

[ca. 1947]

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AN APPEAL TO OUR COMRADES

At this time, when conflict within the Party is at a high point, and feeling about the course the Party should pursue in the coming period is intense, we of the Debs Branch wish to make our position known to our comrades and appeal to those who are in basic agreement with the principles to join with us in building the Socialist Party into a major force for democratic socialism in America.

We are, and we intend to remain, part of the Debs caucus of the Socialist Party. We have no present plans to abandon the Party to form a competing organization. We are determined to oppose the present right-wing leadership of the Party, to reverse the trend toward "middle-of-the-road" liberalism which has characterized the Party in recent years, and to restore the Party to its traditional role as the representative of the international socialist movement in this country. Our only non-negotiable positions in the Party are opposition to American military activity in Southeast Asia and refusal to let the Socialist Party become a component of the Democratic Party.

We believe in seeking the unity of all democratic socialist organizations and individuals. To this end, we urge a continuous dialogue between our Party and any organization claiming a democratic socialist philosophy. We also urge contact between our members and self-styled socialist organizations, believing that through free discussion and free association many members of non-democratic organizations of the left will recognize the validity of democratic socialism.

As socialists, we favor any electoral tactic which offers a reasonable hope of advancing the principles of democratic socialism. We believe that the participation of socialists in local Democratic Party activity may be appropriate at certain times and places, and that socialist who, on the basis of the local political

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situation, believe that they should become active in another party, have the right to do so. We oppose any such activity that involves concealment of socialist identity or manipulative behavior. We assert that the major political parties have been, and remain, agents of the ruling class under capitalism, and that while the reformist and liberal tendencies within them should be encouraged, these will not change the essential nature of these parties.

In asserting our support for, and identification with, the working class, we reject the interpretation that this class consists solely of organized labor and its leadership. We look toward a new solidarity of a working class which includes not only organized workers but the unorganized; not only manual and clerical workers, but wage-earning professionals and the self-employed, who must come to understand that they too live by selling their labor. Further, we believe this class includes the unemployed and the unemployable members of the underclass, whose poverty serves the system by retarding the progress of all workers.

With the prospect of long term continued depression before us, the American working class is awakening to find that the comfortable panaceas have failed. Our labor unions are demoralized, caught between unemployment and inflation. Our people are squeezed between rising taxes and reduced services. Deficit spending appears to have little impact, while the balance of payments crisis looms again. Arbitrary, irresponsible capitalist state power to determine wages has been legitimized and assented to by the entire political and labor establishment. Strikes are being crushed. A new period in which the voice of democratic socialism must cry out our anguish and our hope is upon us.

We believe socialists should work for the increased consciousness of this working class, that we will ultimately gain our freedom from exploitation only through our own organized independent political action. This does not mean that we all believe a strong national labor party can be created at this moment in history. It does mean that we refuse to misdirect our class energies into unprofitable and unequal alliances with the exploiting class.

We believe that socialists have not only the right, but the responsibility, to participate in issue-oriented organizations, both locally and nationally. Too much consideration has often been given to whether such organizations are tainted with the presence of unacceptable political ideologies, and too little to the possibilities of socialist participation moving its members toward a democratic socialist position. Here again, we refuse to abandon the field to liberal reformists, authoritarian "revolutionaries", or to short-sighted, incompetent trade union hacks.

Finally, we affirm that the Socialist Party should continue in its historic role as a democratic, broad-based, multi-tendency Party. There must be room in the Party for all who accept the basic principles of democracy and socialism. This means that we will continue to have heated debates over all the issues discussed here -- am others; that some comrades will refrain from Party activities which they personally feel inappropriate; even, at times, that the party will be so divided that it will be for awhile unable to act on some important issue. This is the nature of democracy. This will be the nature of the democratic socialist society which we seek. The alternative - for either a party or a society - is totalitarianism.

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