provide plenty of elbow room for plebeian masses to mill around in, without access to the levers of control. City machine bosses and Southern bourbons are balanced together with housebroken labor bureaucrats and social demagogues. There are few more pitiful dreams, or will-o'-the-wisps, than those of the new-fledged "reform" Democrat or party-liberal who talks about making this party into a "real people's party."

What is unique about American politics is that this is the only modern country in the world in which the working people and the labor movement have not organized *independently* in their own political party. This is also why the political and social climate of American politics, already far to the right even of its allies in the Western world, is steadily moving still further right. (The 1964 choice between a Goldwater and a Johnson presented, on both sides, the right-most alternatives put before the American electorate since the antedeluvian days of Calvin Coolidge.)

American politics has been moving steadily right since the end of

the last war, and the immediate reason is the absence of any organized Left opposition in politics. Labor is in the hip pocket of the Democratic party; and liberalism (what there is left of it) is in the vest pocket. There is no pull on the left—no *threat* on the left—to counterpoise the pull of American reaction. Every year the people are told to vote for the “lesser evil”—the Democrat instead of the Republican, or the “liberal” Republican instead of the conservative—and there always is a lesser evil. *And every year the lesser has become more evil.*

There is no way out of this vicious circle except by breaking out of the corral called the Democratic Party. The first step toward swinging the helm of American politics toward the left must be this: *to offer a left alternative to both old parties*, to crystallize opposition forces in a new political choice. A new party, initiated by labor and the civil-rights movement, could do this. Even if at first its own politics were as amorphous as the liberals’ (as is likely), this would be the first blow breaking the frozen crust of American politics.

We do not say this with any illusions about the present labor leadership. The initiative in this direction will come from several levels below the domesticated bureaucrats of the AFL-CIO Executive Board, who mostly think like “merchants of labor,” like any other kind of affluent businessmen. It will have to come from the shop-level leaders and militants; it will grow up from the pressure of mounting unemployment; it will burst out because this system *cannot* solve the dilemma posed by automation; it will grow as “lesser evil” Democratic administrations temporize with every vital need of the people: the need for a real peace policy, the need for a solution to unemployment, the need for jobs and equality for Negro workers.

Below the fossilized upper-crust of the labor bureaucracy are troubled soul-searching and ferment over the unsolved problems which workers face. It is from these ranks that labor’s role for social progress is always implemented. The liberal-reformists who truckle to the “labor statesmen,” who adapt to them, who act as their intellectual flunkies and kept braintrusters, only stand in the way.

THE FIRE RIGHT NOW: CIVIL RIGHTS

We said: there is no pull from the left. There is one big exception that proves the rule.

This is the fight being waged by the Negro and civil-rights movements for “freedom now,” for complete equality and desegregation. In the course of this fight, white liberal-reformism has reached a new depth of disgrace and revealed its political soul. It is right and proper that “white liberal” has become a common epithet of contempt among Negro militants. This is not a consequence of their whiteness but of their politics.

The first and biggest fact is that only on this issue does there exist in this country a movement of militant opposition from below. We are not referring only, and not even mainly, to the established civil-rights organizations, such as the NAACP, CORE, SNCC. There is a fire which burns the insteps of the leaders of these organizations too, and makes them step lively where they might want to drag their feet: that is the fire which burns in the ranks of the Negro masses, sometimes in unorganized or semi-organized forms.

It was only when the mass of Negro workers in Birmingham, from the lower depths of the oppressed people, erupted into spontaneous struggle that the power structure shook and trembled all over the country. Even before this, the bus-boycott movements and other mass-community fights in the South broke out outside the established organizational structures, though in cooperation with popular leaders like Martin Luther King. In the North and West, although the “official” organizations have fought many valuable battles here and there, the powers-that-be have been shaken up most badly when the fight burst out of the bounds set by them and spilled out in more militant forms—sit-ins; rent strikes, school boycotts, etc.

Now, it is true that *lack* of organization and leaderless spontaneity are not always a good thing; far from it. Justified frustration and despair, unguided by experienced militant leadership, have their own dangers that become visible in fruitless riots. Here comes the basic dividing line: On the one hand you have the type who responds to “wild” rioting by saying, “Everybody go home—off the streets.” On the other hand, you have the leader who says, “Let’s turn this energy

and enthusiasm into an organized, meaningful, demanding fight for clear objectives!"

The spontaneous dynamism of the Birmingham demonstrations, or of semiorganized mass actions in Harlem, makes the liberal-reformists (white or Negro) blench because they mean that the Negro masses are *out of control*—that is, out of their control. It is indisputable that an action cannot be most effective when it is "out of control," but it is an even greater truth that an action cannot be effective at all when it is *in control*—of leaders whose conception of their duty is to restrain and dilute the fighting pressure of Negro militancy.

If, as we said, "white liberals" are a by-word, what about socialists? Events have been proving in this respect too what the different "kinds of socialism" mean. The basic dividing line was drawn when, in the 1964 election campaign, a section of the civil-rights leadership declared a "moratorium" on the struggle for equality in order not to embarrass the Democratic Party and Lyndon Johnson's election. This surrender was made not only by the NAACP, which surprised no one, but also by right-wing socialists Bayard Rustin and Norman Hill. When CORE declined to go along with the moratorium, Hill even left the organization of which he was a leader in order to do what he considered more important: support Johnson.

What is involved is not just tactics. In every social struggle for freedom, the questions are raised: Whom can we rely on to achieve the new world we fight for? By what road shall we march there? Who are our allies and who are our enemies?

This kind of case shows that reformism ranges itself besides white liberalism, when push comes to shove. As the white power structure reacts to elemental Negro militancy with fear and dismay, so these types react with fear and dismay *to the fact that the white power structure so reacts*; and they cry for moratoriums and restraints. Thus the hostility to Negro militancy by its enemies is transmitted by its would-be friends into the Negro movement itself, or at least into its leadership.

They counsel: "Don't rock the boat; rely on us and on them, but don't interfere with our relations with *them* by scaring our 'friends' with your militant struggle." This is always the wisdom we get from the Social Brokers, who are going to Do Us Good provided we don't inconvenience them by fighting for ourselves.

The fact is, however, that even the gains, and tokens of gains, won by the Negro movement so far have been won decisively only insofar as these "friends" and "allies" became so scared and worried that they turned to *their* white-supremacist "friends" and "allies" and said: "Look, men, if we don't give them *something*, they'll tear the walls down. Play it smart. *We'll* propose to give them a pittance; you can scream blue murder. The louder you scream, the more they'll think they're

getting something important. This way, they'll not only stop pushing but they'll even resign from CORE to re-elect us to office."—This is the story of Johnson's Civil Rights Act.

In the field of civil rights, the reformist approach asks us to rely on the wrong allies. In other issues, other reformist conceptions invite us to rely on American H-bombs to deter war, to rely on the inventors of the Subversive List to protect us from Communist teachers, to rely on liberals for a welfare world, to rely on the Democratic Party to bring the Good Society. The Independent Socialist viewpoint rejects all this.

WHAT SOCIALISM MEANS

So far we have discussed current political issues. Of the ideas that have emerged so far, we want to focus on the following.

What is basic to the viewpoint of Independent Socialism—what divides it both from reformist-socialism and from totalitarian Communism—is this: *In the fight for a radical (i.e. down-to-the-roots) social transformation, socialism must be a movement of revolutionary-democratic opposition from below.*

But both reformism and Communism are movements that latch on to the existing power structures, though different ones.

The reformists adapt themselves to the capitalist Establishment under which we live in this country. The Communists subordinate themselves to the state power of the totalitarian-collectivist world which is the other's rival. Both of them fear nothing so much as opposition movements which they do not control.

The underlying view of the reformists is that capitalism is inevitably and gradually evolving through welfare-statism to that blessed state when government planning will bring order and efficiency to society. But these are not the indicia of socialism. There is plenty of welfarism of a sort in prisons, hospitals and zoos, but these are not socialist models. There is order and efficiency of a sort in armies, factories, the Salvation Army, and graveyards. Socialism means something else again: it means a society controlled from the bottom up by free and equal men—free and equal in their control of economic life, and in their social life as in their political life. That is why capitalism has to go.

The underlying view of the Communists is that you have “socialism” when the State owns and controls everything. This is a fraud. The reply is: *But who owns and controls the State?* In the Communist countries, the State machine, which runs the economy, is itself run by a new ruling class standing over the people—an uncontrolled bureaucracy which, no matter how you reckon it, is as much a minority as the capitalist class is in the West. If this be socialism, then the American working class is right in wanting no part of it!

We are, you see, no longer discussing in terms of different “kinds of socialism” but rather dealing with the very meaning of socialism itself. We are no longer assuming agreement on the “general idea” of socialism, but are questioning what the “general idea” is.

What the reformist meaning of socialism has in common with the Communist is that both of them think of “socialism” as a social order handed down to the mass of people *from above*.

The affinity becomes a good deal closer when we consider the growing number of reformist types who regard dictatorial collectivisms as being quite in order in other countries than their own—underdeveloped countries, for example. Analogous are the pro-Communists who apologize for every existing Communist dictatorship everywhere else but insist that in *their* country Communism will be idyllically democratic. The one is in the camp of the Western status quo; the other in the camp of the Eastern status quo. Independent Socialism is opposed to both sets of rulers. It represents the Third Camp.

Now this is a very unpopular position to take, and you will be well advised to stay away from it if you define “practical” political activity in terms of getting “in” with the centers of existing power. (This is a very American definition of success in politics, in a country where even gangsters and pimps can become respected pillars of society provided only that they are successful enough.) This view of practical politics is also one of the dividing lines between the different “kinds of socialism.”

Let us illustrate a fundamental difference with the following parable from the experiences of the civil-rights fight in various cities:

A “Freedom Now” campaign is shaking the city: It has organized defiant demonstrations, or sit-ins, or jail-ins. It is naturally deplored or denounced by all the “responsible” liberals in office, who regret having to rough up the demonstrators or sentence them. The movement is naturally led by militant radicals and sparked by an implicitly revolutionary attitude of contempt for the status quo and for its ideological cops. This does not endear them to the conservative Negro leaders, who cannot openly come out against the movement but who are queasily dissociated from it and lose no opportunity to stab it in the back.

In face of the “dangerous” state of feeling “whipped up” by the “irresponsible agitators,” the City Fathers and the business community decide that they had better stave off worse trouble by making concessions. Perhaps they set up a commission with a couple of Negroes on it; they co-opt a Negro or two on the city council; the Mayor gets a Negro secretary; some of the businesses put on a Negro as a salesman, or a junior executive, or what-not.

Now, note that this is done *because* of the “irresponsible agitation” which has been denounced, and that not a bit of this had been accomplished in ten years by the responsible, well-behaved, thoroughly legal and socially approved Negro leaders who are not denounced and deplored. The fight would therefore seem to be

very "practical," and so it is from our viewpoint.

But now, note further that the "good" Negroes who get named to the above-mentioned jobs are *not* those who led the movement which achieved these concessions. More characteristically they are Negroes who deplored the "irresponsible" and "illegal" tactics to which they owe their elevation. This figures, because the white power structure wants this kind as their black-skinned showpieces to mollify the "dangerous feeling." These types then conclude that *their* pursuance of "practical politics" has paid off (to them). If they had been too radical or militant, they would never have been eligible for their new eminence. They can now play the game just like their white brethren, using the simmering threat from below as their own lever to get ahead, telling themselves of course that some day they will be in position to Do Good for their people...

Here we have two fundamental versions of "practical politics." The civil-rights parable we have used is only an example. Many of the same labor leaders who today would faint over their Country Club cocktails or collapse in their Cadillacs if expected to lead a sit-down strike are the heads of unions which exist only because the workers in the plants and mills once "got out of control"—out of control of leaders like themselves.

This is a basic kind of choice you have to make in choosing your politics. This is the kind of choice you have to make in deciding whether Independent Socialism is for you or not.

7 AN EDUCATIONAL CENTER

As everybody knows, the socialist movement in America is weak and tiny. It is not "practical politics" in the opportunist sense. There is not even a mass *reformist* socialist movement in this country.

We conceive the present role of socialists to be two-fold: (1) to participate as militant activists in some sector of the political battlefield—for civil rights, for peace, as a left wing in the labor movement, etc.; and (2) to engage in socialist education, looking to the training of an informed cadre that learns and teaches the lessons gained from its experiences.

As far as the Independent Socialist Committee is concerned, its task is the second only. It is therefore not a membership organization or "action" organization, but, as a center for socialist education, it aspires to be a political-educational arm of the socialist left.

The Independent Socialist Committee has no affiliation with any socialist party or group, but we are interested in educational collaboration with socialists of any group or party who think along our lines. We do not consider ourselves a rival or competitor of any other group or party as an organization—only as a distinct political tendency.

Given the present situation, some who hold our Independent Socialist views maintain membership in the Socialist Party, whose heterogeneous membership ranges from the militant left to the decrepit right; some are unaffiliated; others are collaborators with one of the socialist magazines. Here and there unaffiliated and autonomous Independent Socialist clubs have been formed, in communities and campuses, for discussion or action, as local bodies. We are interested in maintaining loose ties for political education. What we propose to all co-thinkers is that they undertake to spread the Independent Socialist Committee's publications wherever they are active, as individuals or groups, and to correspond with us on the activities and problems of the socialist left.

What the Independent Socialist Committee proposes, above all, is a new *political identity*, distinct from both reformism and Communism.