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**A  
WAY  
FORWARD  
POLITICAL  
REALIGNMENT  
IN  
AMERICA**

**Political Declaration of  
the 1960 National Convention,  
Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation**

**10¢**

## **A WAY FORWARD: political realignment in america**

### **introduction**

*The following declaration was adopted at the 1960 national convention of the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation, and is the Party's official statement of political perspectives. It points the way forward not only for Socialists, but also for liberals, for civil rights, for labor, and for peace. It does so by examining the present stalemate in American political life and its main cause, the Republican-Dixiecrat alliance; and by showing how that stalemate can be broken and political realignment achieved.*

*It has become almost an article of faith among some historians and political scientists to assert the impossibility of a meaningful realignment of political forces in the United States. Yet for proof they offer only a stale and static formula, that our major parties have never made political sense, and that what has been shall always be. If anything is certain, it is precisely the opposite. New and dynamic forces are at work within and upon the old parties, especially the Democratic Party: the new Negro, labor's immensely powerful political machine, the liberal and peace organizations. Sooner or later these must burst through the stultifying restraints of their old ties and alliances. In the conflicts which they generate over genuine issues lies the hope and the promise of a new alignment in our political life.*

*The Socialist Party is wholeheartedly dedicated to the fight for realignment. In that fight we are not alone. The United Automobile Workers AFL-CIO, Americans for Democratic Action, New York's Liberal Party, and other outstanding progressive movements are on record for realignment. The SP-SDF is ideally situated to spearhead the drive for realignment in that it is an independent organization, free of any compromising ties with the old party machines. It can and it will play the role of the most courageous and intransigent force for realignment.*

*This declaration, taken together with the Party's decision not to enter a presidential ticket in the 1960 campaign, represents a basic shift in tactics for American socialism. Realignment, the Party's convention felt, is an essential precondition for meaningful Socialist politics. In a new liberal-labor second party, democratic socialism will come into its own in the United States. Indeed, Socialists believe it must eventually become the program of the new second party. Nothing less will adequately meet the challenges history itself will provide. But first things first: Realignment is the desperate need of today. We call upon all men of good will to join us in the battle to achieve it.*

The radical realignment of political forces is America's most immediate and desperate need. Without it, our nation faces the ominous prospect of continued stalemate and stagnation in the midst of crisis.

This is the Socialist Party's most urgent message to the American public in this election year.

Our party offers no candidates for the presidency in 1960 because we seek to speak to and to be heard by all Americans—Democrats and Republicans as well as socialists; because we seek more than a protest vote for a third party candidacy—valuable as such votes have been in the past. We seek nothing less than the re-evaluation and re-alignment of all political forces in the United States.

To the lovers of peace in both major parties, we address this urgent question: How does an American cast a vote this year for a policy of consistent and principled devotion to peace? How do we insure ourselves against the prospect of voting for a party which promises peace during the campaign but recklessly gambles with nuclear catastrophe when it takes office?

To the working men and women of America we ask: How does one vote for a party which loyally and honestly supports labor in this election, with the firm and secure knowledge that it will not betray labor when it takes power?

To the Negro people and to all believers in civil rights we ask: How does one cast a truly meaningful vote for racial equality in this election campaign?

To all Americans who seek social policies inspired by genuinely humanitarian impulses, we ask: What reliable political instrument do we possess for the achievement of our goals?

The most basic and profound truth of politics in America today is this: We find ourselves with two political parties devoid of any principled political programs.

### **presentday parties meaningless**

The Democratic Party is looked upon by millions as the party of progress, and beyond a doubt contains within it most of those Americans who sincerely favor liberal, forward looking policies. Yet this party which contains labor also contains labor's most violent enemies. It contains most of the Negro and civil right forces together with the worst Negro haters in America. Among its leaders are some who are sincerely dedicated to peace

*copy by Mr. H. M. Macdonald*

and disarmament while others are among the most diehard cold warriors of our time.

It includes sincere supporters of the oppressed victims of dictators like Franco and Trujillo as well as those who are ardent admirers or actual agents of those same dictators. Millions of Democrats enthusiastically favor new and vigorous programs of housing and urban renewal while other Democrats run corrupt big-city machines which thrive on slums. The Democratic Party enjoys the support of liberal champions of better conditions for our several million farm laborers and sharecroppers, but also includes many of the very people who exploit those same farm workers and tenants. In truth, there is hardly a political, social, or economic question that matters on which one does not find the most contradictory and irreconcilable views and interests within this Democratic Party.

As with the Democratic Party, likewise the Republican Party. Realizing that a natural majority of the American voters are Democrats, the Republican Party has learned the technique of putting on a "liberal" face at election time. It has even succeeded in winning the loyalty of some, albeit a minority, of the liberal-labor elements in America.

### ***progress stymied***

What are the consequences of the present political alignment in our nation? This is not an academic question; it is utterly crucial for every one of us. For our government has not passed a single major piece of new welfare social legislation since 1938—twenty-two years ago. Our labor unions have been saddled with steadily tougher and tougher laws—first Taft-Hartley and now Landrum-Griffin, not to mention the so-called "Right to Work" laws enacted by many states. In the field of civil rights progress has been abysmally and inexcusably slow in some areas and altogether absent in others.

On the single most vital question of our time, nuclear war or peace with freedom, we have appeared before the world as the one great nation most reluctant to disarm. We have earned the suspicion—even the hatred—of millions throughout the world who look upon us as calloused, selfish and immature.

### ***crisis of leadership***

The major parties are designed to compete for power, and not to debate the issues. Therefore our present party structure compels, by its very nature, the sacrificing of political ideas and progress to the unprincipled "deal." It rewards the unscrupulous seeker-after-office and with rare exceptions condemns to defeat those who take their political ideas and ideals seriously. It is incredible, but true, that we have not so much as had a se-

rious national debate on any of the great issues of our time since World War II: Our political system not only stymies progress, it stifles discussion of program.

Instead of debate, we have been the victims of every type of phony and fraudulent campaign that the clever political hacks and their hired public-relations agencies have been able to concoct. Is the candidate too young, or is he too old? How does he dress? What does his wife look like and how does she dress? Does he go to church regularly and to which church does he go? Did he serve in the armed forces?

This incredible nonsense has passed for campaign issues largely because debating the actual issues under our present party system is fraught with danger. With rare exceptions the candidate who speaks clearly and boldly risks the loss of his party's nomination and if nominated risks the loss of a segment of his party's traditional supporters. That is the principal reason why our nation now finds itself in a crisis of leadership: We do not reward forthright leadership, we punish it.

### ***how did it happen?***

How did we get into this condition? America's political parties are the result of long historical evolution in a nation rich in the most varied sectional, class, racial, and religious interests and traditions. Each party has been subject to alternating strains and pressures over the years from farmers, slaveholders, bankers, workers, manufacturers, immigrants, churches, etc. Through the years both came to be identified with special interests and special regions. And it was possible for America to get by with parties primarily devoted to patronage, because our responsibilities were fewer, and because our incredible natural wealth permitted us somehow to muddle through.

Now all this is changed. The balmy days of Calvin Coolidge seem to belong to another century. The United States today is one of the two great powers in whose hands lies the survival of the human species. We face the challenge of a Communist bloc making rapid strides toward world supremacy. The imminent danger of nuclear war hovers over us constantly. Suddenly the issues of worldwide poverty, race discrimination, and colonial revolutions have thrust themselves upon us. Our cities, schools, houses, roads, communications are in various stages of crisis. Our people, and especially our youth, find themselves bewildered and dissatisfied. Having come through a post war period of unprecedented prosperity and materialism we have failed to find that national sense of moral purpose which is the essence of a healthy community. Our lives have been dominated increasingly by things, while men have been alienated. Hypocrisy and conformity have been rampant in the nation that gave the world some of history's greatest rebels and dissenters.

The major parties as presently constituted are simply unable to cope with our contemporary problems. Our present political alignment, if allowed to continue, may well drag our nation, and perhaps the world, down to catastrophic oblivion.

## ***political realignment***

What is meant by political realignment? In its simplest terms it means this: Let labor, the farmers, the Negro people and other minorities, the liberal and peace forces, come together in a party of our own; and let the forces of conservatism and big business, the militarists and nationalists, the stand-patters, come together in a political party of their own. And let these two parties contest for political power on the basis of programs—programs that are serious, that are meant, that will actually constitute mandates to be carried out during terms of office.

Is such realignment possible? We believe it is not only possible but absolutely necessary if America is to deal intelligently with the challenges it faces.

Surely the conservative forces in control of the Republican Party and the Dixiecrat wing of the Democrats have the strength and common interest to constitute a major political party. On the opposite side too are ranged substantial forces capable of sustaining a party of their own. Labor and its political arm, COPE, command the allegiance of millions of working men and women and their families. It has a program and a vast machinery for mobilizing its political strength. Working farmers, the constant victims of powerful moneyed interests, have everything to gain by allying themselves with the liberal forces. Our elderly folk, suffering under a pinch-penny and heartless policy of starvation pensions, are certainly in need of a political instrument responsive to their needs. Finally, Americans of all walks of life who want peace through disarmament, civil rights, expanded federal aid to education, the wiping out of slums, national health insurance, greatly increased foreign economic aid, etc., need and want a party sincerely committed to these goals.

The time for realignment of American politics is now. We have already lost more time than we could afford. Every time we duck a pressing issue, or postpone it, or try sweeping it under the national rug, we invite eventual catastrophe.

Whether it be the question of racial equality, or the bomb, or policy in Latin America, or our schools, we must begin to meet our problems head-on. We desperately need high-level debate, and having heard the debate and participated in it, we need to be able to cast a vote for a party we can rely upon to carry out the policy it espouses.

## ***how to gain realignment***

How are we to gain this political realignment? Recognizing the urgent need for it is the first and major step. But recognition of the need is not enough. Much more is required.

We believe the key to realignment is this: To get a party system based upon program, we must boldly and consciously press for our programs now—and let the chips fall where they may.

We Socialists can hardly tell the conservatives what program to press for; that's for them to decide. But as the natural allies of—nay, the socialist *sector* of the liberal-labor movement, we do have something to say to our liberal friends. And that is this: The single most pressing domestic moral issue today is that of complete equality for the Negro in America. We propose simply that the believers in civil rights fight for civil rights. We say, do not be dissuaded by appeals for party "unity," or pleas not to rock the party boat. On the contrary, a Party whose unity embraces both liberals and reactionaries is a false unity, an unprincipled and harmful one. Let the advocates of racial equality be forced out of the Party or let the racists. But so long as both are locked in their present unholy matrimony, the inevitable consequence must be the sacrifice of civil rights as well as all the other liberal objectives.

This is emphatically not a mere "scheme" to use the issue of civil rights for the ulterior purpose of obtaining alignment. Exactly the opposite is true. We want realignment in order to be able to advance the cause of civil rights, and all other progressive causes. Short of it we can expect no more than Congress delivered in the incredibly meaningless and toothless "civil rights" acts of 1957 and 1960—the form without substance.

We believe that of all the issues now facing America, civil rights is the one most likely to constitute that catalytic agent capable of forcing realignment. If pressed with courage and vigor by those sincerely committed to it, realignment will be the consequence. Forcing the Dixiecrats out of the Democratic Party, however, will not alone constitute an adequate basis for the new alignment America needs. Rather, it will be a first step. The Southern Democrats departed the national party in 1948, as a result of the civil rights conflict at the convention of that year, only to be readmitted after the Truman victory. This time things must be different. For if a truly liberal party is to be won, nothing less than an organized drive to build a permanent progressive southern wing of that party will be necessary. Such a wing, based upon fully enfranchised Negro and white workers, is becoming ever more possible. In an increasingly industrialized south, it will be the true heir to the once flourishing Populist forces which for a short time in the late 19th Century rose above the evil of racism.

We have no doubt that the process of forging realignment will engender

many other new political trends and struggles. With the onset of genuine programmatic conflicts many new and heretofore voiceless sections of the population will enter the political arena. The tendency toward issue-oriented political clubs made up of non-professionals will be greatly accelerated. More rank and file labor participation in politics can be expected. Greater participation by Negroes in political life will ensue. The old type big city corrupt political machines will face new challenges to their power. Cynicism and apathy among our youth will decline. All this we welcome. It can be the dawn of a national renaissance in America; precisely what is needed if we are to master our circumstances.

## ***socialists and realignment***

The Socialist Party—SDF looks toward this new alignment not because we are prepared to abandon our Party's historic tradition or our independent socialist principles; far from it. We are intensely proud of that tradition and those principles. We seek realignment because we want America to move ahead now, on every front, in the direction of peace, equality, security, and freedom. In a realigned political party system we look toward the liberal-labor second party as the arena in which we can function even more meaningfully than we have in the past. As a loyal and honest democratic socialist wing of that party we look forward to fulfilling a profoundly important political and educational role: that of offering long range ideals to serve as a yardstick while vigorously pursuing every-day actions consistent with those ideals.

This policy is entirely in the tradition of American socialism which has always stood for the formation of a liberal-labor party. We recall with pride our important role in the great 1924 campaign for Bob LaFollette for president. It is a fact that subsequent historic developments did not result in the formation of any significant third party in America. However, we reject the dogma which says that only the traditionally-prescribed third party formula has validity. It is not the form to which we owe our loyalty, but the concept itself—*independent labor and progressive political action*. In today's America the most viable and practical means to that goal is political realignment. It constitutes not only the intelligent application of socialist aims, but what is vastly more important, offers the single best hope to all the American people for a new and brighter era in our nation's affairs.

Toward this goal we earnestly pledge the dedicated efforts of the Socialist Party.

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