

A letter on “‘Socialism 2010’: The politics of the International Socialist Organization”

25 June 2010

The WSWS has received a number of letters in reply to our two-part article devoted to the International Socialist Organization and its conferences, “Socialism 2010” (“The ISO and the American middle-class left” and “The ISO and Barack Obama”). Some of them have been supportive, some critical.

We welcome these letters, and certainly encourage more. We will post those we think especially important. Such a discussion on socialist perspectives is of immense significance, in our view. It can only help clarify the political demarcation between Marxism and opportunism.

We posted one email and a reply yesterday. Here is another letter on the ISO and its conferences.

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This article is very well written. It is a savage attack on the International Socialist Organization that utterly destroys the politics of the American Cliffites [followers of British theoretician of “state capitalism,” Tony Cliff]. However, I think a few things are worth raising:

1) There seems to be no reason to attack the ISO for denouncing the racist smear tactics used against Barack Obama, primarily by the Clinton campaign. Indeed, to do so presents a “teachable moment” on the history of the Democratic Party, the Clinton years and race. It goes without saying that the ISO fails to do this, but this seems to be the point of entry, not that they objected to the Clinton campaign’s racist gutter tactics.

2) On this paragraph:

“Underlying this lack of serious analysis conducted by the ISO is its leaders’ conviction that there is no historic, systemic crisis of capitalism. They have a boundless confidence in the resilience of the ruling

elites, their capacity to head off every challenge to their rule.”

This case could have been made clearer and more extensively. The politics of “no historical crisis” are fundamental to the ISO. It’s their original sin, it drives their entire program. The Cliffite stuff is just a mirror image of Pabloism. Cliff, Pablo and Grant are the Three Stooges of postwar Trotskyism who all fail to grasp the historical crisis of capitalism. This is a DEEP political miscalculation and a real “knock-out punch” that was not sufficiently elaborated on.

3) On this paragraph:

“Why have the ISO and other ‘left’ forces rallied to the figure of Obama in particular? Central to their theory of American society is the conception that race, and not social class, is the pivotal question. This may or may not extend to the argument that the bourgeois revolution was never completed due to the aborting of radical Reconstruction after the Civil War. Such a view leads to the conclusion that democratic questions need to be addressed in the US, especially racial equality, before the fight for socialism can be placed on the historical agenda.”

The ‘centrality of race’ argument seems like an overgeneralization, and not a terribly accurate one. It’s too specific and the case is not sufficiently made that the ISO values race above all. They seem to have taken a particular interest in sexuality as of late, a phenomenon that I have theories about which I prefer not to articulate at this time. The part about Reconstruction seems to conflate the ISO with the 1950s/60s SWP. Again, the case is simply not made. The conclusion seems accurate, but the dots aren’t connected.

For what it’s worth, I’ve followed the ISO for over half my life. During my days in the SWP-YS and my

college years I made a special point to read their press for the purpose of trolling them. I retain an incredibly deep-seated (and, I might add, somewhat irrational, but ultimately political) loathing of the ISO. Hence why I think it is SO important to articulate the key points as lucidly and thoroughly as possible. Overall I think the article has savaged the organization, but on these three areas I feel a better job could have been done.

Comradely,

NP

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