

October 23, 1944

Dear Friends:

The attached was written, as you will observe, by instructions of the branch. I fully agree with the position of the branch. Let me make it clear at the outset, however, that as a responsible member of the NC I avoided either initiating the discussion of the Branch's disagreement or fostering it. I reserved my remarks until everyone had spoken, being in opposition to the policy of the PC I could not, of course, speak for it. I stated my own views with as little polemical reference as is possible under such circumstances. I could not do less.

The letter was read and discussed in the executive committee and in the branch. The decision was not only unanimous in both cases, but no one expressed a different point of view at any time during the discussion. The branch discussion was thorough, nearly an hour being devoted to the matter. During the course of the discussion it covered a lot of ground dealing with the traditions of our party on endorsements, our conduct in the last several presidential elections, reformism, pacifism, LP, class politics, etc. Our union people were the only ones who tended to show real feeling in disagreeing with the line. I sought, in my remarks, to take the sharpness out of their attitude.

Now as to my own views. I think the position of the PC to be mistaken and the letter with the actual motions to be a poor one, even from the viewpoint of the PC. Let me make the following points:

1. It is necessary to note how the problem of the elections came before the PC. A letter is received from a branch. The PC has something shoved into its lap. It devotes a short discussion to it and sends out a badly formulated set of motions (I am sure dictated on the spot). The national presidential elections took no one by surprise. They occur every four years on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. For months every organization in some manner connected with the American political scene is adding up the score and trying to decide where it fits in. Even individuals (from the late Wendell Willkie to Dwight Macdonald) find it necessary to give thought as to where they stand. But for us the national elections are still in another world. And we are a political party. With us the matter of the elections are a minor concern. We get a letter about it. We have a discussion. We send our motions out. Comrades, I say this is not taking ourselves seriously. How do we expect to be taken seriously by others? Even by new worker members of the party? Isn't it possible that some may think, "What kind of a party is this that disposes of the national elections in a short discussion in a top committee of a half dozen or so?" American workers attach a great importance to political campaigns, and rightly so.

2. Now as to the question itself. Is it a principle with us that we only vote for revolutionary Marxists? I do not believe this is the case and I am sure that the PC did not take its stand on such grounds. It is, of course, a principle that we do not vote across class lines. But electoral support to reformists has always been viewed by us as a tactical question. Even Temple is willing to agree to this. The question of the present elections, with no revolutionary Marxist Party in the field, is, therefore, a tactical problem as far as we are concerned.

3. In what manner is the question a practical one for us? Certainly not from the viewpoint of how many votes we will swing either way, and effect the results. To me the problem has only one avenue of approach worth considering. In what manner can we inject ourselves into the campaign and advance the political education of the 1,000 or so trade unionists who look to Labor Action for guidance. (1,000 is a rough estimate of the number of regular readers we have among the union activists.) This is our base in the workingclass today. This is where our main concern must be. This is the nucleus of our future party. These workers are already against the no-strike pledge and for a Labor Party. They are also opposed to Roosevelt, in greater or lesser degree. This is our "workingclass public". What will they do on election day? There is one thing they will certainly do -- go to the polls and vote. Any attempt to argue them out of this is reactionary. In addition, it is futile. A campaign to accomplish this would be stupid, anarchistic, and serve only to discredit us.

4. What will the bulk of this 1,000 Labor Action followers do on election day? 90% of them will vote for Roosevelt. This, despite their agreement with most of what LA writes about Roosevelt. They will do it because of the political backwardness of the American workingclass and their underdeveloped sense of class principles, above all class lines in politics. It would be a great education for them to learn that if they vote they must vote within their class. A vote for the Socialist Party would have under these circumstances a most progressive educational function for them. We would give them a positive lead. Our campaign against Roosevelt would be reinforced. Our own people in the unions and shops in innumerable arguments against Roosevelt, have, when pressed, instinctly taken this line of asking those who are going to vote to vote for Socialist.

5. What is the concrete meaning of the position we have adopted? It is to permit the Labor Action vote to be cast for Roosevelt. In 1940 this did not matter. We had more readers on the campus than in the shops. We could then take an attitude of disregard. We had no responsibility to workers. We told our own members what to do and that was sufficient. Macdonald is quite right in his attitude toward Thomas. But DM is not a party. He is an individual. He makes a declaration of conscience and lets it go at that. For us it is different. We are a party. We have influence among a definite grouping of workers. We have their respect and, to some measure, their confidence. In 1940 we could view it like a free lance intellectual. But today it is different. In 1940 it was a question of shall we (WPers) vote for Thomas or stay home? The question was not worth a serious discussion. Today it poses itself differently. Shall a thousand Labor Actionists vote for Thomas or Roosevelt? These are the alternatives. "Stay at home" is not an alternative for them. The PC has decided, in effect, that they will not give any leadership to the Labor Action following (our "masses") but permit them to cast a vote for Roosevelt.

6. But isn't Thomas pro-war? To begin with, this is not decisive in this instance. The candidates of the Michigan Commonwealth Federation are certainly more pro-war. Any independent labor candidates we support during the course of the war will be pro-war. True, their role as genuine representatives of the class in politics will require a different approach than to the Socialist Party. Were the Socialist policy on the war (if there be such) as pro-war as the average LP candidate will be during the war, then it would perhaps make a difference. If Thomas campaigned on a win-the-war platform a la CIO-PAC, he would be so little distinguished from the bourgeois

policy that given his lack of a mass base in the class we would gain nothing from supporting him. But this is not the case. On the issue of the no-strike pledge, conscription, American imperialism in Asia, race discrimination in the army, role of WLB, and other issues he has campaigned on he has been in sharp opposition to the war policies of the administration. He is pro-war because of what he omits rather than what he says. True, this omission is not accidental. He (and his party) is a mealy-mouthed defensist. For this he must be exposed to the rays of a revolutionary Marxist criticism. This is necessary precisely because he sounds 95% anti-war. But we are not dealing with Kautsky in 1914. Kautsky was the main ideological danger in the workingclass. For us today Hillmar Murray, not Norman Thomas, represent the main ideological danger. We have recognized this and conducted our agitation against the PAC line accordingly. It is ludicrous to fear the possible effects of a Socialist Party vote upon our "LA masses" to whom the alternative is Roosevelt not abstention. It is ludicrous to fear the effects of endorsing the "pro-war" Thomas upon workers who will otherwise cast their votes for Roosevelt.

7. But won't such endorsement build up the Socialist Party among workers? No. Quite the contrary. It will build up the Workers Party. A pro-Thomas policy will show them that we have a positive lead to give and that it has something to do with the world they live in. An abstentionist line will only remove us further from them. No WPer in his right mind would, of course, propose that we conduct a campaign for the Socialist Party. We are not out to sell either Thomas or his party. It would be quite sufficient that we devote one lead editorial in our paper telling workers to vote within their class. 90% of the editorial would deal with the principle of class lines. 10% would tell them that a vote for the SP is the only alternative today in the absence of a real labor party or a genuine socialist party. In addition we would run an article, once as long as the editorial, telling what the SP is, who Thomas is, and why they cannot solve the problems of the workingclass. Not only would such a policy have favorable results in the ranks of our "LA masses", but also among the general radical public.

I ask that this letter be made available in some form for the information of the NC. If it is too burdensome upon the office to mimeo it with all the other documents on hand, it could, perhaps be prepared in 4 or 5 typewritten copies for circulation among out-of-town members.

Ernest Lund