

STATEMENT ON REGROUPMENT

By Jack Weinberg

For those of us who remain in the IS, there should be no question that some form of left regroupment is the only strategy that may be able to prevent the dissolution of the IS political network that we have all put so much into building. However, the proposal to project and organize for regroupment into a new broader revolutionary socialist organization is wrong. It won't work.

To be sure, the regroupment process must seek to include as many people as possible who maintain a revolutionary socialist perspective and world view. But, the remnants of the revolutionary left can be a part of a healthy regroupment process only if substantial numbers of fresh new forces are also drawn in. We must honestly conclude that the pool of existing revolutionary socialists (including the remnants of the IS) is too narrow, too disoriented, and carries too many battle scars to form the sole basis of a dynamic regroupment.

The EC sponsored regroupment proposal seeks to compete with Michael Harrington and DSOC by offering revolutionary socialism as an alternative pole to reformism. This approach means an orientation toward attracting those people who already see reform versus revolution as the decisive question. With very few exceptions, this means an orientation towards people whose politics have already been heavily influenced by some type of relationship to the organized revolutionary left.

Like it or not, the political basis for a revolutionary socialist trend of any real substance does not exist in American labor today. Few labor activists who are doing work of significance (including IS members) are actively propagating an explicit revolutionary socialist perspective among their co-workers or within their unions. The explicitly revolutionary side to their perspective only becomes active in their small circles --- if there. Who will be the open, public, labor spokespeople for this organization? Who will be the revolutionary socialist labor activists who play the same role that Winpisinger and Bluestone play for DSOC (even on a more modest scale)? It is not likely that many labor activists (other than already committed leftists) would join an organization centrally defined around questions that are contraversial, but that have little perceived meaning to their own lives and their own experiences. A few might be recruited to become the lionized darlings of the non-labor radical left. But this won't sustain an organization. It will only create split personalities.

If we hope to carry out a successful left regroupment, it must base itself on trends and events that are actively at work in the world. More particularly, its political basis must be something that can be openly articulated and fought for within the context of American labor today. In bits and pieces, members of the IS, together with other activists, have been doing pioneering work in the framework of a new emerging American labor radicalism. In so far as the IS has a positive reputation on the left, it is because of this work and because of our relationship to this process. Our regroupment perspective should seek to unify healthy remnants of the revolutionary left, labor activists, activists in the various progressive movements, and left intellectuals into a common organization that represents, articulates, and advances the politics of this emerging labor radicalism.

In brief, the political basis of the new organization should be the view that class antagonisms and conflict in the U.S. are heightening and will continue to sharpen. In the not too distant future, this will lead to the complete reshaping of American labor relations and the American political landscape. We will see serious efforts at union busting and at reversing the real living standards of unionized workers. In the same context there will be growing attacks on the gains of minorities, women, environmentalists, and so on, as capital goes on the offensive to maintain its profitability during a period of prolonged economic contraction. In doing so, it will be forced to sacrifice the post World War II pluralistic-liberal-consensus through which it governed during the period of the greatest economic expansion any nation on earth has ever seen. To effectively defend itself, labor will have to become much more activist and combative. It will need to ally itself with other progressive forces in society--the movements of minorities, women, environmentalists, etc.---and this alliance must be developed into a political party, a labor party.

At present, questions of class do not sharply polarize American politics. People with differing class backgrounds, perspectives, and commitments can coexist within the various progressive movements. For example inside the black movement, some leaders (for example, Hooks) seek an alliance with big business, while others, (Conyers) are committed to the labor/liberal orbit. Similar divisions--focussing on real differences of policy--exist in every progressive movement. But at present these issues are not sharply enough posed to polarize or split the movements. However, as class antagonisms in America heighten, these movements will be split along class political lines. For example, what will happen when prestigious black community leaders, feminists, or environmentalists come to the aid of union-busting efforts?

The organization we should try to build should be a membership organization of activists in the labor and progressive movements. It should attempt to develop joint strategies and perspectives and should work together to carry them out. It should see as a major commitment the development of the self-awareness, self-activity, and political development of the ranks, and it should project and develop the understanding that all political questions should be viewed **from** class perspectives.

Its members in labor should seek to strengthen their own influence and the influence of the organization's ideas in their workplaces and unions. Activists in the progressive movements should be trying to extend and deepen the relations between those movements and labor. This means supporting and strengthening labor-oriented wings and politics within these movements as well as building a base for these movements within the ranks of labor. Our job is not to sharpen class antagonisms within progressive movements--events will do this themselves. Rather, we should take advantage of the openness towards a labor orientation that now exists within progressive movements and should build on that.

The central idea that ties it all together for us is labor politics and a labor party. It is the same sharpening class antagonisms that will make the labor party a viable perspective that will also eventually split the various progressive movements. How that split breaks and what forces will then be organized in favor of a labor party will depend on political work done between now and then. Besides the activities of its individual members, the organization would also hold public forums, discussions, do education, distribute literature, and so on--all aimed at creating a political education current committed to labor politics and a labor perspective.

The first step toward launching such a regrouped organization is the drafting of a political statement that 1) presents an analysis of political and economic trends at work today; 2) surveys the states of labor, the progressive movements, and the left, and projects what effects political and economic trends will have on them and on the overall political process; 3) indicates the general line of development required for the most progressive possible outcome of the trends at work, and outlines a program of tasks for labor activists and activists in the various progressive movements, based on the needs of those movements; and 4) calls for the formation of a new organization of activists who generally agree with this analysis, and who agree to work together to advance its general perspectives and program.

The central ideas tying this statement together are labor politics, the commitment to the development of a labor party uniting organized labor and the various progressive movements, and the urgent need to begin now working to foster and encourage this development. The statement should avoid labelling the organization (socialist, liberal, populist, etc.). Programmatically, however, it should take as its starting point the real needs of labor, the progressive movements, and the vast majority of American people. It should attack the placing of the demands of private profit over the demands of human need. It should not shy away from the fact that many of the most serious problems now facing the American people cannot be solved by programs that are compatible with the basic interests of big capital.

This statement should be circulated as a draft, for discussion purposes. We should encourage and/or organize discussions of the statement by activists in various unions, in various movements, and by radicals. We should be asking for responses, amendments, or alternative drafts, and should encourage activists to develop supplementary statements developing the ideas in more detail in relationship to their own unions or movement. We should announce that on the formation of such an organization the IS will dissolve and encourage all its members to join the new organization. Some members of the IS, and others, may publish a revolutionary socialist journal or magazine, but they will not maintain a shadow organization, or faction, in the new organization.

We should be seeking activists and intellectuals, individually, and in groups, to declare themselves for the formation of this organization. We should explore possible relations with Commoner's Citizens' Party. We should encourage those committed to this organization to begin working together immediately. No time-table can now be set for launching the organization. That must wait until sufficiently broad support and leadership exists--so that there is no question that we are merely attempting to launch an IS front (like the RCP's Workers' Organization, TUAD, etc.).

We should propose to LERP that it have a special relationship to the new organization, similar to the relationship of various research and educational think tanks to the Democratic and Republican Parties. We should encourage LERP to expand its resources, putting more of its efforts into exploring, from labor's viewpoint, political questions facing American society--and to develop regular reporting on the relations between organized labor and the progressive movements; as well as reportage on developments toward labor's own political party.