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Rough Draft-not for publication or distribution

What follows are notes motivating a form of political discussion and the development of a new journal as a vehicle for facilitating that discussion.

The rough draft of the document by Mark and Mike U. begins a discussion over perspectives in the organization that is long overdue. Without regard to its merits, the framework in which the discussion develops could well prejudice its outcome. This draft is aimed at establishing an overview of the problem and groundrules for a discussion that could, unlike so many fights of the past, actually be positive and instructive. Though the form of the debate is determined by its subject—our relationship to the left in DSOC—its content is the development of revolutionary perspectives for ourselves and the revolutionary left in general.

The DSOC discussion arises in the context of severe working class defeats and a concomitant collapse of perspectives for the entire revolutionary left. As such, it ought not be surprising that DSOC becomes the context in which a fundamental discussion of political perspectives arises. Any attempt to resolve a crisis of revolutionary politics in a knee-jerk fashion because the specific choice of subject runs counter to IS orthodoxy runs the risk of short-circuiting a necessary process that can have a sound effect on the organization and the larger left in general. To declare a "majority line" on the discussion, as has been bruted about, to rally the members in defense of Western Civilization as we are all much too good at doing, may win a fight, but it won't resolve a political impasse facing the entire revolutionary left. To declare a majority line is to treat this in a rather short-sighted fashion, mistaking form for content, teaching people, ourselves included, precious little in the process.

These notes are not meant to gain more time for a position I support, but to frame a necessary discussion. Lets be clear—I do not support Mark/Mike U (henceforth known as Mark-sorry Mike) position as put forth in his initial draft, because it represents an organizational rather than a political response to the crisis of revolutionary politics—that this crisis will continue whether we are in DSOC or not, and that its resolution is critical. As I am not nearly as star-struck as is Mark by DSOC's seeming success, the challenge from DSOC does not seem so timely that joining it becomes the question. There are other reasons for this lack of ardor, but it strikes me that their ^(DSOC's) support for a labor/socialist wing in the Democratic party (a position Mark doesn't support—making his position even more problematic) and a general, non-sectarian

(2)

call for regroupment in a unified socialist organization demands we have a coherent, comradely response. Can we answer such? The PC can hothouse a "position", for what its worth, but to oppose an open call for regroupment demands that we offer an equally non-sectarian political alternative—something in the spirit of "Join Us-You Have a Choice!" To fashion that choice requires first of all an open and frank exchange of views in which everyone learns something about the real pressures in American politics that lead to ~~certain~~ forms of ~~accomodation~~, as well as ~~alleged~~ forms of resisting or surmounting them. Such a discussion would be exhaustive, though it need not be interminable, or detract markedly from other work. It can be comradely (this is admittedly tough—they didn't teach that one in IS school) and aimed at a higher integration than existed for any position(s) before.

Realistically, we have not had satisfactory discussions on a national level since the '76 convention, and I can be corrected on how satisfactory those were; but the bottom line was, they reflected the reality of our work and an earlier perspective being tested in the class. THE ISO split, though necessary, produced a freak show on one hand and a group (though small,) with a realistic assessment of its tasks, if an inflated idea of how easily they might be overcome. The ISO split, however, taught us nothing. (I remember the earlier RSL expulsion, also no education—a comrade who shall remain nameless but now wants to join DSOC told me it was useful because he ^{finally} ~~got~~ to use his 46 volumes of the collected Lenin—an embarrassment of riches, I thought) It was only when our debates were around real questions that confronted activists in their work—questions of long as well as short term resolution that had two different possible outcomes, rather than a burned-out or ultra-left fantasy, that the resolutions were accepted or that we learned anything collectively.

Our collective learning experiences are dated, the revolutionary lefts perspectives have dissolved, and the world is raising questions that appear to some as old (the Democratic Party[?]-Draper resolved that in 1957!) but will be confronted anew. Yet instead of a fresh face for the new tasks, there is much heavy breathing about independent politics and aspersions about people's backbones (or brains in the other case—I plead guilty here). The one example of interest in Independent Politics was shared by only a minority of us—the lessons of which are almost a year old. Both Enid and I, as one example, were on the Executive committee of the Citizens party, an experier that has largely remained private, despite the organizations overarching

(5)

interest in Independent Politics. The point is, with the exception of those of us laid off, or Professional ^{members}, interest in the Citizens Party, the only real Independent politics in a decade, was minimal because in reality it did not fit into the ongoing work of comrades. No amount of retrospective fetishizing will make it fit. Independent politics has not been real for the IS. Whether it can be is precisely the province of such a discussion, but people must be committed to seeing it through, and not pretend there are closed questions that challenge a living tradition of IS politics.

When discussions were raised in the past (Zeluck, etc) ad nauseum, they were in the context of obfuscating and confounding a series of perspectives we believed to be very much on. No one believes that now. Thus no one should fear these discussions or fear a return to a circle mentality. To develop a **revolutionary socialist** organization or trend in contradistinction to a rising socialist ~~democratic~~ formation demands we take exhaustive steps to resolve a common theoretical/political impasse not of our making. Every previous split was ^{a move} away from activism toward a comforting circle. The DSOC-Democratic thrust is bequiling precisely because it allows for a degree of activist politics in the real world. This is DSOC's strength-I believe their crisis will come when their perspectives collide with the cold hard world, but it will take time, and we can not ^{simply} circle the wagons ^{until} before that happens. What can we do? I have some ideas, but they can only be meaningful in an active dialogue with the rest of the collapsed left around shared problems. Otherwise, as SOCIALISTS- we join the dustbin of history-along with Barbara, Cal and the rest of the refuse of our generation.

(more here)

Motivation for a new Journal

A public journal, with manpower and frequency (2-3 issues per year) to be determined by the center, ~~#####~~ rather than Changes or a forthcoming bulletin, is the appropriate vehicle for this discussion for the following reasons:

1) a journal, professionally produced and ready to be used outside the organization, would pressure the discussion to be clear-even polished, and serve by its distribution to echo or anticipate many of the arguments everyone on the left is asking. We are not alone in this ambivalence-caught between the impasse of our class and the seeming success of DSOC-and could profitably invite selective^{ed} outside forces into a discussion.

2) a bulletin may put forward positions starkly, but not necessarily clearly. That is both its strength/weakness. People can think aloud and make mistakes, but it rarely serves the function of clearing the air or facilitating collaboration. In fights, bulletins serve to firm^{up} people up, they rarely play an educative role.

3) Changes was based on a different premise-a regroupment of the Rev. left around its own best work. This must be continued, but, as argued below, the range of topics a journal would cover appear too specialized and long-range for Changes-~~if ##### then~~ (more here)

4) There may be a fear, among those who agree with the extensive discussion argument, of nevertheless "airing our dirty laundry in public." Rather, we should think of a public journal as a clean-up attempt after a natural disaster, sort of a clean-up after the Reaganite Mt St Helens in which everyone's underwear is a tad smudged.

The title can be something akin to "Working Papers on Labor Politics," or having the words Socialism and Democracy appear, ^{as well,} the thrust to suggest provisional ideas on common problems.

The idea of an organization sponsoring an open journal ought not be so strange-the worst hack crap is produced by line periodicals, while some of the best new thinking is going on in periodicals whose politics are removed from us, but allow a lee-way for some pretty challenging stuff (Radical History Review, New Left Review of the last 5 years, Socialist Review of the last two years, Working Papers for a New Society (guess we can't use that title after all), ~~#####~~ even the new periodical Democracy has printed some terrific critiques of Reagonomics.) The fact is, we have the brains and talent to put out a quality product if we only have the faith that these are not closed questions, but require an open hearing.

Questions such a journal, in the context of the above discussion, would address include:

1-Is Democratic party work defensible as a tactical extension of other work? We have always denied this was so, and we may again, but no attention is given to the actual pressures in the real world that determine such tactical choices, or alternately, given an activist orientation, how to withstand such pressures. Too many horror stories pass for analysis ("Imagine, Miriam Balanoff isn't raising pro-choice arguments in her campaign,"-and I wrote that too!) In fact, given the secret oral tradition of the IS, the "slippery slope to hell," combines with "who stole the chairs" as a large part of the inherited traditions on all questions that have not been timely in the last decade. The tactical question is now, unlike in all but isolated situations that could be ignored, a question of moment, and the organization had better be prepared, regardless of its conclusions, to offer a fairly sophisticated and comradely response-the old crap will only hang us! Thus, situating the question of tactics in the present context and knowing what we know about the political world is healthier than pouring over whether Willoughby Abner (the poor man) betrayed his class. As such, the question of tactical support of Democrats, even urging CLC's and locals to initiate Democratic runs, ~~requires~~ requires first of all a patient and thorough discussion of tactics.

2-What are the differences between the DSOC vision and strategy of a realigned pro-labor DP and our conceptions of Independent Labor formations. This is by ^{means} self-evident, though the orthodoxy built a China wall between them; I suspect there are confusions on all sides, differences and areas where the biggest IS capitulators into DSOC would surprisingly agree with the hardest abstentionist

3-Following from this, what are the ^{historical + current} justifications of separate tendencies and separate organizations? In Gary, for example, the demise of IS as a separate entity was not based on incorrect ideas or a lack of spine, but our inability to give clear responses to calls for collaboration (first and briefly by the Balanoff forces in local primaries) but more importantly, how and why to continue distinguishing ourselves from our closest allies-allies who had a good deal to teach us, and of whom the things we could teach them needn't justify a separate organization.

4-What is the basis of regroupment internationally? It was once a source of pride that we were comrades of an aggressive, seemingly successful British party with an influence in its own class. Is there then a sense down the road of such developments that can be directly related to? The SWP has discovered Havana Dreaming, the British SWP has created a joke organization in its IS Tendency. DSOC can answer this question credibly and unambiguously-their comrades are the Bennite left in Britain, the ruling Government in France, and a dominant wing of the Italian CP-not bad for starters, and something that would make them appear impressive to people new to the left. In truth, we can not ~~house~~ house an International, but we can do better than ~~for~~ Chris Harmon's piece in Changes-second-guessing the Left as incorrect after the fact. That is no explanation of the American left's collapse; it is no less insulting and sectarian as an explanation of the European debacle.

5-How do we evaluate the development of populist formations around energy/utility issues (CLEC, NCUE, the CA groups, ACORN) These people are close to DSOC's conceptions, if so far hedging their bets on DSOC itself.

6-Rather than hard and fast positions, symposiums involving IS/non-IS comrades ^around issues of mutual concern. These people may be harder on DSOC than we.

(6)

One final point-the journal is a vehicle aimed at facilitating the discussion suggested above; it is not conceived as an end ~~in itself~~ in itself or a simple replacement for Changes. If comrades believe Changes ~~##~~ can be such a vehicle, obviating the problems of another periodical, then well and good, but I doubt it. The audience for such a discussion is smaller and more self-selected, than the broader Changes readership. But the ~~discussion-honest, far-ranging,~~ and clear is critical.

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one suggestion could be every quarterly issue of Changes held for discussion, or a "Discussion" section of each issue-though
still
my first preference would be a separate journal
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