

March 6, 1976

To the P.C.

Jean Tussey dropped me a note pointing out some shifts in the positions of the Socialist Forum. We asked Fred Feldman to review their material and prepare a report for the Political Committee. This is it. We can discuss it at the next meeting.

Jack

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Report on Socialist Forum
by Fred Feldman

Socialist Forum was the publication of the Socialist Committee of Correspondence, which split from the Socialist Labor Party in July 1969. They opposed SLP's sectarian abstentionism, especially around the antiwar movement. This group, which included frequent SLP presidential candidate Eric Hass, regarded itself as De Leonist.

A section of the group began to get sucked into the milieu of the sectarian purportedly Trotskyist groups. This trend was represented by Malcolm Kaufman, who wasn't very prominent at the time of the break with the SLP.

A new split occurred in 1971 with a whole layer of more-or-less orthodox DeLeonists splitting off. They formed the DeLeonist League which publishes a magazine called Socialist Reconstruction.

Kaufman was now the main figure in the remains of the group which now called itself Socialist Forum. He began to describe himself as Trotskyist, making the standard criticisms of the SWP as Pabloist, opportunist, etc.

In the last issue published until recently, Winter 1973-74, Kaufman denounced us for allegedly violating democracy by not allowing him to sell inside a campaign meeting. We made him sell outside. Since that was our last contact as far as I can tell, we included it in the xeroxed material.

Kaufman then joined Vanguard Newsletter and Socialist Forum disappeared. He seems to have participated in the merger with the Leninist Faction that produced the Class Struggle League. The Class Struggle League disappeared in a very small puff of smoke last year.

Now Socialist Forum has surfaced again, putting out a mimeographed flyer called Socialist Perspective. They express the hope of issuing it at least annually, but they have put out two issues this year. The post office box is the same as the old Socialist Forum box, but no name or phone number is given, as was done in the past. So it is impossible to tell whether we are dealing with Malcolm Kaufman or with some other fragment.

The group describes itself as adhering to Lenin, Trotsky, and De Leon.

The most interesting items are on Portugal and Angola. On Portugal, they denounce the phony soviets, oppose the FUR, note the corporatist aspect of the MFA-People's Power plan, oppose the popular frontism of the CP and SP, and call all the provisional governments capitalist. On the level of broad analysis, it is close to us. As far as strategy goes, they simply note the desirability of soviets and a revolutionary party in an abstract way.

On Angola, the leaflet opposes all three groups as capitalist nationalists whose programs lead to neocolonialism. The difference between United States and Cuban intervention is correctly noted without giving support to MPLA. Their only counterproposal to these errors is to overcome tribalism through a pan-South-African socialist republic.

The lack of concrete proposals may not stem from hardened sectarianism, but from being so small and isolated that they can't conceive of how to influence events. So they feel reduced to issuing circulars containing broad socialist propaganda. But the positive sides of their positions are very unusual among opponents today. Perhaps if they studied Barry's report on November 25 and Tony's on Angola, in an objective way, they would note that there really are areas of agreement.

The same circulars criticize our city crisis work for emphasizing the racist character of the cutbacks. That probably indicates some kind of a difference on the national question and on how to overcome divisions in the class.

Given that they have moved towards some positions like ours and perhaps even under our influence to a degree, I think they are worth looking into. They clearly feel strongly a lack of what they call "effective communication with our readership and those who are active in leftist politics." An overture from us might help persuade them to look at our politics, including, for instance, the 1975 political resolution, objectively, without being blinded by the hallucinogenic preconceptions about our reformism that are common in their milieu. Even a small and isolated group like this may have picked up a few healthy people interested in advancing the cause of socialism.

A move towards them would be a signal to the whole radical movement that we are serious about reaching out to and collaborating with people who are coming closer, and are not out to count up and settle old scores, even when the groups involved are really tiny compared to the party. It would show that we are not content to let a group like this float out of existence or into some ultrasectarian outfit without giving it a chance to objectively consider another course.

We don't know what they'll do, or whether there will turn out to be anybody there worth having. But, given the relationship of forces and our own clarity, I don't think we have anything to lose.

It will reemphasize the point we made in our work with Tim and Nancy -- that the door is open to anybody who is honestly interested in working and collaborating in a fraternal and objective way with us. We will respond in kind, regardless of past conflicts.