

# Why YOU Should Join the SLP!

## What Is the SLP?

The Socialist Labor Party is the fourth oldest political party in the United States. In a sense, however, it may be called the second oldest because all other political parties are either out-and-out parties of capitalism or parties of reform that identify themselves with the “labor,” “socialist” or “communist” label. The SLP is the only political party of the country that rejects capitalism and every effort to gloss over capitalism’s imperfections with the social cosmetics of reform. No other party can make that claim.

The SLP was founded upon the principles of scientific socialism in 1890. It has never deviated from these principles nor compromised them for temporary gain. It holds, with Marx, that the approaching social revolution must be accomplished by the enlightened *working class* and cannot be accomplished by a minority at the head of unclassconscious masses. To the end of educating our fellow workers to their mission and in the methods of achieving the goal of the Industrial Republic of Labor, the SLP has conducted a tireless campaign of agitation and education. It is the one and only exponent of Socialist Industrial Unionism through which the American workers must and will back up their socialist ballot and which will become the framework of the new administration—the industrial union administration.

## Should You Join the SLP?

If you agree that the prolongation of capitalism means more wars, more exploitation, more environmental and human degradation; if you agree that society must be reconstructed on a socialist basis for progress to be the law of the future as it has been of the past; if you agree that the program of the SLP is the correct program for bringing about such a socialist reconstruction of society, then you should join the SLP and become an active member in its ranks.

At the same time, however, the SLP does not encourage the applications of persons who are carried away by momentary enthusiasm. Other organizations have done this, among them the so-called Socialist and Communist parties. In the 1920s, for example, the Communist Party made an all-out drive for new members. It started the year, according to one report, with 10,000 members. It

took in 10,000 new members. And it ended the year with—10,000 members! The SLP, of course, has nothing in common with the CP. Nevertheless, experience and common sense teach it that it should not encourage those who would join in a burst of emotion.

*The SLP needs and wants new members.* But it wants men and women who know beforehand what the SLP stands for, and who support the party's program and principles. It wants men and women who have thought it over, and who have reached the conclusion that the Socialist Industrial Union program of the SLP is the way to socialist freedom.

Among the nonmember readers of *The People* there are unquestionably many who, as far as general understanding and conviction are concerned, have the qualifications for SLP membership. More are in the process of acquiring these qualifications all the time as they build up the store of knowledge that scientific socialism imparts. Those who do should apply for membership. Not only are they wanted, they are needed to strengthen the SLP and to ensure its future.

### **What Are the Membership Requirements?**

SLP membership requires, among other things, a grasp of the class struggle and its implications. This, in turn, requires an understanding of basic and elementary Marxian economics, as, for example, what *wages* are, what determines the *value* of commodities and how the capitalists exploit the working class through the extraction of *surplus value*. This knowledge is available in the pamphlets of the party and other literature included in the party's New York Labor News catalogue. The party also prints *Socialism for Beginners*, a brief statement on how to go about studying socialism and what to read. The New York Labor News catalogue and *Socialism for Beginners* are supplied free to interested persons, or may be downloaded from the SLP's Web site.

The age limit for SLP membership is 18, but the party encourages youths under 18 to attend its activities and to participate in its work, especially in the vital work of distributing SLP leaflets and *The People*.

Dues in the SLP are nominal. The first month's dues are free and there is no initiation fee.

In counties where there are SLP subdivisions, new members become members of sections (local SLP organizations) having jurisdiction. In counties where the party is not yet organized, new members would become "national members-at-large," that is, they would come directly under the jurisdiction of the national organization, or "out-of-town members of the nearest section..

## **Does the SLP Manage Its Affairs Democratically?**

Yes. The SLP is a democratic organization. The highest authority in the party is its own enlightened membership. Furthermore, the democracy of the SLP is not a “paper democracy.” It is a living principle that the membership guards jealously. Efforts have been made to short-circuit SLP democracy, reduce it to absurdity and by such means to disrupt the party. They have failed. But, whenever they have been attempted they have brought home anew the vital lesson that the party’s principles are safe from serious internal attack only under a system of collective decision making and of membership enlightenment on the facts.

One safeguard of the SLP’s democracy is its Constitution, which, among other things, declares that all of the following acts of the National Convention shall be submitted to the membership for a general vote and shall not be effective until thus approved:

“1. All Constitutional changes.

“2. All resolutions and statements setting forth party policy, position or analysis of political and/or theoretical questions.

“3. Election of National Officers. [There are three: A National Secretary, a Financial Secretary and Editor of *The People*.]

“4. Election of NEC members. [The National Executive Committee has seven members.]”

The membership referendum, or general vote of the party’s whole membership, is the most important safeguard of SLP democracy. “As nothing of any importance can be done in the party without a referendum vote,” De Leon said, “such a thing as rule from above has no ground to stand on.”

## **What Duties and What Rights Do SLP Members Have?**

In many respects, rights and duties are the obverse and reverse of the same coin.

Members of the SLP have the *right* to make, speak to and vote on any motion at their section’s meetings. Members of one section who are visiting another section also have the right to speak to motions before that section, though visitors have no right to make or second a motion before another section and may be excluded from that section’s meeting under certain circumstances, as when the section they are visiting goes into executive session to consider some matter of exclusive concern to that section.

At the same time, members have the *duty* of attending the meetings of their own sections where the rights mentioned may be exercised. In the end, SLP democracy depends on the participation of its members in the decision-making process.

While members have the right to make, speak to and vote on motions, they also have the obligation of complying with the decision reached. Democracy, after all, involves more than the rights of individuals and minorities to be heard and to participate in the decision-making process. It involves a willingness to be bound by the decisions once reached by democratic means.

Where important disagreements cannot be resolved at the section level, members have the right to appeal against them to the party's National Executive Committee. In the meantime, however, members are expected to comply with the decisions reached.

Members also have the right to stand for elective office within the section or within the party once they meet the basic eligibility requirements, which range from six months to two years of membership in continuous good standing. At the same time, members who accept election to office have the duty of discharging the responsibilities of that office. The membership who elects the officers has the right to expect this from those they elect.

The primary *duty* of every member of the SLP is to keep her or himself in good standing before the organization by paying their dues regularly and promptly, or by requesting the exemption from dues payments to which they are entitled in cases of unemployment, financial hardship or illness. Members who fail to maintain their good standing forfeit their rights and risk their membership.

### **What Does Discipline in the SLP Mean?**

In an excellent summation of this point, De Leon once wrote:

“In a political party of socialism the word discipline has its twofold application.

“First, the discipline of obedience to facts, and obedience to the rules and regulations that the facts prescribe for the realization of the socialist aim. This is the discipline of education. It is not, nor can it be, produced by party legislation. It is the product of correct training. Necessary to it are unity of purpose, unity of method. The socialist movement cannot be

all things to all men; it can be only one thing, and to only one class—the working class.

“Second, discipline also implies the power of the party to visit with censure or expulsion as punishments, infractions or offenses against the party’s rules or principles. Rigid adherence to party principle and tactics being necessary to socialist success, transgressions against the party must be met with punishment according to the gravity of the offense. Membership in the party being voluntary, and the discipline being self-imposed, he who subscribes to the party’s ethics does so, not as one yielding submission to imposed authority, but as one bowing to the necessity and desire of maintaining strict adherence to principle and for orderly government in party affairs.

“Discipline in this, its twofold application, is a recognition that knowledge is power and that in union is strength.”

This explanation of socialist discipline is simple and clear. And it is fitting that De Leon should note as the *first* application of discipline in a party of socialism *obedience to the facts and the rules and regulations that the facts prescribe for the realization of the socialist aim*. To nonmembers, this vital “discipline of education” is not as self-evident as the discipline which manifests itself in the censure, suspension or expulsion of members who commit offenses against the party and party principle. Both applications of discipline are necessary, but where the members keep themselves informed on the facts, on the principles and program of socialism, and on the necessity to adhere to the principles and program without swerving, it is rarely necessary for the party to invoke its power to punish infractions.

## **I Believe I Am Ready for Membership In the SLP. How Do I Proceed?**

When you have decided to apply for membership in the SLP you can proceed in one of three ways:

First—You can write to the National Office for a Membership Packet, which includes copies of the party’s Constitution, Organizational Norms and Procedures, Handbook on Intervention and Union Work, a booklet entitled *To the Prospective Member of the SLP* and a membership application form.

Second—You can get the same material by contacting your local section. (See the SLP Local Directory elsewhere on this site.)

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Third: You can view and download the same documents from the “Join the SLP” section of this Web site.

The application form poses a series of seven questions. They are not trick questions, but questions which afford applicants the opportunity to affirm their convictions concerning the correctness of socialist principles and the program of the party.

After filling out the application form, double-check to make sure that you have answered all the questions and signed your name before mailing it to the section in your area or to the SLP’s National Office.

Socialist Labor Party  
P.O. Box 218  
Mountain View, CA 94042–0218.

In return you will receive hard copies of the membership packet referred to above (minus the application form) and a letter explaining how your application is being processed.