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The People's Front Can Defeat Reaction

DESPITE the continued rise of the economic index of the United States, the main feature of our economic life continues to be its instability. With production approaching the estimated normal, we still have mass unemployment. The power of consumption of the masses of the population remains about on the level of 1932. Unprecedented expansion of productivity is creating again all the preconditions of another cyclical crisis, more severe than that of 1929. It is such factors which give emphasis to such pessimistic questions as that posed by the conservative Brookings Institution, when it said:

A fundamental question with which the world as a whole is confronted at present is whether the capitalistic system of wealth production has not perhaps permanently broken down.

Such doubts, combined with the present enormous increase in profits, have given rise to a determination among the most powerful capitalists, to make use of this period to consolidate their power and establish guarantees against any effective challenge to their rule. That is why we are witnessing an unprecedented gathering of reactionary forces, who if they win their aims would carry our country far on the road to fascism.

Far-sighted progressives noted these tendencies soon after the most reactionary circles of the Democratic Party began to break with Roosevelt. For example, at the sessions of this Institute last year, Dr. David Saposs, the well-known economist and liberal, issued the warning:

Nothing short of an enduring, far-sighted and courageous alliance of the liberal middle class, the Socialists and Communists, can keep the middle class and workers from abdicating to fascism, and the whole world from being precipitated into another war.

We Communists had independently come to the same conclusion. We were assisted in this by our study of the developments in Europe. There we saw fascism coming to power in those countries where labor was divided, and where the progressive forces had not formed an enduring alliance against reaction. We saw, in France and Spain, where the progressive forces did unite against fascism, that reaction could be checked and democratic institutions preserved. We saw that fascism was not inevitable when the progressives were able to unite their forces. We learned the fundamental lesson of the People's Front—unity means victory over reaction.

It is this approach that determined the platform and policy of the Communist Party in the 1936 elections. That is why our platform declares that democracy or fascism, progress or reaction, is the central issue in the present elections.

This main issue is presented concretely in every partial issue of the election struggle. The fully-developed reactionary program of Hearst, Landon and the Liberty Leaguers is directed toward cutting wages, raising prices, smashing the trade unions, squeezing the poor and tenant farmers out of agriculture, cutting relief, wiping out social and labor legislation, balancing the budget at the expense of the poor and cutting down the taxes of the rich.

To this end the reactionary program cultivates and idealizes the rule of an irresponsible judiciary over the legislative power, curtails democratic rights and prepares for their eventual destruction by Black Legions, Ku Klux Klans, vigilantes, etc. This program is cloaked in phrases of "Americanism" and "constitutionalism," by which it hopes to hide its real goal—the establishment of a full-fledged fascist regime.

What forces are there in the United States, strong enough to defeat this threat of the reactionary camp? Clearly, the most important of these forces are to be found in the trade union movement, the farmers' organizations, progressive groups in the old parties and the organizations grouped around the Socialists and Communists. Here are the potential elements of an American People's Front. The problem is to find

that program upon which such otherwise diverse groupings can be united.

Such a program for a People's Front against reaction in America already exists in embryo. All these groups agree to the need of raising the living standards of the masses, building a powerful trade union movement, saving the farmers from ruin, extending social and labor legislation, balancing the budget at the expense of the rich. They agree that it is necessary to curb the usurped powers of the Supreme Court, defend democratic rights, assert popular control over the government and maintain peace.

The only way in which reaction can be decisively defeated is through building a broad People's Front upon such a program. It is the main purpose of the Communist Party in this election to further in every way the building of such a united front against reaction. That is why we say the issue is democracy or fascism, progress or reaction—an issue for which the broad potential People's Front is prepared, upon which it can be organized now, and not the ultimate issue of socialism or capitalism, a choice which the progressive forces are not ready to make.

The reactionary camp is doing everything to avoid squarely facing this issue of democracy or fascism. They—the Liberty League—try to carry the nation on the road to fascism, by delaring the only alternative today is socialism. That is why the reactionaries are so insistent that the issue to be decided in this election is the choice between capitalism and socialism. That is why they describe Roosevelt and the New Deal as Socialistic and even Communistic, although there isn't an ounce of Socialism in the administration in Washington.

Norman Thomas, Presidential candidate of the Socialist Party, seems to be confused by our complex political situation. Out of his confusion he has brought forth the same slogan as the reactionaries, socialism or capitalism. He is indifferent to the need for a broad united front to defeat the reactionaries. He refuses to see any immediate menace of fascism.

As a consequence the Socialist Party has refused effective participation in immediate political struggles; it still rejects the People's Front; it drifts toward sectarian isolation. The leadership of the Socialist Party does not see that there can be no effective fight against capitalism without fighting against the immediate menace of reaction.

Landon and Knox are the candidates of the camp of reaction. They were handpicked by William Randolph Hearst, chief exponent of fascism in America. They are supported by the Liberty League, by Morgan, by the du Ponts, by the Rockefellers, by all the monarchs of monopoly, collectively known as Wall Street. The Republican platform, behind a thin camouflage of Main Street liberalism, is the platform of reaction as I have described it.

The case of Roosevelt and the Democratic platform is more complex. Roosevelt stands for capitalism. But as between reaction and democracy, Roosevelt is striving to follow a middle course; he therefore wavers between the pressure from both sides. Roosevelt's policies for the past year were chiefly characterized by retreat before reactionary attacks; but the Democratic platform for the election emphasizes a progressive note.

It is against this indecisive position that the reactionaries rage; they demand a frontal attack against the living standards and democratic rights of the people. It is this same indecisiveness, however, that makes it impossible for the serious progressive forces to rely upon Roosevelt for the defeat of reaction.

The growing movement for a Farmer-Labor Party is the specific American form of the people's front, which we Communists see as the only hope to defeat reaction. But the Farmer-Labor Party, while seriously growing on a local and state scale, has no Presidential ticket in the field.

If there were a Farmer-Labor ticket, the Communist Party would support it and not put up its own candidates. We bring forward our own ticket to advance and strengthen the Farmer-Labor Party—the broadest People's Front against reaction.

In this we see also the means to build and strengthen our own Party and to advance the struggle for Socialism.

The major part of the Farmer-Labor Party movement is supporting the re-election of Roosevelt. That is the chief reason why there could be no Farmer-Labor ticket this year. This is especially true of the big progressive trade unions, whose pressure, exerted through John L. Lewis, was mainly responsible for the progressive note of the Democratic platform. Roosevelt supporters in the Farmer-Labor movement raise the question why the Communists, supporting the Farmer-Labor movement in other respects, do not also support Roosevelt.

We Communists are in full agreement with the aim of the progressive unions and the Farmer-Labor movement to defeat Landon and Knox at all costs. But we insist, first, that Roosevelt is no barrier to reaction; secondly, that to insure the defeat of Landon and to do it in a way most advantageous to labor and all progressive forces it is necessary that these progressive forces act unitedly and independently; and, third, that the progressive forces adopt a critical attitude toward Roosevelt and assume no political responsibility for him.

We have seen too much of the way in which Roosevelt is influenced; we have seen him moving to the Right, making concessions to the reactionaries, precisely because there was not sufficient independent counter-pressure from the Left, from the progressives. It is this lack of independent political action by the progressive forces which seriously threatens to give victory to Landon.

It is because the progressives do not organize their own forces for independent action, that the field is left open for the adventure of Lemke and Coughlin, and their so-called Union Party, conceived and financed by Hearst and the Liberty League. The Communists cannot agree to reliance upon Roosevelt, which leads to passivity, which prevents the rapid building of the people's front, the Farmer-Labor Party.

We Communists take advantage of every opportunity to repeat that we are ready to support fully every serious effort

to bring about the unity of all progressives to the fullest degree possible, for the defeat of reaction.

The Communist Party platform is designed to help this aim of building the broadest People's Front. Our platform is one that could be adopted by such a Farmer-Labor Party which we advocate and support. . . .

Our program represents and meets, the needs of the overwhelming majority of the American people. It has grown out of their struggles in the trade unions among the unemployed, the farmers, the Negro people, the intellectuals and professionals, the youth. A point of decisive importance is that this program can be achieved under the present capitalist order. That this is true has been proven by the victories of the People's Front in Spain and France. All of these demands can be won, if the people take the road of independent political action in a Farmer-Labor Party and compel the capitalists to disgorge some of the wealth they have taken from the people.

This program is of a special interest to the toilers of the South, white and Negro, but especially the Negro people who are the most exploited of working people and who are denied the right to live as human beings. There can be no freedom for the Negro people and no prosperity for the toilers of the South until the demands of the progressive platform are realized.

There has been much talk that the special problems of the South can be solved only in some peculiar Southern way. We say that the domination of Wall Street in the South is aggravated by the remnants of semi-feudal and serf relations. It is these hangovers from slavery that enabled Wall Street to establish the vicious system of wage differentials, to cite only one example.

Those shackles which prevent the full economic development of the South, those restrictions on civil liberties, those denials of full economic, political and social equality for the Negro people, can only be smashed, if white and black toilers unite, if in the South and North, East and West, the American people rally to defeat the threat of reaction and fascism, and

in the South, smash once and for all the remnants of slavery and serfdom. This is the only way freedom and prosperity can be won for the South.

The American people have shown in many ways that they will fight against fascism. Their hatred of a fascist dictatorship is the reason why the reactionaries have clothed their reactionary program in the garb of "liberty" and "constitutionalism." That is why it is necessary for the people to make a genuine fight for freedom and liberty. By fighting to maintain and extend our democratic rights we organize and strengthen the people against reaction. They learn those deeper lessons which will eventually prepare them for that necessary reorganization of our social life which can only be achieved by taking the road to socialism.

The program which the Communist Party proposes and carries to the American people is one which by fighting for liberty will pave the way for socialism. This program to meet immediate needs is one which preserves the possibility for the American people to choose the socialist path when they think it necessary, a choice which the capitalists would deny them by fascist force and violence.

In this connection I should like to point out that it is the reactionaries who use force and violence against the people, and that the Communist Party is not an advocate of force and violence. Let me quote a resolution adopted by the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party which was held last month in New York City:

The Communist Party must smash once and for all the superstition, which has been embodied in a maze of court decisions having the force of law, that our Party is an advocate of force and violence, that it is subject to laws, (Federal immigration laws, State "criminal syndicalism" laws) directed against such advocacy. The Communist Party is not a conspirative organization, it is an open revolutionary Party, continuing the traditions of 1776 and 1861; it is the only organization that is really entitled by its program and work to designate itself as "sons and daughters of the American revolution.")

Communists are not anarchists, not terrorists. The Communist Party is a legal party and defends its legality. Prohibition of advocacy of

force and violence does not apply to the Communist Party; it is properly applied only to the Black Legion, the Ku Klux Klan and other fascist groupings, and to the strikebreaking agencies and the open-shop employers who use them against the working class, who are responsible for the terrible toll of violence which shames our country.

We Communists believe that a strong and consistent fight for democratic rights under the conditions of decaying capitalism must ultimately lead the American people to the choice of the socialist path. In the fight against reaction the people will learn that the evils of the present system cannot be completely abolished unless a new social order, socialism, is built.

Under socialism, the United States, the richest land in the world, would be able to furnish prosperity, happiness and a rich and cultured life to all. Under socialism there would be no crisis, no poverty, no unemployment. The people would spring overnight from the kingdom of necessity and poverty to the kingdom of freedom and abundance.

We Communists maintain that the American people can and will be won for socialism. But this cannot be done by merely preaching socialism in the abstract as Norman Thomas and the Socialist Party are doing in this election. It can be done only by rallying the people to fight for their immediate and most burning needs and to organize them against their most dangerous enemies—the Liberty League, Landon and Hearst. In these struggles they will gain that determination and conviction which will lead them to abolish capitalism and establish socialism.

In waging this fight against reaction the American people are but carrying on their glorious revolutionary traditions, which are the most hallowed heritage of our people. Reactionaries of all shades attack socialism as revolutionary. But since when is revolution un-American? Our country was born and preserved in revolutionary struggles. Our people met their problems and solved them in a revolutionary way.

Today a far greater crisis confronts the American people. We Communists are confident that they will meet and solve it in the same spirit the American people solved the crises of 1776 and 1861. We Communists are proud that we can truly

say that Communism is the Americanism of the twentieth century, that in the great struggles to come the Communist Party will carry forward the revolutionary traditions of the past to a higher stage, and show the American people the way to a better and more secure life in the present, and to a future of peace, freedom, happiness and prosperity for all.

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