

New York, N.Y.  
January 31, 1966

To National Committee Members

Dear Comrades,

In a memorandum of August 1, 1965 Comrade George Breitman submitted a proposal that we change the transitional slogan "For a Workers and Farmers Government" to "For a Workers Government." The party convention referred his proposal to the incoming NC which in turn referred it to the PC for initial consideration. As a preliminary step the PC instructed the Secretariat to prepare background material on earlier party discussions of the subject. Toward that end the Secretariat has prepared the attached material containing the following items:

On the Slogan for a "Workers Government", by James Burnham. (Internal Bulletin, August 1938, pages 39-42).

Conversations with Crux (Trotsky) on the Slogan for "A Workers and Farmers Government". (Internal Bulletin, August 1938, pages 43-44).

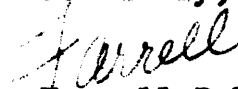
For the Workers and Farmers Government, by Jack Weber. (Internal Bulletin, August 1938, pages 46-49).

For the Slogan of "A Workers Government," by Max Shachtman. (Internal Bulletin, January 27, 1939, pages 1-4).

A Note on the Slogan for "A Workers and Farmers Government," by J. Burnham. (Internal Bulletin, January 27, 1939, page 5).

Supplementary Remarks on Workers and Farmers Government, by J. Weber. (Internal Bulletin, January 27, 1939, pages 6-7).

Comradely,



Farrell Dobbs

FD:ba

## ON THE SLOGAN FOR "A WORKERS GOVERNMENT"

By James Burnham

The thesis on the application of the Transitional Program to the United States proposes the slogan for "A Workers Government". Comrade Cannon has proposed, as an amendment, the substitution of the slogan for "A Workers and Farmers Government". Comrade Cannon has offered no motivation for, nor explanation of his amendment, though presumably the burden of proof of the suitability of his amendment as against the slogan advocated by the National Committee lies on his shoulders. Nevertheless, since the question has been raised, clarification is necessary.

The formal objection which has been raised in discussion to the Cannon amendment is that it commits us to advocacy of a "two class state". This formal objection is not, however, decisive, and indicates a lack of understanding of both slogans. The slogan for "A Workers Government" is not identical, in all respects, to the demand for "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat"; it is also a transitional slogan, designed like the other transitional slogans to aid in bridging the gap between the maturity of the objective social conditions for the proletarian revolution and the immature political level of the masses.

We would accept the slogan for "A Workers Government" in order to give it our own content. We understand that the only genuine workers government can be the dictatorship of the proletariat - the soviet state. We know that the struggle for a genuine "workers government", however conceived, can if resolutely pursued to the end, eventuate only in the struggle for the soviet revolution.

Our ideas in this respect are not, however, shared by the masses. In the first stages, what the masses understand by "a workers government" will not at all coincide with what we understand. They think, and will for some time think in parliamentary terms. "A workers government" will mean a "labor government" elected to office in the existing parliamentary setup. Their subjective aim will be the same as ours: a government administered by and in the interests of labor and the masses generally. But they will translate this aim differently into concrete terms. Only in the actual struggle for a labor government, and perhaps through the actual experience of a parliamentary "labor government" in office, will the masses learn that the achievement of a genuine "workers government" must mean the accomplishment of the soviet revolution.

It is in this way that the slogan for "A Workers Government"

can act as a bridge between parliamentarism and the revolution. Through this slogan the revolutionists can participate in the present struggles, alongside the masses, and can at the same time guide that struggle toward its future required channels.

This, then, is in brief the justification for the National Committee's advocacy of the transitional slogan for "A Workers Government".

Since the slogan for "A Workers Government" is itself capable of a reformist interpretation, it is evident that there is no difference in principle between it and the slogan for "A Workers and Farmers Government". The same type of analysis can apply to the latter. We can understand the latter slogan, in historical perspective, as actually meaning the dictatorship of the proletariat - i.e., the alliance of proletariat and peasantry with the leadership of the proletariat through the democratic soviets.

Apparently Comrade Cannon prefers the more extended slogan (though here, since he has written nothing on the subject, one must speculate) because it expresses openly the aim of bringing about the alliance between proletariat and peasantry, and because it can serve as an agitational weapon in securing the support of the "peasantry".

No objection in principle can be made to this preference by anyone who accepts the general conception of the transitional program. Indeed, it is or should be clear that the extended slogan is correct for some nations. The error is in believing it to be universally applicable. The specific error now in question is in believing it correct for the United States.

The error results from the attempt to draw too detailed an analogy between Russia, Spain, China and even such nations as France, on the one side, and such a nation as the United States on the other.

The problem of the Russian Revolution was the problem of "the peasantry". The issue depended entirely on whether the mass of the peasantry could be drawn to the side of the workers against both landlords and bourgeoisie.

It is easy to see why this problem was crucial: (1) Agriculture accounted for an overwhelming percentage of the output of the national economy; (2) The overwhelming percentage of the population was in agriculture; (3) Of this agricultural population a still more overwhelming percentage (all but one or two percent)

consisted of small peasants.

Not one of these conditions holds for the United States. The differences are so great as to change the whole character of the central problem of the revolution in this country. (1) Agriculture accounts for only a minor percentage of the output of the national economy. (2) Only a minor percentage (about one-quarter) of the population is in agriculture. (3) The division of the agricultural population is not in the least comparable to that of the agricultural population in Russia, or any similar nation. In the first place, in the United States, a substantial percentage of the agricultural population (around fifteen percent) consists of farm laborers - e.g., agricultural proletarians. Of the farm "operators", around one-quarter are share croppers, and another quarter are tenants of other varieties: in other words, only about a half of the U.S. farms are owner-operated. But, further, among the owner-operated farms, we do not at all find the average plot of 3, 5 or 10 acres that held for Russia, or for most European nations today. On the contrary, the average farm is of several hundred acres. Moreover, a substantial (not infinitesimal, as in Russia or Spain) percentage of the owner-operators are large scale agriculturalists, employing labor, renting part of their land to tenants and share croppers, etc.

Even so sketchy an account should indicate how thin is the analogy between the "peasant problem" in, say the Russian Revolution with the "farm problem" in the United States.

It is clearly impermissible to employ the word "farmer" in the United States in the same manner that we have employed the word "peasant" in Russia or Spain. "Peasant" in Russia meant more or less everyone in agriculture except the landlords; and this meant more or less everyone on the land, which in turn meant the overwhelming majority in the nation. Further, the differentiation in status, the class stratifications, among the great mass of the peasantry was on the whole not great. But in the United States the word "farmer" is so loose and vague as to be useless for the purposes of Marxism. Who is meant by it? If it means everyone on the land, then it applies to a vast range of social categories, from agricultural proletariat to farmer-capitalists, and each of the major categories is of considerable size.

But our attitude toward the members of these various categories is and must be entirely different; and their role with reference to the revolution will be sharply different. Agricultural laborers we must approach as proletarians, not at all as "farmers" in any sense. We urge them to organize in unions, and to fight for the same kind of demands as other proletarians.

The tenant-farmers, especially the share croppers, revert more and more to a semi-proletarian status, not merely in their relations to landlords, but in their work on WPA and other government projects during several months of the year. These, of course, we strive by all means to win to the side of the workers. We must support demands applicable to their conditions: suspension of rent and share payments; suspension of debts; prohibition of evictions; etc.

With reference to the owner-operators, there are also demands that we support, but these demands are formulated exclusively with respect to the lower stratum of the owner-operators, to the poor owner-farmers ridden with mortgages and tax debts and without adequate machinery and fertilizer (conditions applying to about half of the owner-operators). We demand for them a moratorium on mortgage payments and on taxes, free loans or subsidies for machinery and fertilizer, price committees, freight rebates, etc.

But the upper stratum of the owner-operators, comprising perhaps around a quarter of all farm operators, are potentially and actually for the most part enemies and not allies of the workers and their revolution, as well as of the other groups in the farm population. And it is this stratum which is above all meant when people in the United States speak of "farmers". All of the sets of demands which we advocate for the other groups - higher wages for the farm proletariat, suspension of rent payments and debts, even the demands for the lower stratum of owner-operators, are in reality directed against the upper stratum of owner-operators against the "farmers" in the full American sense of the word.

Our aim in "agricultural policy" must be: first of all to win the agricultural laborers; second, to win the support of share croppers and tenants; lastly, so far as possible to win alliance from the lower stratum of owner-operators. We can at most expect to neutralize part of the upper stratum of owner-operators; the remainder will be firmly - as experience already clearly shows - on the other side of the barricades.

Along with the sets of demands, some of them transitional demands, which further this complex aim, we accept also the more general demand for a "government" which will advance the interests of agricultural laborers, share croppers, poor farmers. And this is precisely a "workers government", not a "workers and farmers government". The latter slogan, in the United States, turns the farm problem upside down, and suggests a perspective just the reverse of what our concrete revolutionary perspective must be. It places the emphasis upon the stratum of the agricultural population which is not merely our enemy and the enemy of the revolution, but

the enemy also in the most direct as well as the longer term sense of those sections of the agricultural population which it must be our aim to win. We must beware of the automatic transfer of the solution to a problem correct in one nation to another nation where the conditions which made the solution correct are not at all to be found.

To accept the slogan for "A Workers and Farmers Government" for the United States would be to introduce a serious tactical disorientation - not indeed into our immediate day by day work, where the whole problem is now somewhat abstract - but into our general orientation for the American revolution. That is why we must reject it. The transitional slogan for "A Workers Government" is necessary, correct and adequate.

James Burnham  
August 11, 1938

CONVERSATIONS WITH CRUX ON THE SLOGAN FOR  
"A WORKERS AND FARMERS GOVERNMENT"

(STENOGRAPHER'S NOTE: The following is a rough draft of a conversation with Crux held July 29, 1938, uncorrected by participants.)

QUESTION: Which is more preferable of the two slogans: "Workers Government" or "Workers and Farmers Government?"

CRUX: I believe it is a very important error to have accepted the formulation, "Workers Government," instead of "Workers and Farmers Government," and I believe the basis of this error is the half-sectarian misunderstanding. One can oppose the slogan of "Workers Government" with the same arguments used against "Workers and Farmers Government," for you can say that Green in conjunction with Lewis -- that is not our government. We can say that Green plus Lewis plus LaFollette, as a representative of the petty bourgeois and peasant -- that is not our government. In that sense we can condemn the slogan of "Workers Government" as not sufficiently clear. So good, we can condemn it as well as "Workers and Farmers Government." If we accept the slogan of "Workers Government" then all of our other slogans, our whole strategy and tactics, will give a concrete meaning to the slogan. This slogan will become very popular and clear. You workers must take the power. Then we give this program which excluded the power of Green and Lewis, exclude from our point of view as a power which we could accept and support, but then we have deprived ourselves of the possibility of saying to the poor farmers, "It will also be your government." The farmers play a very important role in the United States. In England, this is not a very important question because the workers are the overwhelming majority. In the United States the question of "Workers and Farmers Government" is very important. Why deprive ourselves of the possibility in the rural districts to say, "This government would be yours."? That is our drive on the basis of progress, what can you object, farmers? What are your propositions, etc.?

QUESTION: Don't you think the misunderstanding or mistake arises also from a misunderstanding of the transition program itself? The idea back of limiting the slogan is that farmers don't have the same interest as workers, that they will come into conflict.

CRUX: Of course the workers and peasants, the workers in general, the peasants in general, don't have the same interests. The farmers are not a class, but a series of layers, of social strata beginning with semi-proletarian elements and ending with exploiters, big farmers, etc. The slogan "Workers and Farmers Government" doesn't include for us the whole peasantry. The content for agitation

doesn't include the whole peasantry or farmers. We signify that by our slogan we will introduce a political delimitation in favor of the poor farmers against the rich farmers. The bourgeois democrats as well as the fascists are interested in representing the farmers as a unit and through the higher stratum of the farmers which is totally bourgeois to hold in hand the lower stratum. Contrariwise, we are interested in introducing a wedge, and to omit here the higher stratum and to attract to us the lower. When we say "Workers and Farmers Government" in our propaganda, we add every time that we mean the exploited farmers, not exploiters, not the farmers who have agricultural workers -- they are not our allies. In this sense we can say that the more successful we are, the more closely would be the alliance between the workers and the lower stratum of the farmers.

It is very possible on some questions, we will have the support even of the middle farmers. We can even say that with some of the higher classes we can have a success, but with the radicalization of our measures, especially during the seizure of power they will be repulsed. But during the radicalization of our activity when we are before the seizure of the power and especially after seizure of the power, the middle elements of farmers can also be rejected for a certain time, because the fluctuation of the farmers is tremendous -- towards the workers, many times against, and only through this fluctuation can we definitely win the exploited majority of the peasants for alliances with them for building up socialist society. In this sense we should understand this slogan in a dynamic perspective and not as an agreement with a definite class for an indefinite time.

The important thing is that we ourselves understand and make the others understand that the farmers, the exploited farmers, cannot be saved from utter ruin, degradation, demoralization, except by a Workers and Farmers Government, and that this is nothing but the dictatorship of the proletariat, that this is the only possible form of a Workers and Farmers Government. By and by we must give this understanding to the agricultural workers and to the semi-proletarian farmers, that their own government cannot be conducted by LaFollette and other bourgeois, only by revolutionary workers.

The farmers themselves are absolutely incapable of creating their own government. This fact is checked by all of history from the middle ages down. Every time they are led by the burghers, the radical burghers. When the peasants began a movement, it was a local movement. Only the burghers gave national character to the Reformation, but all the peasants remained as local sects. The



same was true politically of the peasants government -- the feudal system was vanquished in France only under the guidance of the Jacobins, and the Jacobins were petty bourgeois of urban cities. The same in Russia. Victory was assured only by the workers. The same in Germany. Hitler with petty intellectuals succeeded in winning the support of the peasants, The peasants themselves were ready to follow the guidance of fascists or communists, awaited for salvation, and Hitler was more successful, but Hitler's movement began as a movement of the towns. Naturally it finished under the inspiration of the finance capital.

We must thoroughly understand ourselves that the peasants and farmers who economically represented survival of the productive system of the middle ages can have no guiding role in politics. They can decide only through the cities; better, they can be guided only by the workers. But it is necessary to pose this slogan before the peasants themselves. We say you must not choose as your alliance the bourgeois, but the workers who are your brothers. And this government would be your government of workers and poor farmers, not of all farmers, but poor farmers.

FOR THE "WORKERS AND FARMERS GOVERNMENT"

by Jack Weber

It is difficult to grasp the point of view of those who consider the issue a "principled" one. Quite correctly Comrade Burnham points out that the slogan for a "Workers Government" is a transitional slogan not at all identical with the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat." The slogan for the "Workers Government" certainly lends itself to reformist interpretation, but because it can be made to appeal to workers in the process of becoming class conscious and because we can fill it with our content (not necessarily all at once) we would adopt some such slogan as an educational bridge across which the leftward moving masses can be led towards the ultimate goal of soviet power and proletarian dictatorship. No objection that is raised against the slogan "Workers and Farmers Government" cannot similarly be raised against the idea of a "Workers Government." Is the objection that we are calling for a two class government? But in actual practice the "Workers Government" can be quite similarly interpreted. What Workers Government is it to be? The government of the trade union bureaucrats, of the Greens, Wolls, Lewisses, Dubinskys? That would surely be a Workers Government -- and a two class government. For all these figures are the agents of the capitalists in the ranks of the workers and it is our task to make this clear to the working class. It is strange that some comrades now find a principled difference involved in the choice between these slogans, particularly since the slogan has been used for a number of years by our French section without any of these comrades raising the slightest objection. Or is the issue principled only for the United States?

Comrade Burnham raises the issue as to the correctness of the slogan not elsewhere, but only in the United States. He objects to any attempt to apply the slogan "Workers and Farmers Government" universally. But nobody, so far as I am aware, has attempted to apply it universally. It would not at all apply, for example, in England. But it does apply in the United States.

The capitalist class everywhere today looks upon the farmers as an anchor of safety which helps to stabilize capitalist society. Without this buffer group (as an important part of the middle class, although as will be pointed out, the farmers do not form a single class) the small minority of capitalists would be face to face with the proletariat in all its mighty strength. The New Deal has had as one of its major aims the economic preservation of the farmers precisely for this reason. Had economic laws in their "purity" been permitted to govern, without government intervention through subsidies, the same process of disintegration of agricultural economy would have proceeded in the United States as in

England, to the point where the farmers would have become a negligible factor, numerically and economically. In England capitalism not only robbed agriculture of all its wealth, but carried the process of ruin to such completion that today the farmers form, families and all, only some seven percent of the population. Thus in England it would be quite unnecessary to argue the point, in a transition program, of whether to call for a workers government or a workers and farmers government. But in the United States, as earlier in France, the capitalists have learned from history, and, while continuing their exploitation of the farmers as intensively as ever, they utilize their government to maintain the farmers as farmers, even if at a low economic status.

The capitalist government pretends at all times to speak for the "farmers." Roosevelt registers as a farmer to give added point to this pretense. And indeed the bourgeois government does speak for the exploiting group among the farmers, that group which "farms the farmers." The ruling class does everything in its power to maintain allegiance among the farmers to the present system. A systematic propaganda, well subsidized, is constantly poured out to drive a wedge between the farmers and the workers. In particular, the hatred of the farmers is directed against the organized workers in the trade unions. This is accomplished by making it appear that these unions are selfish instruments which force so much out of the bosses that these same bosses, now as purchasers of agricultural products, cannot afford to pay the farmers better prices. Thus the bosses constantly dangle an alliance before the farmers against the working class with the illusion that the farmers will get more of the national income if they help the monopolists to beat down wages.

But the farmers are not a single class. They form a collection of all the classes. In his analysis at this point Comrade Burnham bolsters up his reasoning in an amazing manner, apparently reducing a real issue to one of terminology only. For he tells us that the term "farmers" applies here in America to "owner-operators," nay to "the upper stratum of the owner-operators" above all. Thus it would appear that when we advocate the "Workers and Farmers Government" we are advocating a joint government of the proletariat and the upper stratum of the owner-operators on the farms. We are told that the word "farmer" is so loose and vague as to be useless for the purposes of Marxism. It is perfectly true that the term farmers includes owner-operators, tenants, share-croppers, farm workers, and various combinations of these elements. It is the function of Marxism to enter such a complex social realm so as to drive a wedge between the exploiters and the exploited. This is done by means of a program for the exploited layers, a program (does Burnham teach us anything here?) which sets the exploited

against the exploiters. Our program and our propaganda are an attempt to focus the light on the realities that exist, not an acceptance of bourgeois looseness and vagueness. The capitalists would like nothing better than to have the term "farmers" apply only to the upper stratum of exploiting owner-operators. But even they cannot do this. In their census they always divide the farmers among owners, renters or tenants, sharecroppers, farm laborers. True those who work on the farm for wages are included with the wage earners, but they are also workers of the land or farmers. The most cursory examination of the literature will show the use of the word "farmers" to include the large exploited majority of those who work in the fields. Thus Lenin in his work on American agriculture that is by no means outdated except in its statistics, says: "Even on this basis we find that more than one third of all farmers are directly exploited by the great landowners and capitalists---". Comrade Burnham is willing to fill the term "Workers Government" with our content; that is, he is willing to interpret what he means by laying down meanings and a program. Will he not allow us to do likewise with the "farmers?" Must we add in front of this term the word "exploited," or will he allow us to show this in the actions we propose and the directives we give to the farmers. And surely we cede to the bourgeoisie that half million of exploiting capitalist farmers, to whom we offer no program but rather against whom we direct part of the activities of the real farmers, from our point of view.

But make no mistake, the question is by no means terminological alone. For what is involved is the weight of influence of the "farmers" in the fight against capitalism. One of the points made by Comrade Burnham is that "Only a minor percentage (about one-quarter) of the population is in agriculture." One-quarter of the population a minor percentage? As Burnham uses the word here, I get the impression that he means more than the numerical connotation alone, he means to minimize the importance of the farmers and their contribution to the proletarian revolution. But in this minor percentage are included both white and negro sharecroppers who live as nearly like European peasants as any section in America. Also a large section of poor farmers hopelessly in debt to the bankers. Even bourgeois writers refer to the mortgage as the bridge to tenancy, and this in turn as the bridge to wage-earning on the farm. Burnham does not deny the need for winning over these forces to the side of the workers. The program he offers for this purpose is part of the transition program adapted to this purpose. But he does not wish to sum this program up in political terms.

To weigh the importance of the exploited farmers (including the "independent farmers" exploited in the capitalist market by monopoly capitalism) the question should be posed in this form:

Can the working class win the victory in the United States without the support of the farmers? We know that the farmers cannot unite and form a strong political party of their own. They can follow only, follow one or the other of the two major contenders for power. If the farmers side with the capitalists -- they can then starve the city proletariat -- the working class would be doomed to defeat. On the other hand, in a revolutionary situation, the farmers could deliver a mortal blow to the capitalists financial structure and to capitalist economy. (Throwing off of debts, food agreements directly with the working class, participation in the soviets). Comrade Burnham is willing to strive to prove to the workers the need for our leadership. How shall we prove to the farmers that the Workers Government is in reality their government, the government of all the exploited as well? Shall we not sum up our program for the farmers politically by calling, in the transition program for the Workers and Farmers Government? Comrade Burnham is, I am sure, heartily in favor of soviets of exploited farmers in the country. How shall such soviets arise and how shall they be linked with the workers soviets? Is not this linkage to be actively attempted and striven for? And how can this be done except by pointing out the road for the farmers to follow to the working class? The call for a Workers and Farmers Government is more than symbolic of the fact that we would adopt the entire program of the exploited farmers, and that we would carry this program out in life. It is the slogan around which we carry on all our propaganda to achieve the alliance between workers and farmers, it is part of the transition program to involve the farmers in struggle against capitalism, to teach them through experience in this struggle who is friend and who foe, to counteract the propaganda of the capitalist class among the farmers, to reduce to a minimum the oscillations back and forth of these necessary but uncertain allies. In our opinion the motivation given for the use of "Workers Government" is actually one which aids the bourgeoisie to maintain their grip on the ideology of the farmers, to win the farmers away from the workers. The value of any slogan lies in its correct summing up of a program or a necessary trend of action. The term "Workers Government" alone does not sum up our program of cementing the alliance between the exploited in town and country, it ignores the need for this alliance. In that sense it can actually be harmful, and objectively of aid to the capitalists. It is necessary to encourage actively the building of soviets at the proper time and to create a link between the soviets of city and farm. This is accomplished by calling for a Workers and Farmers Government. To say that this is not Marxism is to ignore the whole nature of slogans and the method of applying them in complex ("vague") socially contradictory situations.

FOR THE SLOGAN OF "A WORKERS' GOVERNMENT"

by Max Shachtman

It is important, it seems to me, to bear in mind the following considerations in discussing whether the party should at this time (the reason for the emphasis on the present moment will appear more clearly later) adopt the slogan of a "Workers Government" or the slogan of a "Workers and Farmers Government."

The slogan of a Workers and Peasants Government had its origin in Russia. Under that slogan the Bolsheviks succeeded in accomplishing the October Revolution and establishing the Soviet power. To have attempted the triumph of the Soviets in Russia under the slogan of a "Workers Government" would have been the most obvious nonsense, and no serious Marxist ever proposed it in that country even though Lenin mistakenly accused Trotsky, several years earlier, of advocating such a watchword. Why? Because firstly, the overwhelming majority of Russia's population at that time was agricultural, and secondly, because the overwhelming majority of the agricultural population was composed of peasants. A central strategical slogan which failed to take into account this decisive fact would doom the party that advanced it.

Furthermore: the Bolsheviks advanced the slogan of the Workers and Peasants Government in a sense meant to include the entire peasantry, well-to-do peasants ("farmers," kulaks) as well as poor peasants, and to that extent, Lenin explained, "the revolution remained a bourgeois, a bourgeois-democratic one." But early in 1918, when the "bourgeois-democratic phase" of the October revolution approached its end, the class struggle manifested itself more sharply and openly in the agricultural population, only the poorer strata (and the agricultural proletariat) remained with the Bolsheviks, "and to that extent the revolution became a socialist one." Corresponding to this stage the Bolsheviks popularized the slogan of a "Workers and Poor Peasants Government."

Finally, if during the civil war, the two slogans were used more or less interchangeably, it was because there was no possible doubt as to who was meant by "peasants" in the "Workers and Peasants Government." Firstly, most of the kulaks were fighting this government in the camp of the White armies, and secondly because the rigors of War Communism (and later the famine) eliminated to such a large extent the social and economic differential in agriculture as to reduce its population, by and large, to one low level.

To what extent is the situation in the United States today like that which obtained in Russia of 1917? (In passing: the mere posing of this question indicates that my position has nothing in

common with an objection in principle to the slogan of a "Workers and Farmers Government" even in the United States, a point which will be amplified below.)

In Bulgaria, for example, to say nothing of China, the slogan of a "Workers and Farmers (Peasants) Government" is clearly indicated. I believe the same holds true of France. But nobody proposes that this slogan shall be raised for England. There we always have called for a Workers (i.e., Labor) Government.

Now, are the class relations in the United States closer to those of the 1917 Russia or to those of England? In Russia, the peasantry outnumbered the proletariat by about nine to one. In England (1924), the wage-workers constituted about 76% of the gainfully occupied and the middle class (including a negligible quantity of farmers) about 22%. In the United States, 23,500,000 wage-workers constituted 58.5% of the gainfully occupied, (the figure and percentage do not include such semi-proletarians as clerical employees -- 4,000,000; salesmen and all types of agents -- 1,000,000 teachers, nurses, librarians, architects, draftsmen, etc., who number some 2,000,000 -- all these Corey, from whom these figures are taken, includes in the urban middle class); while 12,500,000 persons (the "middle class") constituted 25.6% of the gainfully employed. The gainfully occupied farm population was divided as follows: 300,000 of an upper capitalist layer; 1,600,000 of an intermediate or "middle class" layer; 4,300,000 of the lower or semi-proletarian layer (poorer tenants and owners); hired farm laborers (agricultural proletarians) numbered 2,600,000. These figures date from 1930; the crisis since then has tended to increase the numbers at the agricultural poles at the expense of its equator.

In the light of these realities of American class relations, what would the slogan of a "Workers and Farmers Government" mean? On the face of it, it would mean to the average worker what it literally says: a government of all the workers and all the farmers. To the agricultural population of all strata, (with the exception, let us say, of the thin upper layer of capitalists), it would mean the same thing: a government representing not only the farm laborers and sharecroppers and tenants, but the comparatively well-to-do farm owners.

But it is argued, we will explain, in our agitation, in detail and in order to eliminate confusion, that by the slogan of a "Workers and Farmers Government," we mean a government of all the workers and only the poor farmers, the croppers and tenants, the laborers - not all the farmers, not the bourgeois farmers.

If the essential meaning of the slogan is not clearly implicit in its wording, and requires elucidation and reservation, then, in my opinion, the slogan of a "Workers Government" still remains preferable and correct. To the farm laborer, to the cropper and tenant (I leave aside for the moment the urban proletarian), I will explain that only under a Workers Government, a government of all those who toil, who are oppressed and exploited, will his problems, too, be resolved.

The slogans involve, furthermore, the question of the direction in which the proletariat (and above all, its revolutionary party), shall now turn its attention. It is necessary for the party first of all to break with the 20-year old curse of the American communist movement - the orientation towards the Northern, North-western and Western "farmers," who always constituted "our agricultural partners in Farmer-Labor-Party opportunism. Rather than hunt for the dubious farmer ally of Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Nebraska, etc., at the present stage, the party should seek to establish its bonds with - and turn the attention of the city workers towards - the hundreds of thousands of agricultural laborers in that territory. Let the party (and following it, the workers in general) turn its attention to the South, where the problem is, more often than not, the mobilization of the farm workers, and above all the horribly exploited sharecroppers and tenants against whom stand arrayed -- the farmers! In California as in Oregon and elsewhere, our initial and main task is the organization and mobilization of the hundreds of thousands of exploited migratory and semi-migratory farm population against the oppressors whom they know so well under the name of the "Associated Farmers." The fulfillment of these elementary tasks, these first tasks, is not served by the slogan of the Workers and Farmers Government. At the present stage, at the very least, it is a confusing and disorienting slogan for the party and for the proletariat.

Let us consider another, and perhaps decisive, aspect of the question.

Given the present stage of development of the American working class, what is the main problem facing the party?

To imbue the workers with the consciousness of a class, to heighten and sharpen their class consciousness, to make them a class for themselves, to have them first of all separate themselves into class distinct and independent of all other classes. This is, in fact, the principal and indispensable (but now still in-existent) pre-requisite for a proletarian alliance with other classes (i.e., the urban and rural middle classes). Our task is to explain to the workers the need of a separate class organization, with an



independent class goal - that is, the need of a government of their class. In Minnesota, for example, our concrete task under the concrete circumstances is not so much to fuse the workers with the farmers into one (i.e., the now existing) Farmer-Labor Party -- but to separate the workers into a party distinct and independent from the farmers (especially, God knows, from such farmers as now compose the agricultural part of the F.L.P.!) "We must ... always organize ourselves separately" from the agricultural masses, is a principle that still holds good.

Now again, under the given circumstances, does the slogan of a Workers and Farmers Government facilitate or impede the solution of these problems, the accomplishment of these most urgent tasks? It impedes them; the slogan of the Workers Government facilitates them.

Further: we are not and I hope we shall not become the advocates of the two-class party, a Farmer-Labor party, in the United States. But what shall our agitators who work in the trade unions and advocate the formation of a Labor party with the program of a Workers and Farmers Government say in reply to the worker who then proposes: "If the party is going to work for a Workers and Farmers Government, why shouldn't we try to organize a Workers and Farmers Party?" It seems to me obvious that as matters stand now, the slogan of a Workers and Farmers Government unlike a Workers Government slogan, contribute to the trend towards a two-class Farmer Labor party rather than to the independent class political formation of the workers.

Does it follow from what is said above that the slogan of a Workers and Farmers Government is excluded for us, in principle or for all time? I do not think so. It is possible to conceive of a development which would make it mandatory upon us to extend our slogan of a Workers Government to include specifically the farmers. Our first task, however, is the popularization, above all among the urban and rural proletariat, and the poorest strata of farmers, of the slogan of a Workers Government. If, meanwhile, the rural middle class - the various intermediate and lower strata of farmers - should develop a progressive "separate" political or semi-political movement of its own, embracing considerable masses, the extension of the slogan to read "Workers and Farmers Government" would serve the revolutionary labor movement as an expression of its desire, its willingness and the necessity to make an alliance with the "anti-capitalist" farmers for the purpose of establishing a government of all the toiling and oppressed people. It was essentially in this way that the Comintern first raised the slogan of a Workers Government, and later, in view of a rising peasant movement (which by the way, proved to have been grossly overestimated and deceptive),

converted it into a slogan of a Workers and Peasants Government.

But while we cannot and should not exclude such a development in the United States, the present situation, the present relationship of forces, the present level of consciousness of the masses, our present task (our task, that is, for the coming period), all dictate to us the retention of the slogan of a Workers Government.

January 12, 1939

A NOTE ON THE SLOGAN FOR A WORKERS AND FARMERS GOVERNMENT

by James Burnham

I do not wish, at this time, to add at length to what I have written on this problem in one of the summer's internal bulletins or to Comrade Shachtman's current statement, with which I am in agreement. I wish only to stress and briefly elaborate a single decisive point, made also by Comrade Shachtman.

We are disputing now not about any "principled" difference between the two slogans, but about which is correct for current agitational use by our party. I am convinced that the slogan for "A Workers and Farmers Government" is directly inconsistent with our present general agitation, in particular with our slogan for "A Labor Party" and the perspective which this latter slogan currently implies.

Let me put it this way: Suppose I am giving a public speech, and during the course of it I advance the slogan for "A Workers and Farmers Government." Then, during the question period an intelligent worker asks me: "You are for a Workers and Farmers Government. I assume therefore that you are also for a Farmer-Labor Party? We will first build a Farmer-Labor Party, and then that party will take over the government and we will have our Workers and Farmers Government?" But I have to answer: "Oh, no, I am not for a Farmer-Labor Party but for a workers party, a Labor party." Then he asks, "Please explain this to me."

In all seriousness I state that it would be impossible for me to explain; I would have no answer. What could I possibly tell him? It would be easy enough, perhaps, if the workers already had their labor party and the farmers already had a party of their own. But neither party exists as yet. I can hardly say that I don't want a Farmer-Labor party because the farmers are no good; then how could I justify wanting a government of workers and farmers - a government is after all more important than a party. In short: I won't be able to make sense. If, under present circumstances, we adopt the slogan for a workers and farmers government, then we will also - if we want to make sense - be compelled to change our slogan for a labor party to a slogan for a Farmer-Labor party. Otherwise, one or the other of our slogans will necessarily be mere demagogy.

I urge the members of the NC to consider this problem not merely in "theory", in the abstract, but in terms of what it will mean in our own concrete experiences, in our day-by-day agitation. How could we answer the hypothetical question I have given? We could not. And this alone proves that at the present time it

would be altogether incorrect to adopt in this country the slogan for a Workers and Farmers Government. The agitational slogan now corresponding to conditions in the U.S. and to our own problem is: For a Workers Government.

SUPPLEMENTARY REMARKS ON WORKERS AND FARMERS GOVERNMENT

by J. Weber

There are two points of view opposed to the inclusion of the term "Workers and Farmers Government" in our Transition Program, and desiring that we call for a "Workers Government." The one takes a general position and states categorically that whatever its correctness elsewhere, this slogan is positively incorrect for the United States. The other declares that the slogan may conceivably be applicable at some future time (though not necessarily), but that the sum total of conditions at the present time demands that we call for a Workers Government, that to call for a Workers and Farmers Government right now would be harmful.

Comrade Shachtman expresses the latter point of view, but in spite of conceding that he can visualize a situation that would make the call for a Workers and Farmers Government correct he is in accord with Comrade Burnham concerning the meaning of the term "farmer." It is far more important for us to organize the sharecroppers in unions and the agricultural workers in unions, against the farmers than for us to depend on the farmer to aid the proletarian revolution. Not a single member of the party, I am sure, will polemicize against organizing these unions. On the contrary it should be said that without the organization of the poorest farmers, the tenants and sharecroppers and agricultural workers, the meaning of the slogan Workers and Farmers Government could hardly be carried out. Such a government must be the government of the majority of workers and the majority of farmers. And the poor farmers, consisting predominantly of the above groups, constitute that majority.

The analogy with the Russian Revolution has pertinence with respect to the use of the term peasants when "poor peasants" was intended. Comrade Shachtman states that it was only after the Bolsheviks came to power that they distinguished between poor peasants and kulaks, and carried the civil war into the village. This is certainly not the fact. Lenin, in his speech on the Agrarian Question to the All-Russian Congress of Peasant Deputies (June 4th, 1917), said: "My comrades and myself, members of the party in whose behalf I have the honor to speak here, know that there are two such ways for safeguarding the interests of the agricultural wage workers and poorest peasants. Those two ways we submit to the attention of the Peasant Soviet. The first way is to organize the agricultural wage-workers and poorest peasants." This theme was emphasized over and over again by Lenin. And from the very beginning of the dual power. These organizations were for the immediate protection of the

poor against the rich peasants. They were also the instruments for carrying out majority rule in the village. Elsewhere Lenin says that the party speaks in the name of the wage-workers and the poorest peasants. He interprets the slogan of Workers and Peasants Government to mean "poorest peasants." In similar sense we mean Workers and Poor Farmers, the great majority of farmers.

The workers on the land, of all varieties, look upon themselves and will continue to look upon themselves as farmers. We would make a serious mistake to attack the top layer of exploiting capitalist farmers -- a half million or so -- as "farmers" alone. We would be discarding not this half million but six millions or more. Rather we should turn the farmers (the real workers on the land) against this top layer and its followers by calling the latter the big landlords, the usurers, the capitalist-farmers, etc. And with this understanding of terminology the unions of farmers become the best weapons for turning farmers against their exploiters. Comrade Burnham's approach would be of aid to the bourgeoisie in carrying out their strategy of erecting the farmers as a buffer between themselves and the workers.

It is quite true that the specific weight of agriculture in the United States is not as great as in France, although far greater than in England. But it is far from negligible. And the fact is that this specific weight should be far greater considering the actual contributions agriculture makes to the national economy. The farmers get far less than they should for their products -- a highly important factor in making them our allies. Comrade Burnham agrees that even the small independent farmer must be made the ally of the working class. Our program must include the program of this section of the middle class, particularly the casting off of debts and mortgages. The alliance is clear, the workers nationalizing land and the banks and aiding the farmers to throw off the debt burden and the enormous rent burden to the landlords. But Comrade Burnham will make no further "concessions." There are thirty million people on the farms. The very unions that Burnham and Shachtman are so anxious to create, will unquestionably aid in setting up numerous farmers soviets in time of revolution. I have no doubt that these comrades will not refuse to grant representation in the government to these soviets, farmers soviets. Why not sum up the political program and the political fact in our slogan for the Workers and Farmers Government?

The question of time, raised by Comrade Shachtman, is hardly decisive. We deal here with a general transition program

applying to an entire transition period. Shachtman has raised no objection to the slogan for soviets because it must not, cannot be raised right now. Timeliness is a criterion that applies to any and all slogans. Nobody proposes that we start an immediate and unremitting agitation for the Workers and Farmers Government. The question is here one of general perspective. Is it necessary, from our point of view, that we shall at the proper time agitate for this slogan? Or is this slogan false for all time? To me, it is absolutely essential that we include this slogan in the transition program. I am quite willing to discuss where and when the slogan should be raised, or how it is to be raised. That is a separate matter. It hogs the major issue. As for Shachtman's other aims, of striving to get the workers to act as an independent class, etc., neither one slogan nor the other plays a decisive role. And as for fearing aiding and abetting a two class party, it is not the slogan that does this, it is the whole line of conduct of the party that does or does not do this. Our position can be made perfectly clear on this issue under either slogan. No slogan is self-explanatory. All require explanations and elaboration. All must be filled with a content. And where it is known that a danger of misinterpretation exists, it is all the easier to correct the possible misunderstanding.

These supplementary remarks are not intended to be exhaustive. I can only repeat what I have already said on this subject. It is not a burning issue at this moment, but it is of vital importance that we decide the issue correctly.