

NOVEMBER 7 AND THE FUTURE: II

Earl Browder Answers Some Questions

Shortly after November 7 Earl Browder, president of the Communist Political Association, gave his first analysis of the elections at a gathering of a group of friends of NEW MASSES. Because of the importance of Mr. Browder's remarks we published the main text of his speech in last week's issue (December 26). The questions and answers following that speech are published below.

QUESTION: Isn't it time that the electoral college was abolished, or perhaps it is time to instigate a movement for a reform of the electoral college?

I THINK there is a great deal of sentiment in the country for an improvement of our electoral machinery. I am not so certain that that improvement necessarily hinges upon an abolition of the electoral college. I think that we must always keep in mind that there is a very positive progressive historical origin of the electoral college system, and that any effort on a large scale to bring a fundamental change in that might distract attention from more pressing issues and make it more difficult to get the broadest possible unity for the most important issues of the day.

I think that in the way of electoral reform it is most important to establish guarantees that the electoral college cannot be used to falsify the election returns as was threatened in the conspiracies that were hatched by the Republicans and the Southern Democratic agents of the Republicans. If we can go that far, that is all that is immediately pressing in the way of reform of the present electoral college system.

Much more important than that, I think, is the establishment of the principle of a uniform system of elections for federal officers through all the states. Especially the principle of universal suffrage to every adult person in all the various states. That would be a much greater contribution to democracy than any basic reform of the electoral college.

QUESTION: What should be the role of the liberals who have been fairly active in the campaign and who are opposed to tying up with the PAC? Just what direction should these forces take to unify themselves and get unity of action? Would another party be the answer?

I CAN no more than indicate a general approach to this question than anyone else. I think it is quite true, as you indicate in your question, that a large and important section of the population wants to continue the political activity begun in the election campaign. But as they indicated, some do not want organized relationship with the trade union movement, and there may be any number of other potential divisions in the broad progressive democratic camp. I think that each group should try to find the organizational form that fits it best. They should act as activating and directing groups and not try to have any formal organizational amalgamation. It has got to be a very wide effort of political organization to get this democracy of ours functioning, united at the point where it counts decisively, in the ballot box. We must discourage every project of organization of new parties. I think the lesson of this election campaign points towards reducing the number of parties and not

increasing them. The Progressive Party was practically eliminated in Wisconsin. On the other hand the Farmer Labor Party in Minnesota amalgamated itself with the Democratic Party and thereby secured a democratic victory.

QUESTION: What do you think Wallace's position will be in the new administration or what effect will he have?

I HAVE no information as to what Wallace's official role will be. I assume he is going to play an important role, both in government and in the political life of the country, and I think that most democratic-minded people are going to welcome that fact. I think Wallace has a very big role to play. He has proved himself an important man of leadership in the democratic currents of America. I think he demonstrated by the way in which he took his personal political set-back in this campaign that he is a solid man who can be trusted. I think, however, at the same time it is no more than right to say it is probably fortunate for the country and for Wallace that he was not nominated in this past election.

QUESTION: Why were the country and Wallace fortunate in the way things turned out?

I THINK it would have been much more difficult to have secured very important additions to the Roosevelt cause in this campaign if Wallace had been the vice presidential candidate. I refer specifically to such circles as are represented by the *New York Times* and Walter Lippmann. It is a fact that circles of business and finance had developed a prejudice against Wallace that in many cases is more rabid than their prejudices against the Communists, and for these circles Wallace on the ticket would have been almost the same as Browder.

QUESTION: Do you not think that Wallace came out even stronger after the role he played in this election?

PERSONALLY he came out much stronger as a person in the leadership of the country. For the first time, he now stands on his own feet. He will play an important role in the country in his own right.

QUESTION: What will be the role of the Willkie Republicans? There is talk of their starting a movement away from the Republican Party.

IT WOULD prove a mistake for the Willkie Republicans to leave the Republican Party at the present time. My opinion would be that the Willkie Republicans stay in their own party and organize a fight around the slogan "It's time for a change."

QUESTION: What significance do you attach to the vote of the Liberal Party?

I ANALYZE the Liberal Party vote in the state of New York as perhaps fifty to sixty percent Willkie Republicans, people who were making the first serious shift in their lives and were very timid about it and therefore they found the place that was most strongly like the house they left.

QUESTION: *The votes were practically not even counted before we began to hear about the possible appointments to the Surplus Property Board of some more reactionaries, some of Jones' men and so on. What should be our attitude towards the administration when they again begin to compromise with reactionary appointments?*

THIS is an old question and depends on whether you want an administration in Washington which is going to do everything that we think ought to be done, or an administration which is able to get the country united about it. I dislike the condition as much as anybody, but I am realistic enough to know that the Roosevelt administration must have behind it the united effort of the majority. If I had been in charge of all appointments I might do it differently. But I wouldn't have a majority behind me. We must accept the fact that any majority coalition in this country at the present time will have conservatives in it.

QUESTION: *Would you say that applies to the State Department too? As for instance, in the case of representatives to Spain and other countries?*

IHAVE not been one of the great critics of the State Department, although a couple of years ago I had to make a couple of retractions of accusations I made against the State Department. I am glad I had to make these retractions and to have them justified by subsequent events. The recent withdrawal of Stilwell from China is proof of the fact that our government is really trying to carry through the policy I was accusing it of not carrying out. More and more as I have studied the State Department I have found it is continuously improving its work. From my point of view and to my great surprise, I have had to come to the conclusion that Cordell Hull has been systematically moving toward that improvement, and my conclusion is that the man who was looked upon as behind the liberalizing forces has proved to be the main stumbling block there, and I speak of Sumner Welles. His record out of office proves that his role in office was an obstructive one as far as his policies were concerned. (I still remain a pessimist as far as Mr. Berle is concerned!)

QUESTION: *I believe in calling a spade a spade, Mr. Browder. It seems to be an American tradition to forget statements made by certain individuals against others. I am for bringing out and talking about Dewey's statements made during the campaign. What about this tradition?*

IHAVE a great respect for American tradition. But there is one tradition I want to fight, and that is the tradition where during an election campaign false statements are legal and when the campaign is over they are forgotten. I don't think we should continue that tradition. I think it should be established that this be not permitted and what has happened is not forgotten. I know you are talking against the tradition of so-called sportsmanship in politics. But questions of government are not a game.

QUESTION: *There was a bit of discussion during the election about Mr. Dewey being kept in Albany, and many of the Democrats said that they were content to have him there. Should that attitude be maintained or should it be discarded?*

AS FAR as I am concerned, I withdraw the support I gave Mr. Dewey for the office of District Attorney in 1937. My opinion is that he is a bad District Attorney.

QUESTION: *I have read in the newspapers about Mr. Browder's discussion with Mr. Willkie in August of this year. Would you be willing to discuss any of it at this meeting?*

IWOULD be very glad to discuss how we happened to meet. He invited me to his home and during the visit we understood that I would not in the course of the election campaign make any direct quotations of his discussion with me. One does not speak in an election campaign for any man. I spent two hours with Mr. Willkie. They were very interesting. I can't make a complete report on this, but I would be very glad to give you my impressions for about five minutes.

I got the impression in the two hours of our conversation that Mr. Willkie was a man of great integrity and forthright speech and a man who was growing visibly before your eyes. He spoke to me very fully and frankly about his attitude toward the election campaign. Since it is no longer a question of not speaking for him during a campaign, I can say that Mr. Willkie had no respect for Candidate Dewey and indicated that in his opinion the Republican platform and the candidate adopted in Chicago are both bankrupt. I had one difference of opinion with Mr. Willkie in the course of that discussion. You see, we generally clicked pretty well on almost every question we discussed except one. I said that I thought the election struggle was a very close one and that there was grave danger ahead. Mr. Willkie said that in his opinion Dewey hadn't a chance then or at any time to be President, whether in that election or in any other. In my judgment he was very optimistic about Mr. Roosevelt's reelection. I think he said this so that it would keep the pressure off him and he wouldn't have to give an opinion on how he felt. He was frankly and deliberately waiting to make up his mind until it was absolutely necessary for him to speak. He was entitled to wait on the question of how to best facilitate his future contribution to the political development of America. I most emphatically agree that he was questioning himself at that time as to how he could best be able to discharge the role of keeping his contacts with the mass of the people in the Republican Party, to get them into a greater unity for the country after the election was over.

On the basis of my judgment of the man in the two hours of discussion of the political scene in America and the relationship of forces, I was firmly of the opinion that when the campaign developed further, if Willkie had been healthy and active, he would have been with us in the last weeks of the campaign and he would most certainly have come out for Roosevelt. This is my own opinion. Again I must emphasize what he repeated to me, as to thousands of others, that he had not made up his mind and was determined not to make up his mind until the last weeks of the campaign. Which, most unfortunately for the country and for the world, he never had the opportunity to do.

QUESTION: *Is it permitted to ask how that conference happened to come about?*

IRECEIVED word from a mutual friend that Mr. Willkie would be glad to see me at a certain hour, and he was there. I am very happy to say when I left, he shook hands

with even greater cordiality than when I came in. I was very happy with the interview and our mutual friend said that Mr. Willkie expressed himself as having spent a most interesting evening. Mr. Willkie had demonstrated before that he was not afraid to meet Communists and talk to them. He was a man who had nothing but contempt for the Red-scare technique, and he was of the opinion that Communists had to be taken on their merits like everybody else in the public life of the country, while he was very emphatic in declaring that he had no agreement with basic Communist doctrine. He had a serious evaluation of Communists as individuals and as a group in the solution of practical problems of the day. He welcomed that cooperation.

QUESTION: *Do you happen to know if Eric Johnston expressed his views in the election?*

ERIC JOHNSTON gave his support to Dewey. I was very happy to notice a certain lack of zeal in his participation in the campaign, which confirmed my judgment about the general feeling in the Dewey camp in this election campaign. This feeling was that there was no great sense of urgency that they had to elect Dewey—or else.

QUESTION: *Isn't it possible that a man like Eric Johnston had ulterior motives on his own part? That he doesn't want to be too closely identified with any faction that is so controversial at this stage of the game? There are comments that he aims to be President.*

HE SHARES that with a vast number. It is no longer distinctive.

QUESTION: *Was his [Eric Johnston's] coolness a matter of conviction or a politic one?*

IHAD the impression that Mr. Johnston's attitude was very similar to that of the *Herald Tribune* in New York. The *Herald Tribune* was in the peculiar position of turning its policy in the political campaign over to the business office. The best editorial brains connected with the *Herald Tribune* and the ownership (I think it is not revealing any confidential matters) were privately for Roosevelt. The question of what the position of the paper itself was to be was a matter referred to the business office as a question that had to be decided according to the considerations of how this institution as an investment could be best maintained.



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QUESTION: *Would you be willing to say a few words on the danger to our unity involved in the question of postwar military training?*

THERE is a great deal of unclarity on this question. We have a tradition of pacifism. This makes it difficult to accept military training in peacetime. In my own opinion this is one of the harsh necessities in a very unsatisfactory world. In order for America to be able to live in peace and take its proper role in making military service unnecessary in the future, it is necessary to keep this country militarily prepared, which basically means giving the mass of the youth of this country basic military experience and training in peacetime as well as in wartime. And this must be so until we are certain that the peace is so firmly established that it will not again be challenged. There are many arguments, but I don't think I have the time to go into the topic more fully now. The role of the progressives in this is difficult. Reaction will attempt to capitalize on this before the 1948 campaign is upon us, to capitalize on the mass sentiment, and I think it will be necessary for the progressive camp to have this question clarified sufficiently that it will not disrupt its unity.

QUESTION: *Do you think that the class consciousness shown by the labor movement in this election will cause the press to assume a more liberal attitude than they have had heretofore?*

ICANNOT see any signs that will give me any right to predict a more liberal press in the United States, except as we bring it about by helping to close up reactionary papers and start progressive ones. The press of the United States is an interest by itself. It doesn't represent the nation. It doesn't represent the masses of the people. It doesn't represent business. It represents itself. And it has its own special business in politics in serving the reactionary elements. The true interests of monopoly capital today are represented by Roosevelt and not by Dewey. And yet the newspapers went overwhelmingly for Dewey in this campaign, so they are not good representatives of monopoly capital. There is no sign that this monopoly will be broken in any way, except as it is being broken by the larger number of newspapers that have some degree of independence and by the rise of a great trade union press which most people don't see and have very little knowledge of. The greatest progressive force in this country is the trade union press, especially of the CIO. It has a circulation of millions and is very influential. It is a weekly press, however.

QUESTION: *What do you think of President Roosevelt's denunciation of Communist support, and do you feel it was necessary to assure the result of the election?*

IGOT the impression that this was something which Mr. Roosevelt personally considered unnecessary, but it was forced upon him as a practical necessity at the last moment by his party advisors. I got that impression precisely from the hastiness and clumsiness of its formulation, which was quite unlike the President. The President is usually very precise and the opposite of clumsy, and this particular statement was mechanical and clumsy. I judged from it that this was a necessity only because it was considered a necessity by some panicky Democratic machine leaders.