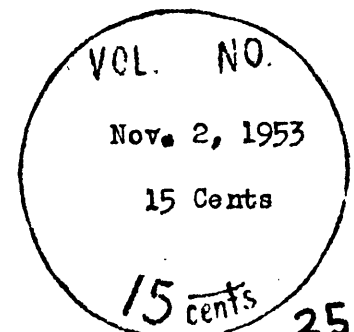


# FORUM

Discussion & Information Bulletin  
of the Independent Socialist League

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TWO COMRADES IN SEARCH OF A RIGHT-WING PROGRAM

Nobody in his senses, in the ISL, believes that we have all the answers to the problem of how to intervene as socialists in the process of pushing the labor movement to independent political action and a labor party. There is an immense amount of room for proposals and discussion on tactics and policy in this effort. An elementary condition for such proposals should be that they be at least clearly stated -- however tentatively. If it is just a matter of kicking around some ideas, or of a mood or frame of mind, that has a place in discussion too -- since no one can demand that a comrade come forth with a full-blown idea right off -- but then it should be equally clear that this is what is in question.

Comrades Magnus and Beilas sound as if they are proposing something new, fresh and different, which is a thing devoutly to be wished. What their idea is, however, is more obscure, now that they have "clarified" their point, than it was before.

In LABOR ACTION for September 29, 1952, a letter signed by these two comrades appeared which seemed to be raising a new proposal -- new for us, that is. In this letter, after some thoughts on the general problem, they made the following suggestion:

"At any rate, it appears that LABOR ACTION, as a result of the events at the Democratic convention and afterward, should be impelled into a reconsideration of its support to labor candidates in Democratic primaries running against reactionary machine politicians (as in the Willoughby Abner case), and perhaps even to extend this support to all primaries where the Democratic labor-liberal bloc confronts the right wing for control of the party." (My emphasis.)

This was the only conclusion for policy in the letter. It was, as we see, tentatively suggested, with a "perhaps," which was duly noted in LABOR ACTION's editorial comment on the letter.

The tentative suggestion, with its "perhaps" and all, seemed fairly clear.

First of all, the comrades proposed "reconsideration" of the League's rejection of the Willoughby Abner policy, that is, the policy of supporting labor candidates within the Democratic primaries. This they proposed without a "perhaps."

Secondly, however, the "new" idea they suggested is that we have "perhaps even to extend this support" to...other than labor candidates in Democratic primaries, specifically, apparently, to candidates of "the Democratic labor-liberal bloc." What is this "extension?" Well, it too had come in for some discussion during the Abner-policy dispute. In fact, the opponents of this policy had challenging asked its supporters why (by their course of reasoning) they were unwilling to extend their support of an Abner, who was a labor man running in the Democratic primaries, to other Fair Dealers in the primaries who were not labor men but who were supported by labor as "friends of labor" -- labor-supported Fair Dealers, Trumanites. Unanimously, the supporters of the Abner policy decried any attempt to foist this thought upon them.

Now, in the last issue of FORUM, Comrades Magnus and Beilas have a reply to LABOR ACTION's editorial comment, and they claim to have been misinterpreted. In fact they write: "No place in our letter in LABOR ACTION did we even hint at supporting the 'Fair Dealers' as Draper suggests in his lengthy answer

to our letter," and they deny that they advocate support to "liberal Democratic candidates against right-wing Democratic candidates."

Very good. But we are still in the dark about one thing: what was this "extension" of the Abner policy which we should "perhaps" make? How does it differ from the Abner policy itself? Who else is to be supported ("perhaps") besides labor candidates? Did Comrades Magnus and Beilas actually have a thought in mind in writing those words, or was the whole thing a mistake?

We do not ask this in order to press these two fine comrades to the wall, for if they are merely in the process of "thinking aloud," why, by all means, let them think. But then they should not write polemical replies in which they sound as if they are replying to the editorial comment, while as a matter of fact they forget the only passage of their letter which seemed to put forward a "new and fresh" idea.

We have not the slightest objection or reproach that Magnus-Beilas have dropped mention of their little "extension" in their FORUM article. Only -- they are not helping anybody's meditation on the problem when they quietly forget that the LABOR ACTION editorial comment, which they are now polemizing against, was initiated by a suggested proposal which they no longer mention.

They would do better for themselves, and for the thinking of the League, if they did not look for polemical whipping-boys, but instead tried to think out what they have to say, and then say it in as positive terms as possible.

Their FORUM article is still puzzling. At its close they write: "We did not, and do not, intend to push these ideas as courses of action until after the coming elections and that for several good reasons."

What "courses of action?"

The only course of action mentioned in their FORUM article is the Abner policy, the line of urging and supporting labor candidates in Democratic primaries. As everybody knows, this policy has already been pushed as a course of action in the League, and very vigorously indeed -- for a whole year or more prior to the last convention. Magnus-Beilas were not exactly being models of self-restraint when they announced that they "did not, and do not, intend to" push it all over again, after it had been defeated following a year-long discussion. In fact, the "course of action" on which they are exercising this self-restraint can hardly be merely the Abner line, can it? As mentioned, it is puzzling. Again, they sound as if they have a new line to present, but it is a risky thing indeed to venture to pick it out.

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But there is something percolating in their thinking, and (taking my very life in my hands) I dare to guess that it is not merely a "reconsideration" of the Abner line. That vegetable is a bit wilted this season. In any case, if Comrades Magnus-Beilas really do want to "reconsider" the Abner line, they ought to take their task seriously and discuss (for example) whether Abner's own experience has pushed him further away or closer to independent political action...

While admitting my lack of success in fathoming the Beilas-Magnus proposal (the one which they are restraining themselves from pressing) I do want to give them a word of advice in their announced project of asking stimulating questions for the discussion of the League.

It is this: Do not get into the deplorable frame of mind where you cannot see the

difference between (a) answers, and (b) answers which you agree with.

There is a real difference between the two, honestly. Yet there is more than one case history I have observed, including a rather recent one, where a comrade gets into the rut of denouncing (say) LABOR ACTION for not "answering" a problem when what he really means is merely that he doesn't consider the ISL line a sufficient answer, that is, he doesn't agree with it.

Comrades Magnus-Beilas show advanced signs of this malady. Consider for example, the following passage.

The two excellent comrades denounce the "rigid criterion" of "the present approach of the ISL," because the ISL has "one fixed and unalterable criterion -- is this, or is this not, an organizational move out of the Democratic Party, toward the setting up of a labor party? If it is, we applaud; if it is not, we condemn it or ignore it." That's bad, they think.

Their first example of "rigid criterion" is a reference to "Jason's articles on the UAW in Michigan," unexplained at this point. Further down we find no reasoned discussion of Jason's articles, but the following:

"The fact is, of course, that the UAW has taken over the Democratic Party machinery in Michigan. This is attested to by Jason who can only fulminate against this fact, propping up his lack of any positive orientation toward this situation with a metaphysical theory of how the UAW must become tools of the bourgeoisie in the process."

How responsible a discussion this is of Jason's articles on the UAW's disastrous course in political action!

Then Magnus-Beilas denounce the same hapless Jason for telling the UAW, "You see, we warned you about the evil effects of capturing the Party; get out and form a labor party!" Their sole comment is "This, it seems to us, is not Marxism."

Well, that does for Jason, the first example of "rigid criterion." It appears that Jason's crime is that he utilizes the UAW's record in political action to advocate their break with the Democrats to form a labor party! This, to Magnus-Beilas, is not a "positive orientation." Translated into English, this means they want something different. What, exactly? Well, as we have seen, they are very self-restrained about letting this out. Meanwhile, before deciding to do so, or perhaps before knowing exactly what they want to do, it is sufficient for the nonce to denounce Jason for propagandizing for a labor party.

Perhaps they think that Jason's main theme in LABOR ACTION should have been to raise the slogan "Walter Reuther for governor?" In the first place, they then should have said so, somewhere in the course of this attack on Jason, just so the peasants might understand what they are talking about. In the second place, not even the supporters of the Abner line ever told us that they proposed that the main line of propaganda in LABOR ACTION be, not for a labor-party break (which is the condemned "rigid criterion") but rather the universalization of the Abner tactic. In the third place, are Magnus-Beilas proposing that we raise such slogans for propaganda regardless of whether there is any real move in that direction or not? In the discussion on the Abner tactic, its supporters kept swearing that they viewed it as an exceptional policy in special situations where the problem was put before us. If Magnus-Beilas disagree with this, that is, with the other supporters of the Abner tactic, then at least we ought to find out; it would help.

The second example of "rigid criterion" is something of a whopper. Here it is:

"Another example is the silence of LABOR ACTION on the conflict at the Chicago convention..."

It is unbelievable, but it is there. In the issue devoted to the Democratic convention (August 4), two front-page articles discussed the conflicts at the convention in detail. One, by Gordon Haskell, thoroughly analyzed the constitution, importance, numbers, policy, strategy, and results of the labor bloc at the convention at some length. The second, by Mary Bell, concentrated on the civil-rights fight there. Both long articles were about nothing else but the conflicts at the Democratic convention, naturally centering around the role played by the labor-liberal bloc.

From Magnus-Beilas' pen comes the winged summary of these two articles: "the silence of LABOR ACTION on the conflict at the Chicago convention" -- silence, mind you! If we exercised Magnus-Beilas' freedom in using language we would call this "disloyal" at the very least, since that is the polite term these models of loyalty hurl at Comrade Saul Berg, who criticized them. But we understand Comrade Magnus and Beilas: it's a matter of semantics; when you disagree with a critic, and when you are loath to discuss what he actually writes, you use the code-word: "So-and-so has said 'not a real, thoughtful word' on the question" and that's that.

It is a system with Magnus-Beilas. Earlier they had written complaining that LABOR ACTION should "say something" about the attempt to oust the Southern bloc at the convention, referring to the "loyalty" fight. Both LABOR ACTION articles had discussed this fight, at some length in toto, but presumably not to their satisfaction. This, by definition, constitutes saying nothing. It relieves them of the task of saying anything themselves about the non-existent analysis which filled some LA columns.

It is a system: On page 10 of their article they write:

"We asked the question: 'What is the relationship of the growth of this labor-liberal bloc to the development of a labor party in America, and what is the task of labor-party supporters vis-a-vis that bloc?'...Comrades who wish to settle this question will find themselves unable to do so unless they address themselves to it. So far no one has done so."

"So far no one has done so," except, of course, Magnus and Beilas. What our various resolutions and LABOR ACTION articles on the subject are about, god alone knows. What Shachtman's article in the NI, on the elections, was about, if it did not center about this question, is a mystery. What the editorial comment in LABOR ACTION, on the Magnus-Beilas letter, was about, is -- it goes without saying -- beyond comprehension. No one has even addressed himself to this question, which Magnus-Beilas are now doing us the service of posing, just as if there was any other question about labor political action which we are interested in.

Magnus and Beilas are quite unable to recognize that we addressed ourselves to this question, which they have revealed to us, in some years of taking up the question of policy in and toward the PAC; in years-long discussions on labor party policy in every aspect; in, come to think of it, the Abner discussion itself. (It appears that not even the supporters of the Abner tactic were addressing themselves to The Question.)

It is with some truth that the two comrades write that "we believe that the League's policy is somehow out of focus on this question." Ordinarily, when a picture is out of focus, the trouble is sought in the viewing eye or lens. If the League's policy is out of focus in the eyes of our two comrades, they might consider the possibility. It may serve to explain their astigmatic view of Jason, Haskell, Bell, etc.

We have seen how they denounce Jason for counterposing a labor-party break to the UAW policy. Tie that up with their statement elsewhere: "In terms of the development toward a labor party, this means that we socialists cannot counterpose our ideas as to how to initiate and organize a 'pure' labor party against the forward moves of the liberal-labor bloc."

There indeed is a statement made to order for "misinterpretation," a fate which Magnus-Beilas simply invite all over the place. The uninformed reader, who is not aware of the code used by those comrades, would think this meant that we cannot "counterpose" our proposal for a labor party to the policy of the liberal-labor bloc. Haven't they denounced Jason for doing just that?

But the code is not that simple. They are talking about our counterposing a "pure" labor party, whatever that is. This snide adjective is simply "disloyal" (for sense of disloyal, see remarks above). We do not counterpose a "pure" labor party to anything. All we want, to begin with, is an independent labor party, which is sure as hell to be very impure. The "pure" stuff is thrown in by Magnus-Beilas, not out of "disloyalty" or sheer nastiness, but because they cannot bring themselves to write down just what is percolating through their thinking. They make believe that they are merely denouncing propaganda for a "pure" labor party, though no one mentions any such thing. It relieves the conscience.

Secondly, they have covered themselves (they think) by writing that we cannot counterpose that "pure" labor party "against the forward moves of the liberal-labor bloc." Heaven forbid that we should "counterpose" anything against any "forward" moves. We applaud "forward moves" and demand them still forwarder. For example: the AFL makes a "forward move" of a sort by getting into politics as an organization to the extent of endorsing a candidate in the election. We explained in LABOR ACTION the sense in which this was a "progressive" development. We naturally also explained why we did not support their endorsement of Stevenson. Having noted and even applauded this "forward move" by the AFL, do we or do we not "counterpose" independent politics to their endorsement of Stevenson? Of course, we do. But someone who "misinterpreted" Magnus-Beilas might be puzzled.

It's that system of code-words. On page 10, Magnus-Beilas refer to "the statement in LABOR ACTION which 'supports' the AFL endorsement of Stevenson." Naturally, LABOR ACTION said nothing about "supporting" the AFL endorsement of Stevenson, not even with quotation marks around "support." The two comrades have invented a new term: "support" as distinct from support. We can all make an attempt to understand what they mean, as they explain it, but we also suggest an attempt to understand why they do this.

To get an idea, turn to the other case in which they use this new term "support," which is not the same as support. They write: "we wish to closely analyze this Democratic labor-liberal bloc and 'support' it in some positive way..."

We suggest that for Magnus-Beilas this quotation-marked "support" represents their out-of-focus method of saying that they would like to find a way to support the Democratic Fair Deal-labor bloc without compromising the principles they hold. That they cannot find such a way is their dilemma, and it is the question which they present to the League, not the one which they put down in words.

Naturally, this is a "misinterpretation" and they will indignantly deny that they mean it. And I will believe them when they say they do not mean it, for if they did they would not beat around so many bushes. But that is, for all that, the policy-problem which is percolating through their thinking.

They cannot fit in with their other ideas, and so they find present ISL policy "too neat." They cannot see a way to it which does not abandon the socialist approach, and so they find present ISL policy "rigid." They cannot get this policy in focus with their other ideas, and so they find ISL policy "out of focus." They do not find LABOR ACTION making allowances for this thought in its own line, and so the amazing "silence" in LABOR ACTION that they find is "silence" on the way to "support" the Fair Deal laborites' political-action policy.

We began this article with the fullest intention of taking up the rest of Magnus-Beilas' discussion in detail. It is perfectly futile to do so, however. In paragraph after paragraph of their coded discussion, we would merely be showing what we have already shown.

Comrades Magnus and Beilas are groping for a right-wing position on the problem of political action, and their request that the League take up their ideas in discussion (as "so far no one has done") is a request that someone please provide them with such a right-wing position which will hold up. It is, no doubt, a perfectly legitimate plea. I have not the slightest intention of derogating their effort; I am merely trying to explain them to themselves -- and other comrades.

We have seen other comrades start groping in this manner, and at some point or other they will have to think it through for themselves. As I have already said, they will speed up the process if they will stop polemizing against straw men and ask themselves where they are headed for, just what is "out of focus" for them.

Comrade Magnus, to my mind, is going through the same throes on the war question, as evidenced by his article in a previous issue of FORUM. He is groping for a position. Without discussing the war question here, I note that the sharp edge of his "Remarks on the War Question" is turned toward a big polemic against "sectarianism" on the question, as if "ultra-leftism" is the main danger in the ISL on war: "Even Shachtman is influenced by the sectarianism still prevalent in the ISL..."-- even Shachtman, but by god not Magnus. He polemizes against "abstentionism," which is a typical code-word of his that would deserve some translation. He denounces "conservatism" and "traditionalism," in our organization which is under the murderous pressure of social-patriotic moods. He cusses out "sectarian blindness," "ultra-leftism," and "pacifism" (to which "the slightest concession...would be disastrous," he says, in the U. S. in 1953).

Yes, I know that social-patriotic pressure among some tends to produce, as its reaction, a sectarianism among others which, in turn, only further deepens social-patriotic moods. I know, further, that this is indeed happening to some extent, and this is the kernel of truth upon which Magnus' approach in the article is pegged. But when Magnus looks at the ISL and sees "sectarianism" so

prevalent that "even Shachtman" is its hapless victim, I have to wonder...

When the Teton mountains were discovered by French explorers, they were so named because their shape reminded the men, long from home, of "little breasts," which is the source of the name. The modern tourist usually views the Tetons from Jackson Hole on the east side, and when he reads about that little etymological tale, he wonders, because the mountains do not look like that to him at all. The explanation is simple: the French explorers came upon the Tetons from the west....

Roughly, that is also why Magnus and Beilas have such a different picture of the ISL and its policy, and that is the difference in their focus. They are tending to view it from so much further right. Or shall we say, from a bit too far West?

Spring, 1953

Hal Draper



METHODOLOGY AND THE WAR QUESTION

Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to show that many of our self-imposed restrictions on the war question are both incorrect and arbitrary. An attempt is made to show the origin and basis of these limiting ideas and maxims. This is done against a background of a World War III whose time, nature and circumstances can be predicted to only a limited extent, and whose sub-events even less so.

The writer believes that the problems discussed are not the concern of only a few politicals, but are inherent in the situation as we are now able to perceive it. Thus questions and discussion on these and similar problems are bound to arise as a result of the initiation of any general war discussion anywhere. These problems cannot be dealt with while we continue to support formulations which leave no room for possibilities and adjustments. Until these formulations are revised, the many recent and commendable attempts to deal with issues which may arise in the next war will only deepen the contradictions between practice (still, happily, on paper) and theory.

In the opinion of the writer, no alteration of our present third-camp position is indicated by what amounts to a broadening of our horizon by inclusion of some distant but insistent possibilities; but until we have made room for these in our theory, we will be forced time and again into an untenable position.

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A discussion of a socialist position on war, for today, cannot be termed a discussion of "the" war. A thorough discussion would have to include:

- 1- A discussion of current events and problems,\* with a view towards making concrete decisions;
- 2- An attempt to evaluate the probable nature or character of the next war, together with its likely specific manifestations, with a view towards elaborating a general policy;
- 3- An attempt to set the limits of permissibility for socialist maneuvering, particularly in the event of a world war, considering the real possibilities, or the imponderabilities of the situation.

For our present purposes, it is most profitable to begin with a discussion of the prevalent theory of the movement, insofar as it sets the limits of socialist policy in a coming war. Our socialist movement has often formulated its ideas on specific wars as though for all time. Many such formulations, derived from past wars, are with us today. The inappropriateness of the conclusions, injunctions, and limitations imposed by such theory may be demonstrated the consideration of concrete cases.

However, since it is the contention of this article that the mistaken conclusions flow directly from a false methodology, bear with us while we contrast two conflicting methodologies of the movement:

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\* Not the subject of this article.

A method of reasoning which our movement has often rejected, but which it often follows in arriving at a war position, proceeds as follows:

- 1- State the class character of the states in the war.
- 2- Describe or state the broad aims of the war in terms of the desires or interests of the ruling classes, or the results of the war given the continued and successful rule of these classes.
- 3- Support or oppose the war in line with our support or opposition to the basic war aims of the ruling classes.

In the past, our movement has often been saved from incorrect war positions by departing radically from such reasoning, without, however, making the rejection of such reasoning sufficiently explicit. In rejecting it in the past, we tended to set up what seemed to be a rival but parallel edifice. At any rate, we are faced today, in the ISL, with a type of logic on the war question which still proceeds from step one to step three, with perhaps a slight halt in between.

In departing from this pseudo-Marxist reasoning in the past, particularly in the case of the Spanish civil war and the Russo-Finnish war, the reasoning seemed to follow these lines:

- 1- Determine what to us is the central issue of the war. (For example, continuation of the struggle for democratic rights in Spain; Russian expansionism in 1939.)
- 2- Describe the actions or aims of the states primarily in relation to these current central issues or war aims. (The class character of the state reasoning would have led us to fatally incorrect conclusions in the cases just cited.\*)
- 3- Describe or label the nature of the war in relation to the role of these states on these central issues; and support or oppose these states on the basis of their role.

So far, so good, except for the dangers inherent in the labelling itself, and which in the cases mentioned, it seems to me, were more than potential. While this is an interpretation of what happened:

- 4- The label resulting from the evaluation of the issue (a subjective one, in a sense) was manipulated on an equivalent level with terms indicating class character. Democratic, or expansionist ("issue" terms) were counterposed to such terms as capitalist, or working-class. The break with the methodology of the pseudo-Leninists did not become sufficiently clear.

In the case of the Spanish civil war, the war was described as democratic (even a "war for democracy") in spite of the capitalist character of the state, and the imperialist aims of this state.\*\* This approach to a war, or any other living problem, is as it should be: what is most important in the situation should be determined by the real interests of the people involved, nationally and internationally. IN MANY CASES THE REAL ISSUES WILL SEEM TO FLOW FROM THE

\* Russia was still regarded as a degenerated workers' state at that time, but was not supported in the war.

\*\* I am concerned here primarily with methodology.

BROADEST STATEMENTS OF HISTORICAL ISSUES, AND CHARACTERIZATIONS OF PARTICIPATING FORCES; BUT IN MANY CASES THEY WILL NOT, and the current situational issues may, for days or years, be among the crucial historical ones.

Having thus lost a false theoretical guide, let us continue with our attempt to set the limits of socialist permissibility during the next war by considering one specific problem, raised in fairly concrete form by Robert Magnus in Forum, Jan. 1953:

"Taking our point of departure from 'Bevanism,' the continuous leftward socialistic developments in the B.L.P.....what should be the left socialist attitude toward the class struggle, the military budget, the political struggle against Toryism, foreign policy, etc., etc., in England? Is there any comrade in the ISL who would suggest carrying on the class struggle regardless of the military consequences?"

and, later:

"Despite Bevan's 'opposition' to the war trends, there is no reason to believe that he will not, for the great part, continue in the 'national' traditions of British laborism. That is, Bevanism will carry out, no matter with what misgivings and reluctance, the role of junior partner in the U.S. war bloc."

Even the above situation is not completely enough described to give an answer as to the main issue in Britain's participation in the war. We do not know the conditions under which Bevanism came to power, how long the war has been going on, the state of the military front, the possible war weariness of the population, or the extent to which atomic weapons are being used, for example. However, since for this discussion we are interested in the limits of the situation, we have not the slightest hesitation in saying that, IF THE OVERRUNNING OF ENGLAND BY THE STALINIST ARMIES WERE A REAL AND URGENT POSSIBILITY, THE SOCIALIST VANGUARD IN ENGLAND SHOULD CONSIDER MILITARY SUPPORT TO THE WAR.\* The most important issue in the war, to the working class as a whole and to the socialist vanguard, would be the maintenance of favorable conditions for the development of the labor movement and the socialist revolution.

In this military support we should not be moved by any formal considerations such as the precise characterization of the Bevan government. It would be solving the problem of limits too neatly by calling the Bevan government a variety of workers' state, or, at least, workers' government, and hence having different aims in the war, etc., etc. This would be merely another attempt to fit the situation into the class-character-war-aims reasoning previously rejected.

Let us go a step farther: the question of whether the Labor Party were at the head of the government, with a 51% majority, or out of power with a 49% minority, while of importance, should not necessarily be of crucial importance in our support of the war on the part of England. The maintenance of the British working-class movement, with its left wing, and its immediate or distant possibilities for socialism might very well be the main issue in the war for us, in the situation-as-a-whole approach, rather than the character-of-the-war methodology. IN THIS CASE, REVOLUTIONARY DEFENSISM WOULD BE AN ADEQUATE DESCRIPTIVE TERM FOR OUR POSITION, as far as a simple statement of support or opposition to the war is concerned.

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\*Magnus would, "under certain conditions vote war credits for a clear-cut, labor government during the war."

The aforementioned situation in England does not warrant an evasive answer on the question of for-or-against the war. There may be occasions where it is appropriate to take a neither-for-nor-against position, or even to change the topic; this, however, is not one of them. Rejection of revolutionary defeatism, slogans or programs for the transformation of the character of the war, and some "concern" for the military front are, when limited to these, merely concessions and, in effect, evasion and double-talk by those who cannot see their way clear to a break with the formalistic character-of-the-war methodology. Socialists taking such a position before the working class might barely squeeze by with it, because, to all appearances they would be accepting the position of military support; but a clear answer on for-or-against can be demanded, legitimately on the immediate military struggle in the English situation.

But, considering the history and mythology of the movement, let us immediately proceed to discuss what revolutionary defensism does not mean, as well as some false truisms of the movement on the war question:

- 1- Military support to such a war is supposed to mean the giving up of the class struggle during the war. Opposition to the war is supposed to be synonymous with the continuation of the class struggle. Thus the most common objection to a defensist position is that it is necessary to continue the class struggle during the war. A revolutionary defensist position is presented as willing to do nothing which might, directly or indirectly, affect adversely the military struggle. This is not so. In all the practical aspects of the class struggle in the discussed British situation, revolutionary defensists of the persuasion of the writer would be willing to "risk" as much as any opponent of the war who recognized the totalitarian nature of the Stalinist regime, and its real danger to the British labor movement. We would, moreover, be able to take a forthright position in defense of the rights of the British workers against both enemies. We can distinctly picture the socialist war opponents effectively hiding either themselves or their war position under these circumstances, and perhaps comforting themselves, in private, that the workers were militant, even though "inconsistent."
- 2- Military support to a war conducted by a relatively advanced capitalist state is supposedly valid only if one has given up all hopes for socialism during that "epoch;" and hence such a position indicates a most profound pessimism concerning the possibilities of socialism. There have been those, both pro- and anti-war, who have actually approached the war problem this way in World War II. As an argument, however, it can rely only on the method of assertion. Any degree of helpfulness or hopelessness is consistent with a simple statement of support which, after all, does not indicate the content of a position. The connection between support and historical pessimism can have validity only in the eyes of those for whom support means the cessation of the class struggle. I have tried to show, in our consideration of Magnus' situation, that support can be consistent with any degree of optimism: Bevanites at the head of a Labor government; a Labor government with a more conservative leadership; or, a Tory government in power with a strong Labor opposition, etc.
- 3- It is often stated or implied that one's position on a world war must be a global one: one either supports or opposes a war on a world scale. With exception made for support to a workers' state in a mixed war, one must support or oppose all states in alliance. It follows from this view that it would not be correct to give military support to Magnus' Bevan government unless we were also prepared to ask Britain's African colonies to support the war; and, of course, the rest of the world as well. We have no right to insist on simple solutions to complex questions, and the

best that can be suggested for the problem as stated is that the British socialists support Britain in the war, while the Africans take every opportunity to throw off the British yoke. Support in Britain, opposition in Africa should not make us feel too uncomfortable, life being what it is. And I hasten to add that socialists in all countries should take this position on England and Africa. It must be recognized that multiplying the Bevan situation by several countries might definitely suggest a formulation of revolutionary defensism for most of the countries involved in the war. If this were the result of our evaluations we should have little hesitation in proclaiming it. The main point, however, is that WE MUST START WITH WHAT WE KNOW (OR KNOW WE WANT) even if this includes the apparently contradictory, AND THEN CONSTRUCT OUR FORMULATIONS (generalizations). Those who soar on the wings of class characterizations and deal with war positions by manipulating a limited number of high-level abstractions will often find their positions out of keeping with the needs of the situation. Those who accept handed-down overall formulations and attempt to deal with concrete issues will often find the formulations in contradiction with their own concrete proposals. Naturally the formulations, and the formulated program, must be in keeping with our general knowledge of the world (which does include the class character of the states involved, for example).

- 4- The term "support to a war" is supposed to have a meaning identical with "support to the basic war aims of the ruling class." This fallacy is difficult to pin down, partly because the identity is so thoroughly assumed. In the Spanish civil war we certainly did not support the basic war aims of the state, yet we gave military support to the war; nor did we always think it necessary to precede the word "support" by the word "military." It goes without saying that our general opposition towards the state and its war aims were made clear. The real difficulty in dealing with our false identity is that support in a particular military struggle is supposed to be given only when support is also given to the basic war aims of the ruling class -- in keeping with the class-character-war-aims methodology previously criticized. Those who consciously or unconsciously accept the identity may show the gravest "concern" for a Stalinist-threatened front, but may never say they support the war.
- 5- The transitional approach as a way of ducking the problem: It is widely believed in the ISL that calling upon the working-class to seize control of a capitalist nation threatened by Stalinism solves the problem of support-or-non-support of the war, and in a manner consistent with the formal anti-war position. This is the general approach of the ISL at its last convention (see LABOR ACTION, Sept. 28, 1953, p. 11), of Shachtman and of Magnus, among others. We should have no quarrel with calling upon the workers to take the lead in the fight against Stalinism, to have no confidence in the leadership or aims of the capitalist class or state, to establish a workers' government and army. BUT THIS IS NOT A FORTHRIGHT ANSWER TO FOR-OR-AGAINST THE WAR, AND THAT, AS A MAJOR AND RELATIVELY LONG-TERM EMPHASIS, IT CANNOT APPEAR AS OTHER THAN AN IMPLICITLY PRO-WAR POSITION. If the transitional slogans were so successful as to catapult the working-class into power, perhaps the problem of what to do in the interim might be minimized. But even a few months of making transitional defense slogans the center (or a central point) in our propaganda cannot help but put us in the position of saying "we can do it better." But wait, an objecting voice answers, we should not admit that "they" can do it at all! "They" will not and cannot carry out the demands of the transitional program! This is absolutely true; but we cannot afford to forget that these transitional slogans got their appeal primarily as a way of defeating Stalinism in an emergency war situation. Until the capi-

talist class is displaced from its leading position, or proves itself incapable even of holding the military line, the working-class, and all other intelligent people will interpret a transitional emphasis as "Better a workers' government, but let's continue the fight 'til then." Concern for, and absence of indifference to the military front, together with a central transitional program for defeating Stalinism, when combined with opposition to the war, is double-talk, and will be recognized as such by all but those with a private logic; and all but a few of the latter will be wise enough to keep their inconsistency and their "anti-war" position under their hats. Those who do not will equate their "anti-war" with "against the war aims of the imperialist state," rather than against the current military struggle, thus leaving the workers free to support the military struggle without either their objection or overt blessing.

- 6- The argument most difficult to come to grips with, but least worthy of consideration, is that it is not politic to consider such questions at the present time, or at any time short of the actual emergency, a-) because our foreign third-camp allies would misinterpret it, and b-) because it would only contribute to the panicky drift towards a general pro-war and pro-imperialist position. As it is extremely difficult to state this position in public discussion, it usually takes the form of saying that this "relaxing" of our theoretical limits is wrong, because it only contributes towards etc., etc. However, the problems and issues raised persist with a ubiquity almost equal, for socialists, to that of the issues of today. (Who is to say, for example, that the military defense of India in the next war is out of the question while India is allied with the United States?) A hush-hush attitude can never succeed in preventing consideration of such problems; and the present official position of the ISL is an untenable one. THERE ARE FEW THINGS WORSE FOR THE GROWTH OR DEVELOPMENT OF A SMALL SOCIALIST ORGANIZATION THAN AN UNTENABLE POSITION. An anti-war position which takes little note of, or an incorrect position on what seem to be real and reasonable possibilities, will tend to drive many to the opposite extreme.

It is important to point out, although off the main point in this discussion of never-never sectarianism, that WE SHOULD EQUALLY REJECT THE PROPOSITION THAT WE MUST SUPPORT THE "LESSER OF TWO EVILS" IN A WAR, or that we must always support the more democratic against the less. It may make some of us uncomfortable to be unable to fall back upon a simple formula, but neither the old sectarian nor the old opportunist formulas seem to apply generally to all future war-types.

Three helpful divisions of the war question were mentioned at the beginning of this article: for discussion purposes, the immediate questions, the probable nature of and policy for the next war, and the limits of permissibility as set by our theory and formulations. Considering the main purpose of this article, the exploding of some well established misconceptions and injunctions, it could be ended here; but since this section has some bearing on the rest of the discussion, it is useful to at least indicate that we have not only stretched the limits; some of the reasonably possible situations seem so reasonable that a-) it seems likely that they will play some part in the next war, and b-) we should be wary of overly-broad generalizations for the war as a whole, recognizing that it may not be one war, and c-) we should recognize that there may be important changes, as the war proceeds, that may necessitate sharp changes in our position. If the ISL elaborates on the probable nature of character of the next (when, under what circumstances?) war, it is not enough to confine ourselves to the "likely" alternatives. What seems most probable is that the war, if it begins as a world war, will be an atomic war between the major powers, and undeserving of support. It also seems that, if the war continues for more than

a few weeks, other and more complicated circumstances might arise.

It is important, both for our own education and that of our public, that we avoid presenting an overly dogmatic point of view on this question, especially in our theoretical discussions. There is a very real danger of our being unable to cope, politically, with events after the start of a war, if we do not have included in our view at least the theoretical and practical possibilities of socialist politics on the war question. It is high time to remedy this situation. Incorrect and rigid dogma have survived many a war.

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October 22, 1953

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