

THE  
LABOR PARTY  
QUESTION

RESOLUTIONS OF  
1938 AND 1944 ON  
THE RELATIONSHIP  
OF THE MARXISTS  
TO THE MOVEMENT  
FOR A LABOR PARTY

15¢

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## INTRODUCTION

The vast gap between the advanced stage of development of American economy and the political backwardness of the American working class has long been the outstanding, over-all contradiction that fairly leaps to the eye of the Marxist observer of the American scene.

On the Continent, the appearance of the modern labor movement was from its outset a politically independent movement in the form of the Social Democratic parties. In England, the trade unions existed on a narrow craft basis for decades before the appearance of the modern industrial organizations at the turn of the century. These, however, brought in their wake almost immediately the organization of the Labor Party.

The persistent failure of the American labor movement to produce a party of its own, despite many indications in that direction at various times, remains a challenge to the Marxists' ability, both as historical and theoretical analysts and as political strategists. Out of this problem has been born the controversy over the attitude of the Marxists toward the formation of a Labor Party, i.e. a party formed on the basis of the existing economic organizations of the working class.

In the period before World War I, the Marxists in the Socialist Party, then having a membership of some 100,000, viewed any Labor Party tendencies as a rival to their party and an obstacle to the development of a socialist consciousness among the workers. With the split in the Socialist movement at the end of the war and the decline in influence of the Socialist Party, a tremendous wave of pro-Labor Party sentiment developed in the trade unions under the influence of progressives like Mockels and Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Federation of Labor and many Socialist trade unionists. This movement posed many complicated problems for the young Communist Party, just emerging from its struggle against ultra-leftism and "undergroundism". Under the guidance of the now notorious John Pepper, representative of the Comintern in this country, the Communist Party was taken through a series of hair-raising twists and turns in an attempt to place the party at the head of the Labor Party movement. The maneuvers of Pepper resulted in landing the party in an opportunist mire from which only the drastic intervention of the Communist International could extricate it. The "Pepper" experiments in Labor Partyism left a bad taste in the mouths of all Marxists which colored their judgment of the Labor Party question as a whole.

The Left Opposition (Trotskyists) were organized in 1929 on a program that included opposition to the slogan for a Labor Party. The moribund state in which the trade unions had descended following the immediate post-war period and their further decline with the beginning of the depression, gave good reason to believe that the American working class would go through a tempestuous political development which would lead directly to the creation of a mass revolutionary party. When the Trotskyists gave up the Communist International as hopelessly degenerated and called for the creation of new revolutionary parties, they took to the tactic of entering the Socialist Party to fuse with its sizable left wing. Their view of the Labor Party remained unchanged. The perspective was still for a rapid politicalization of the masses outside of the trade union movement which would link up with the creation of the new revolutionary party.

However, two events occurred which required that the revolutionary Marxists

reexamining their position on the Labor Party question. The first was the organization of the CIO. This resulted in the appearance, almost overnight, of militant, industrial unions, based on the mass production industries, embracing millions of members and with a political interest beyond any known in the AFL. The second was the expulsion of the Trotskyists from the Socialist Party without the prospect of achieving in the foreseeable future a sufficiently large mass base for their own party to channelize the politicalization of the workers in a revolutionary party.

With the organization of the Trotskyists in the Socialist Workers Party in 1938, the Labor Party question came up for reconsideration from the angle of our relations to the American Labor Party that had been formed under the leadership of the needle trades unions in New York City and of our relations to the national CIO political movement in support of the New Deal, then known as Labor's Non-Partisan League. The reappearance of the Labor Party question coincided with the discussions on the transitional program initiated in our ranks by Comrade Trotsky.

Trotsky posed the Labor Party question in an entirely new light for our movement. The old argument proceeded from the assumption that the Labor Party would be a reformist party and that therefore a slogan for the Labor Party had to be a slogan for a reformist Labor Party. Trotsky riddled this concept by linking the slogan for a Labor Party with our transitional program. He pointed out that revolutionists who call for the workers to create a party of their own also advance a program for that party. The revolutionists, therefore, take no responsibility for a Labor Party other than one that bases itself upon their program. It was this concept of the slogan for the creation of a Labor Party that was proposed to our party and adopted, by referendum vote, in 1938.

The opposition to the Labor Party slogan was led by Comrade Draper, who offered a counter resolution for the continuation of the old position of opposition to the Labor Party slogan. The majority resolution was adopted by an overwhelming vote.

When the Socialist Workers Party split in 1940 and the Workers Party was formed, the latter based itself upon the Labor Party resolution of 1938. This remained the guide to our activities on this question until 1944 when the question was again brought before the party by Comrade Draper. The 1944 convention adopted a resolution reaffirming our support of the Labor Party slogan.

This collection of documents on the question contains the Majority and the Draper resolutions both for the 1938 referendum and for the 1944 convention. We commend these documents to the close study of all party members and students of the American labor movement as an introduction to one of the crucial political questions facing the Marxists in the United States.

Ernest Erber  
National Educational Director

1938: THE PARTY ADOPTS ITS PRESENT POSITION (FOR A LABOR PARTY)

(Following are two documents from the 1938 discussion, in which the Party adopted its present pro-Labor Party position. The first is the resolution of the National Committee Majority, which was adopted by a referendum vote of the party; followed by the Minority resolution which sought to maintain the existing policy. The discussion in the Party which preceded the vote on these two resolutions took place not only in the branches but also in the public press. In particular the New International carried both sides.)

THE MAJORITY RESOLUTION -- FOR A LABOR PARTY

The decline of American capitalism and the social crisis ensuing therefrom have already called forth the greatest trade-union organizing campaign in American history, which brought with it a wave of strike struggles unprecedented in scope and revolutionary implications (the sit-down strikes). At the same time the experiences and results of these herculean efforts of the American proletariat have demonstrated the inadequacy of the purely economic struggle to solve even the most pressing immediate problems of the workers. The precipitous decline in economy, as a result of the new crisis, adds new millions to the ranks of the unemployed, cancels out the gains of the strike victories and even threatens the existence of the newly built trade unions. Instinctively sensing the inadequacy of trade-unionism alone under these circumstances, the workers have begun to turn in million-masses toward political action. The further development of the crisis is certain to strengthen this tendency.

The organized participation of the workers in politics under the aegis of Labor's Non-Partisan League represents a profound departure from the old Gompers school of labor politics, although on the surface the two may appear to be identical. In the past the labor bureaucracy confined itself to "endorsing" this or that "friend of labor" on the capitalist party tickets. In the 1936 presidential elections, and in virtually all municipal and state elections since, we have seen for the first time a systematic and increasingly determined effort to organize and mobilize the political strength of the workers as a single unit. This new movement, represented by the L.N.P.L., must be characterized as a stage in the development of the labor movement from complete subservience to the political parties of big capital to an independent party of the workers.

The fact that the movement as yet remains within the formal framework of the Democratic Party is in part due to the conscious restrictions placed upon it by the bureaucracy and in part to the as-yet unclear aims of the masses. On the other hand, the increasing aggressiveness of this movement on the political field, and its mounting demands for more concessions and representation for labor -- an attitude which has already impelled the workers in important local instances to put up independent or semi-independent tickets -- testify to the profound impulse of the masses of workers toward completely independent

political action. This impulse is progressive and must consciously and deliberately be aided at every step by the Socialist Workers Party.

Parallel with the developing sentiment for an independent party of the workers, and in large measure interfused with it, there is a powerful trend in the direction of a new bourgeois liberal party designed to include and swallow up the incipient movement of the workers for independent labor political action. Under further pressure of the social crisis this trend can and most likely will also gain strength, the present Democratic Party may be split wide open and a new party of the democratic bourgeois front emerge, with the labor bureaucracy occupying a prominent though politically subordinate place. Against such a development, as against the present attempts of the bureaucracy to subordinate the workers to the Democratic Party, we counterpose the slogan of independent labor political action through a labor party.

At the time of our national convention [Dec. 31, 1937], we took insufficient account of the new developments in the labor movement, especially in their political aspects, and fell into the error of repeating abstract formulas on the question of the labor party which, in the light of great new developments, had become obsolete. It is necessary now to reconsider the question and to make a radical change in our tactics in regard to the developing labor party movement. Over a period of years we have discussed and debated this question with the opportunists only in the abstract. That could not be otherwise, because neither a labor party nor a formidable movement for its creation was anywhere to be seen. In these discussions we saw only two aspects of the question -- a labor party which did not exist in reality, but which the opportunists sought to suck out of their fingers, or a possible fully developed labor party some time in the future. We now have to gear our practical activity toward a third and hitherto insufficiently appreciated aspect of the question -- namely, a powerful mass movement in the direction of the labor party which has not yet taken a clearly defined shape. We have always said that, confronted with a fully developed labor party, based on the trade unions, we would take a positive attitude toward it and most likely participate in it. We are now confronted with the necessity of concretizing this general point of view and of taking a direct part in the present developing movement for a labor party and of working with all our strength to push it on the road of independence.

The question of the attitude toward an existing labor party has never been a question of principle for revolutionary Marxists. No more should our attitude toward a genuine mass movement for a labor party be so considered. In our tactics we have always taken our point of departure from the concrete political situation and the tendencies of its development. Several years ago, before the crisis of 1929 and even later, until the appearance of the CIO, we could have hoped that the revolutionary, that is, the Bolshevik party would develop in the United States parallel to the radicalization of the working class and succeed eventually in becoming the head of it. Under these conditions it would have been absurd to occupy oneself with abstract propaganda in favor of an unheralded "Labor Party".

The situation since that time, however, has radically changed and it would be inexcusable to close our eyes to it. The powerfully developing trade unions under the conditions of a deepening crisis of capitalism will project themselves all the more irresistibly upon the road of political struggle and upon the road of crystallization into a labor party.

If the official leaders of the trade unions in spite of the imperious voice of the situation and the growing pressure of the masses preserve a reserved position on the question of a labor party, it is precisely because the

deep social crisis of bourgeois society now imparts to the question of the labor party a considerably greater sharpness than in all preceding periods.

Nevertheless we can with sufficient assurance predict that the resistance of the bureaucracy will be broken. The movement in favor of a labor party will continue to grow. A revolutionary organization occupying in relation to this progressive movement a negative or neutrally expectant position will doom itself to isolation and sectarian degeneration.

The Socialist Workers Party, section of the Fourth International, clearly realizes the fact that in virtue of unfavorable historical reasons its own development lagged behind the radicalization of wide layers of the American proletariat and precisely because of this the problem of creating a labor party is placed upon the order of the day through the whole course of development.

Consequently, the Socialist Workers Party gives positive and unambiguous support to the labor party movement in general and to all its local manifestations. It supports the affiliation of trade unions to Labor's Non-Partisan League as well as to local units of the movement having an independent or semi-independent form (Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota, American Labor Party, etc.) and, in favorable circumstances, the National Committee authorizes its members to join branches of these bodies based on individual membership.

While the Social Democrats, Lovestoneites, etc., advocate a labor or farmer-labor party with a purely reformist program and more or less confine themselves to unprincipled top combinations under cover of this slogan, -- the Socialist Workers Party advances its program of transitional demands in order to fructify the mass movement in favor of a labor party and lead it in a revolutionary direction.

Preserving its own full organizational and political independence, the Socialist Workers Party carries on systematic and irreconcilable struggle against the trade union bureaucracy which resists the creation of a labor party, or attempts to convert it into an auxiliary weapon of one of the bourgeois parties. Explaining and propagandizing its program of transitional demands in the trade unions, at meetings, and so forth, the Socialist Workers Party indefatigably exposes on the basis of the living experience of the masses the reformist and pacifist illusions of the trade union bureaucracy and its Social Democratic and Stalinist allies.

When and how the labor party will be formed, what scope and mass base it will acquire in the period ahead and through what stages and splits it will pass, the future will disclose. Defending the labor party from the attack of the bourgeoisie, the Socialist Workers Party does not and will not, however, take upon itself any responsibility for this party. In relation to the labor party in all stages of its development, the Socialist Workers Party occupies a critical position, supports the progressive tendencies against the reactionary, and at the same time irreconcilably criticizes the half-way character of these progressive tendencies. For the Socialist Workers Party the labor party should on the one hand become the arena for recruiting revolutionary elements, on the other a transmissive mechanism for influencing over wider circles of workers. In its very essence the labor party can preserve progressive significance only during a comparatively short transitional period. The further sharpening of the revolutionary situation will inevitably break the shell of the labor party and permit the SWP to rally around the banner of the Fourth International the revolutionary vanguard of the American proletariat.

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## THE MINORITY RESOLUTION -- AGAINST A LABOR PARTY

- Hal Draper -

(1) The problem of the labor party is a problem of our strategy and tactics in the period of capitalist decline, and more specifically, in the present period of the death agony of international capitalism and the chronic social crisis of American capitalism.

We must solve the series of questions that arise with regard to (a) the objective significance of labor parties in this period; (b) the implementing of our Transitional Program so as to make it a real force in the upsurge of the American workers and in order to steer their development into revolutionary channels; and (c) the working out of positive tactics in reaching and influencing in our direction the sections of the working class which are breaking away from their old-party ties and groping for independent class action.

### THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE LABOR PARTY MOVEMENT

(2) The leadership of the Labor's Non-Partisan League movement is at present intent upon continuing its present course of tailing the old capitalist parties -- i.e., the old policy of "rewarding friends and punishing enemies" in new, organized, form. It is not excluded that they will continue to remain within the bounds of this policy. The more probable outcome, and the one upon which the LNPL leaders themselves are banking, is that a realignment within the old party set-up will lead to a coalition between the LNPL forces and a split-off "left wing" of the Democratic Party (plus even Republican elements) -- to form a characteristic third-party movement, a bourgeois Democratic Front.

The mass basis of such a party would still be the trade unions affiliated to the LNPL, bestraddled by the generals-without-an-army of the Left Democrats, side by side with the LNPL leaders as the left face of the third-party leadership. The objective driving force of such a split would be precisely the sharpening of the social crisis, leading to differences in the ranks of the bourgeoisie on how to deal with it, the "left wing" seeking the shelter of the politically conservative labor forces.

(3) But if such a Democratic split fails to mature rapidly enough, and if the movement for independent action among the workers threatens to go over the heads of the LNPL leaders, on the way to revolutionary action, then the stimulus will be present for the formation by the LNPL of their own independent party on a national scale, reluctantly pushed ahead by pressure from below to the formation of the famous "independent labor party." It is out of such conditions than an "independent labor party" would arise.

(4) This is why it is superficial and false to believe that the significance of an independent labor party would appear as a spur to the development of political class-consciousness on the part of the workers. The relationship is the other way round: an independent LNPL party would be the distorted reflection of the workers' advancing consciousness, not its cause or stimulus.

Nor is it true that it would in its turn stimulate further advance in political consciousness. On the contrary, its reason-for-existence would be to utilize the new form in order to stem the flood and siphon it back into safe channels. It is the old trick of misleadership: running around in front of the masses in order to head them off.



them from capitalist politics, does not mean its role is merely one of futility. The vacuum from which the progressive significance of a labor party has fled, is filled with a reactionary content.

The establishment of such a political machine means a positive obstacle on the road of the development of the workers, a positive enemy of the revolutionary movement. Its positively reactionary character manifests itself on all the fields vital to the interests of the working class. With the threat of a new war overhanging, it cannot even allow itself the verbal denunciation of capitalist war which the Second International before the war could afford, but must appear openly as a social-patriotic recruiting machine and propagandist among the workers, partly even deliberately founded for the preparation of the national union.

To teach the workers now to look upon such an organization as the center and rallying point for the political movement of the working class (i.e., to advocate the formation of a labor party where none exists) means to make it all the harder, in time of war, to break the workers away from their allegiance to it.

(9) At a time when the old two-party system is breaking up, it is possible for a labor party to achieve an organizational, formal independence from the two old machines. But politically, it can only gravitate within the orbit of third-party politics.

The P.C. Majority agrees that if the LNPL forces formed a party in coalition with the left Democrats, it would mean a third party. But if the LNPL is forced to form their party without these allies, what basic difference would there be between the two variants? In program? support of capitalism? methods? mass basis? Why would one be progressive and not the other? It is true that significant differences would exist -- for example, a party formed by the LNPL alone would be more sensitive to working class pressure (just as the Communist Party is, more sensitive to this pressure than Roosevelt); etc. -- but these do not determine the question of its progressive or reactionary character; and in action they would dictate a different tactical approach, not a different estimate of its objective significance.

#### THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM AND THE LABOR PARTY

(10) What conclusion must we draw with regard to the labor party from our estimate of the present social crisis and our advocacy of a transitional program? On the negative side, the present crisis sharpens the outlines of the preceding analysis. Where before the "abstract" analysis of the period of capitalist decline pointed to the reactionary character of a labor-party formation, the present concrete circumstances reinforce the conclusion. Or -- is a labor party reactionary when it is merely a question of capitalist decline, but becomes "progressive" when this decline takes ever more intensified forms?

(11) But it is the positive conclusions from the Transitional Program which point our road. The deepening social crisis in the United States dictates to the revolutionary party the need for a program for the masses that goes beyond the immediate demands elaborated heretofore, that goes outside the framework of capitalism. Convulsive upheavals in the coming period hold forth the possibility for the revolutionary party to advance in bold strides forward with great gains in influence and membership -- PROVIDED that we know how to (a) make this program a living force in the direct mass action of the workers, and (b) on the political field, on the basis of the experiences of the struggle, guide the political lessons which the workers draw toward the necessity of revolutionary

(5) It is important to distinguish the progressive and reactionary elements in such developments. On the one hand, there is the fact that a swing in sentiment by sections of the working class away from the old capitalist parties and toward independent political action manifests a progressive subjective development on their part. This we hail -- this represents a stage in the development of the subjective pre-conditions of the revolution. But it is a fact that the same progressive subjective development is present when a worker breaks with the Democratic Party and joins the Communist Party because he looks on it as a working class party; similar examples can be given. The fact that there is a progressive sentiment afoot does not insure that it will not be corralled into a reactionary channel (any more than a sincere hatred of fascism insures it will not take the form of support of war against Germany).

We must distinguish sharply between (a) the progressive character of the political-action sentiment among the workers, and (b) the reactionary character of the labor-party form into which it is crystallized. The former has an extremely important effect upon our tactical steps, as we shall show; the latter determines our basic strategical approach.

#### OUR BASIC STRATEGICAL APPROACH

(6) The basic question which must guide our policies is: Can a labor party play a progressive role? This question cannot be answered by the mechanical application of principles which apply any time, anywhere. It is determined by our analysis of the present era of capitalist development.

When capitalism was expanding economically, the labor party could rally large masses of workers about the struggle for immediate demands, which the bourgeoisie was able to yield. In this post-war period of declining capitalism, however, this possibility no longer exists; the bourgeoisie must rather withdraw than grant further concessions. Even the successful struggle for immediate demands requires revolutionary orientation. With the intensification of the social crisis, whatever immediate gains or victories are registered, are cancelled out by the development of the crisis itself.

Where once a reformist political party acting within the framework of capitalism had an independent role to play in organizing the working class for immediate concessions, today the only working class program which is actually independent of the capitalist class is the revolutionary program. Today a labor party, like every other political formation, is confronted with the harsh alternatives -- defense of capitalism or the fight for socialism; the possibility of finding footing in a middle ground is no longer there.

(7) The old type of program which, in a different period, provided this middle ground has now been taken over by the most enlightened section of the bourgeoisie itself -- the "left" New Deal Democrats. It is precisely because the reformist labor leaders have no essential political independence from this program that there is no objective basis for their political independence from capitalist politics in general. Under such circumstances, "separating the workers from all capitalist politics" is more and more equivalent to -- leading them in a revolutionary direction.

A labor party born under these auspices is marked from birth: to tie the workers to capitalist politics through new forms, dividing this labor with the left varieties of bourgeois politics (Rooseveltian demagoguery, etc.).

(8) To say however that a labor party can do nothing to solve even the most immediately pressing problems of the workers and that it cannot separate

organization, of revolutionary politics.

(12) How will our program take hold in the workers' mass movement? The Transitional Program prepares the way for putting the question of power on the agenda. The main line which the party must follow in implementing the Transitional Program is to teach the workers the necessity of depending on their own extra-parliamentary strength and organization -- certainly not to teach them to depend upon, or hold to any present illusions in, the ability of a labor party to carry out this Transitional Program. What organizational forms must we strive for to carry out the Transitional Program? Under Section A of the National Action thesis (Economic Demands): "The organizations best fitted to cope with the problems of workers control at the point of production are the shop-committees. Every effort must be exerted to organize the shop-committees, which may become organs of dual power in the factory and the nucleus of soviets, as the crisis takes on a revolutionary character in the future." --- Under Section B (The Struggle Against Fascism): the organization of the Workers Defense Guard, the workers militia. --- In Section C (Struggle Against War): the need for extra-parliamentary organization, here most immediately counterposed to the perspective of a labor party, is most obvious. --- Section D (the slogan of a Workers Government) means for us, as the form for which we strive, a workers' government based upon the councils of workers and farmers. Although the workers may have to pass through the experience of a labor party government, we must realize the danger of ourselves giving this content to the slogan, in our own agitation. -- Carefully the party must lead the workers through the experiences of the shop-committees, the Workers Defense Guard, etc., to the creation of councils of workers and farmers, and toward the national consolidation of these extra-parliamentary organs of struggle as the crisis matures. That is the course which we must set in motion among the masses to counteract the people's-frontism and democratic front of the Stalinists and liberals. If this is the main line we put before the masses, our main line in political agitation is also to keep before their eyes the necessity for revolutionary organization. We cannot point both toward soviets and a reformist labor party as the means of carrying out our revolutionary Transitional Program.

(13) The party ranks must understand this precisely as our main line. The great gap between the objective requirements of the situation and the subjective stage of development of the workers requires that we take the path of the transitional program in an effort to hurdle the course of reformist political development which the American working class had to go through.

But the backwardness of the American workers imperatively demands that we supplement this strategy with a positive program of tactical steps within the labor party movement. Just as on the extra-parliamentary field, we launch slogans which, starting from the desire for independent political class action, are designed to teach them through experience that the labor party cannot bring them a step forward, that our position is correct, that the way out lies in our direction.

#### TACTICS IN THE LABOR PARTY MOVEMENT

(14) Our labor party policy up to now is inadequate for our present needs for two reasons: first, because it was not linked with a program for bringing the masses into motion on a line alternative to that of the labor party movement, the Transitional Program which we have now developed; secondly, because it necessarily emphasized the negative aspect of blocking the formation of a labor party without taking sufficiently into account and paying serious attention to the necessity for tactical utilization of the progressive sentiment which has its distorted reflection in the labor party movement, through work

inside, although our Declaration of Principles and previous resolutions already sketched the outlines of such a possible future course. This is the turn which the party must make on the labor party question.

(15) It must be understood that such concrete tactics cannot be improvised; our considerations with regard to the period of capitalist decline do not automatically dictate our tactics for specific situations. These can be developed realistically only by a concrete knowledge of the situation, the relationship of forces, local differences, etc., and after full discussion. Our first step in making a turn toward concretizing our tactics must be a survey of of the national and local scenes, and it is the task of the party leadership to carefully lay out a positive tactical approach to each. The P.C. Majority solves the problem in short order by proscribing "complete and unambiguous support" in each and every instance. The sectarian is equally expeditious with the view that we should have nothing to do with this morass or reformism. The line of the party must be neither of these rule-of-thumb answers.

(16) The important aspect of the labor party movement for us is the fact that there is movement. Where will this movement lead to? Ahead of it lies either labor-party action or revolutionary political action. We have stated that our basic approach demands that we seek to block the road toward the crystallization of this sentiment in the form of a labor party. Does this then mean turning it back in the direction from which it is coming, toward the capitalist parties? Obviously not; at the same time that we seek to block the road toward the labor party, we must push the politically-awakening workers forward -- which means, along the alternative road of revolutionary action. In proportion as our efforts have their effect, it is this combined action which will enable the advance guard of the workers to come most quickly to the revolutionary party. Blocking the reformist road -- that is the sense of our strategical approach to the labor party question; pushing the workers from behind, forward -- that is the place of our tactics.

(17) We can do neither effectively unless we are in the labor party movement. The nature of the movement itself provides the channels.

The first is through the trade unions. In the last analysis our program can play a role in making the history of the American working class only if our roots are deep in the trade unions, if we are the best union militants, and under these conditions we cannot be isolated from the labor party movement. The second is through serious fraction work in the labor party organizations, branches, etc. If the labor party movement develops to much more far-reaching dimensions than it has so far, it may yet be necessary for us to throw a large portion of our forces into such activity. In cases where there is an established labor party and our party is not on the ballot, possible tactics may include such steps as registering in the labor party primaries. The question of whether such tactics are concretely permissible and to what extent they should be driven are not matters that can be settled outside of a specific examination of cases.

(18) How do we work inside the labor party movement in order to push the workers forward, against their leadership, and over the heads of their leadership to us? We (i.e., our fractions in the trade unions and in the labor party) raise slogans and demands adapted to the particular stage of development of the workers with whom we are dealing. Where the organization is endorsing capitalist party candidates, as in New York, Pennsylvania, etc., we can say: "Your leaders have ostensibly organized for independent political action and in order to solve your pressing problems; it is our opinion that they and the labor party can and will do neither. You don't agree with us? Then see for yourselves, try to get these things; we'll fight along with you, without giving up our political convictions,

but going through these experiences with you. Demand that your leaders put up independent candidates!"

In specific situations the fight for independent candidates can be an important lever in disillusioning the workers with what they can expect from the labor party. But only if in our own propaganda, we utilize such experiences in order to foster such disillusionment, to draw from them our general conclusions and lessons with regard to the labor party movement! It is this which is precisely the main emphasis in the press, for example. Furthermore, it is a matter of the simple truth to state that even if independent labor candidates are run, the problems of the workers will not be a step nearer solution. The demands which we put forward inside the labor party as positive gains for the workers are the transitional demands. Where independent candidates are run, our attack shifts to center around the question of program, especially the transitional demands, and those demands again which will bring the workers in collision with the line of the labor party and its leadership. In the process of exposing the impotence and reactionary nature of the labor party or labor party movement, we must show that there is an alternative path, which only the revolutionary party is following.

(19) Where independent labor candidates are run, the tactic of critical support (with the emphasis on the critical) may be employed in order to avoid a head-on collision with the labor-party sentiment of the workers where it would be difficult to explain our opposition in terms of the workers' own experiences, rather than in terms of our own revolutionary theory. But as in the preceding case, the value of such tactics depends completely upon employing them in the context of our general agitation around the labor party question, utilizing these tactics in order to expose the labor party in action.

(20) The question of affiliation to a labor party is also a tactical question. It would become permissible only if it no longer a question of attempting to block the formation of a labor party, but when we are faced with the fact of an established mass labor party -- provided that complete organizational and programmatic independence of our own party can be maintained.

(21) The question of supporting affiliation of trade unions to labor party movements is also a tactical question, depending on the question: Is there an established mass labor party or is the question still open as to whether the working class will take this road or not? -- In Minneapolis, for example, where the Farmer-Labor Party is precisely such an established mass party, our answer cannot be the same as in New Jersey, where the LNPL itself has not formed a labor party because of the lack of mass support and interest among the workers. There we can still help to determine by our own activities whether the workers will be able to hurdle the labor party stage or not. In each situation, local or national, we must decide: Are we going to accept as our starting point the fact that an established mass party exists and orient our first line of attack toward the question of program? There is no use blocking the entrance to the labor party road when the workers have already passed by. In this case, the question of advocating the formation of a labor party becomes obsolete. But this is not the case at present on the national scene nor in almost all localities!

(22) We believe it important to bring to the attention of the party membership some dangers in the present situation. The effects of social crisis do not remain completely outside our own organization. There is a tremendous pressure upon a party which insists on maintaining intransigently a revolutionary line. A desperate attempt to escape from "isolation", the desire to find new short-cuts to mass influence, a dissatisfaction with results attained heretofore which can lead to disorientation as well as to a healthy reaction -- these

represent the starting-points. We raise this question because we believe that such tendencies have been manifested in now proportions in the reaction of sections of the party membership to the P.C. proposal. Pessimism and defeatism with regard to the future of the party, shading into liquidationism, growing confusion in political ideas, openly opportunistic motivations and reasoning in approaching the labor party question -- these are trends which it must be the task of the party leadership, majority and minority, to combat. In this sense also, the problem is the revolutionary party.

(25) The road to the building of our party in the immediate period lies along the lines of the struggle for the transitional program and the digging of our roots into the mass organizations of the working class. This means:

- Making every member a member of a trade union or other mass organization.
- Organization of fraction work inside the LNPL and labor party movements.
- Bringing forward the transitional demands in the trade unions and labor party movements, and undertaking a campaign to popularize them in our press, popular pamphlets, etc.
- Emphasis on teaching the workers the necessity for reliance on their own extra-parliamentary strength and organization.
- Building toward the organization of shop committees and local councils of workers and farmers, with a national perspective.
- Organization of opposition movement inside the labor party movements around slogans designed to bring the workers into collision with their leadership.

A national orientation toward throwing our forces into building the labor party movement can only divert us from this path. This is the positive line along which the party can be built.

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represent the starting-points. We raise this question because we believe that such tendencies have been manifested in new proportions in the reaction of sections of the party membership to the P.C. proposal. Pessimism and defeatism with regard to the future of the party, shading into liquidationism, growing confusion in political ideas, openly opportunistic motivations and reasoning in approaching the labor party question -- these are trends which it must be the task of the party leadership, majority and minority, to combat. In this sense also, the problem is the revolutionary party.

(25) The road to the building of our party in the immediate period lies along the lines of the struggle for the transitional program and the digging of our roots into the mass organizations of the working class. This means:

- Making every member a member of a trade union or other mass organization.
- Organization of fraction work inside the LNPL and labor party movements.
- Bringing forward the transitional demands in the trade unions and labor party movements, and undertaking a campaign to popularize them in our press, popular pamphlets, etc.
- Emphasis on teaching the workers the necessity for reliance on their own extra-parliamentary strength and organization.
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1944 CONVENTION RESOLUTION OF THE PARTY

THE STRUGGLE FOR AN INDEPENDENT LABOR PARTY IN THE U.S.

(Adopted by the Party Convention, Jan. 1944)

The working class of the U.S. faces the gravest responsibilities in its history. Already it is compelled to meet the offensive against its economic standards and its political rights which American capitalism has launched in the very midst of the war. Tomorrow it will be faced with the crisis of the post-war period and the life-and-death problems that the crisis will pose. Powerful though it is, the U.S. cannot escape the mounting effects of the general decay of world capitalism. All it can hope to accomplish is to delay the appearance of the most malevolent of those effects, but even then only by accelerating their advent in other countries; to mitigate the violence with which they strike the country, but only by increasing the ruinousness of the coming crisis in other lands. Sooner or later, less violently at first or more violently, the fury of the fundamental crisis of decay will nevertheless be felt in the U.S. No country today can escape making the basic choice of society---barbarism or socialism. At best, it can postpone the decision.

The development of a new barbarism is most spectacularly visible in the triumph of fascism in Germany and its works, both before and during the war. But this development is inherent not in the mythical "Aryanism" of the Germans, nor in their equally mythical "racial soul," it is a product of capitalism at a certain stage of evolution, or rather, of its decline. If the U.S. is not the very next order after Germany, it is, nevertheless---barring the victory of socialism---somewhere on the list.

The decay of capitalism into a new barbarism simply means an unprecedently intensive exploitation and disfranchisement of the working class, mass suffering unknown in modern times, and permanent war interrupted only by short periods of truce. The long-lasting crisis of 1929 and the devastating war that began in 1939 are only harbingers of what decaying capitalism has in store for society.

The American working class, by and large, has lost its confidence in the ability of the ruling class to establish a peaceful, secure, orderly and prosperous regime after the war. It greets all the wordy but hollow "post-war plans" for social and economic stabilization and reconstruction put forward by the defenders of the old order with the skepticism and even cynicism which they merit.



However, while its faith in the old has waned considerably, even if not with a fully conscious understanding of the reason for this lack of confidence, the working class in the U.S. has not yet required either understanding of or confidence in a new, or socialist order.

In a word, the American working class is most inadequately situated at the present time to meet the deepening crisis.

Between its state of economic organization and its state of political organization and class consciousness, there is today a more striking contrast than ever before, and this at a time when the

In the trade union field, the American working class is today better and more numerically organized than ever in its history, or even in the history of the international working class. There are now almost thirteen million workers organized in the trade union movement. This is not only more than there have ever been, but the type and composition of its organization is more significant and promising than ever before. Not only are almost half the trade unionists in the country organized for the first time on an industrial basis, but they cover industries which were citadels of open-shop-ism in the past---the basic, key, heavy, mass production industries. The tone of the labor movement in this country is set today not so much by the "aristocracy of labor," the highly skilled and highly paid craftsmen, but by the most important and basic sections of the American proletariat.

From the standpoint of organization and, even more important, from the standpoint of militancy and determination to safeguard their economic standards regardless of any other consideration, including demagogical appeals directed to them about the "war for democracy," the American workers are today undoubtedly the vanguard of the international working class.

On the political field, however, the American working class only brings up the rear. In no important country of the world is labor without a mass party of its own, and even in the countries ruled by reactionary dictatorships there are hundreds of thousands of workers who feel an allegiance to the old working class parties that are now outlawed. The outstanding exception is the U.S.

In the U.S. the masses continue to follow the political path of bourgeois reformism, exemplified by Rooseveltian New Dealism. If they look upon it today, in the light of bitter experiences, with reserve and with greater skepticism and even disillusionment, the modifications in their attitude have not yet expressed themselves in a mass movement for a party and a program of their own. The parties that stand openly on the program of revolutionary socialism are still a tiny minority of the working class; the proponents of a Labor Party with a reformist program are not organized and are themselves a small minority; and even such timid steps in the direction of independent political organization as the formation of the American Labor Party in New York represents are not only far, far from adequate but are still isolated phenomena standing on the platform of the New Deal.

This does not signify that the working class is politically content. In the very nature of the situation in the U.S. today, where economic and political institutions, economic and political life, are so closely, if not inseparably, intertwined, every important economic struggle of the workers is at the same time a political struggle. Like all other classes, the American proletariat too looks more and more to the government in negotiating or solving its economic

problems and less and less to the individual employer. The increase of governmental intervention and direct participation in every sphere of economic life, and in social life in general, is calculated to heighten the political consciousness of the American worker to an ever greater extent. The more openly class character of the government's intervention in economic and social life is calculated to heighten the class-consciousness of the American worker,

However, the growth of the class-consciousness and independent political organization and activity of the working class is not automatically and arithmetically guaranteed by economic and political activities of the capitalist class or its regime. The political thinking, organizing and action of the American workers must be stimulated and promoted inside the labor movement itself on the basis of both the needs and the experiences of the working class.

These experiences and needs make the formation of an independent working class party in the U.S. the problem of the day that most urgently demands solution. The formation of a Labor Party is the most important forward step that the working class can take in this country. That makes the struggle for a Labor Party the most important and most urgent political task of the revolutionary vanguard.

The workers today cannot give political leadership to the widespread discontent of the people today. In the absence of a radically different and progressive working class party, the masses have no alternative to Rooseveltism except political indifference or the time-worn American practice of punishing the Democratic incumbent by voting for the Republican aspirant (and vice versa).

The working class will be unable to maintain itself politically, much less rally the masses of the people in general, in the big crisis of tomorrow, if it does not have a party of its own with a bold program for the solution of the crisis at the expense of the monopoly-capitalist minority. In the absence of such a party, which offers a progressive alternative to the status quo, the masses of the people, the lower middle classes in town and country, that enormously important section of the people that will be represented by the home-coming war veterans, and even large sections of the working class itself---all these will tend to accept a reactionary alternative and fall victim to the social demagoguery of this or that fascist or semi-fascist clique.

Even now, millions hope for and tomorrow will be ready to fight for, what they vaguely call a "change." In the post-war crisis, they will number tens of millions. The bourgeois-reformist politicians to whom labor is now attached will seek to maintain, more or less, the status quo---that is, precisely the situation which generated the crisis as well as the demand for a "change." If labor then tries to maintain the unmaintainable status quo by remaining the tail of a bourgeois political kite, it will easily fall as the victim of those who exploit the popular demand for a "change" for reactionary and anti-working-class purposes. If labor puts forward, on the contrary, a bold political program for social reorganization in behalf of all the "little people," it can crush the reaction and move to the leadership of the country with the support of the masses.

The organization of a Labor Party by the powerful trade union movement would be an immense step forward by the American working class---its declaration of political independence, its most important proclamation hitherto of its separation from capitalist politics and capitalist political parties. However, this step would be vitiated in the long run and the working class demand doomed to defeat if the program of such a party (and correspondingly, its leadership) were imbued with the reformist conceptions, platforms and practices which have para-

lyzed the traditional parties of the working class in other countries and brought about such disasters in many. To be effective in the highest degree, an independent Labor Party must not take capitalism as its basis and seek to hold it together with repairs at this or that point. It must rather put forward such a program as disregards entirely the interests of capitalism and the class which is its beneficiary, disregards entirely the "sacred right of private property" which is only the right of the monopoly capitalists and imperialists to exploit and oppress the masses, and directs itself exclusively to defending and promoting the class interests of the proletariat and those sections of society who are its allies in the struggle against the monopolists and their reaction.

The Workers Party, which vigorously and assiduously champions the formation of an independent Labor Party as a great historical advance by the U.S. working class, is a party of revolutionary socialism and internationalism, and consequently an intransigent opponent of social reformism in all its varieties. While urging the formation of an independent Labor Party based on the trade unions and democratically controlled by them, it nevertheless counterposes to the adoption or retention of a reformist program and a reformist leadership by such a party, the adoption of a militant, bold working class program of struggle against the capitalist offensive, the capitalist class and capitalism itself, with the aim of raising labor to the position of ruler of the country in a workers' government. The Workers Party thus distinguishes itself from all other parties and groups in the working class, not only by its fundamental program of revolutionary socialism, but also by the program for immediate political action which it advocates for the working class and by the militancy of the struggle it carries on for it.

It is difficult to indicate concretely the prospects for the formation of a Labor Party in the United States or the stages through which it will pass.

The lesser likelihood is that the working class, in breaking with the bourgeois parties and developing their independent political class consciousness, will move directly to affiliation with or support of a revolutionary socialist organization such as the Workers Party. The main task of an organization like the Workers Party is to help develop the class and revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat. At the present time, in this country, the first step in fulfilling this task is the work and fight for independent political organization and action by labor. In advocating the formation of a Labor Party, the Workers Party, far from diminishing its own significance as a consistently revolutionary proletarian organization, will only enhance it and draw into its own ranks those workers who reach agreement with its program not only in the written word but also in the deed.

It is more likely that the first steps in political and class consciousness will be taken by American labor in forming a Labor Party. At the present time, the overwhelming majority of the labor officialdom, its Stalinist wing prominently and viciously among them, is opposed to the formation of a Labor Party and seeks to keep labor tied to the wagon wheels of capitalist politics. The fight for a Labor Party thus becomes at the same time a fight to expose the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class.

It is even possible that the labor leadership will remain stubbornly and stupidly opposed to the formation of a Labor Party even in the turbulent days of crisis ahead, opposed even to the formation of a thoroughly reformist party which is strictly under their control. Their efforts to liquidate or at least to deepen the paralysis of even such a caricature of an independent working class political party as the American Labor Party show how strong is this possibility.

In such a case, the movement for independent political action would not be stopped cold, but would merely take on different forms. Given the continued opposition to a Labor Party by the trade union bureaucracy, it is possible that such a party would come into existence "from below," as a result of a powerful political upsurge in the ranks sweeping over the heads of the official leadership, and throwing up a new leadership, at least in part. That is, a development might take place in the political field comparable with the rank and file upsurge that produced the mass unions of the CIO.

However, there is greater reason to believe that the sharpening of class antagonisms in the country will generate enough pressure upon at least a section of the labor bureaucracy to impel it to take the leadership of an independent labor political party lest the movement of the masses "get out of hand." Such a prospect is not immediately in sight, that is to say, not before the 1944 elections. But the declining ability of the remnants of "New Dealism" to give any serious concessions to labor, or even to the labor officialdom, is a factor that will impel the labor movement, from bottom to top, to seek more radical means of wresting concessions from the government. More radical means can only signify the formation of an independent political party of labor, or at least the first hesitant, timid, half-way steps in that direction, upon the model of the New York ALP, whose leaders are already engaged in initial, if not very bold, attempts to spread their organization to other states.

Finally, it is possible that the prospects of an independent Labor Party will be thwarted, at least for a time, by the subversion of the movement into a middle class "third party". This was the case in 1924, when LaFollettism absorbed and destroyed the Labor Party movement. However, it should be borne in mind that by 1924, the first big post-war crisis had come to an end and the "prosperity period" was setting in. There is no realistic similar prospect ahead. The U.S. faces not another "prosperity period" but another crisis in the midst of another world crisis. While the danger of "third partyism" undoubtedly threatens the incipient Labor Party, it has neither the strength nor the prospects it had twenty years ago.

In any case, the revolutionary vanguard cannot and does not content itself with passive contemplation of prospects and possibilities from the sidelines. It is its duty to participate in the struggle and help direct the course of events. To direct them in a forward direction, which means in the general direction of the socialist power of the proletariat, means, concretely, now, in the U.S., to concentrate and centralize all political agitation, propaganda and activity around the slogan of a Labor Party and a workers' government. A Labor Party as a radical break with the parties of capitalism; a workers' government as a radical break with the rule of capitalism.

That the workers will conceive these two ideas in a reformist manner, that they will think of realizing them by reformist means (that is, without a fundamental and revolutionary assault upon capitalist class rule) -- that is the greater probability, above all in the first period of the struggle. Nothing could be more "natural", for that matter. This concerns the Workers Party only insofar as it means that at each stage of the struggle it must put forward such demands, such a program, such a road, as will help bring the working class and its party into clearer and more conscious conflict with its class enemy, as will help them shed their reformist illusions, as will help them, through their own concrete experiences, understand the need for the final struggle for power and the socialist organization of society.

As part of its campaign for a Labor Party, the Workers Party therefore puts forward from the very beginning a minimum program as ITS proposal for the program that an effective and militant working class party should adopt. Even if, as is most probable, the coming Labor Party does not adopt such a militant program, the Workers Party, while giving full support to all the practical activities of the Labor Party and those who are working to form it and build it, will reserve the right to present its criticism of the program that the Labor Party had adopted and the leadership that represents it, and the right to continue urging upon the party the program which it, the Workers Party, considers suitable and necessary in dealing with the social problems facing the working class.

The Workers Party, as a consistent revolutionary socialist organization, thus not only maintains the organizational and political independence which are indispensable to its proper and effective functioning, but remains an advanced but inseparable part of the working class movement, distinguished from its other sections only by its uncompromising opposition to capitalism and all its supporters and by its unequivocal support of both the immediate interests of the working class and its socialist future.

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MINORITY RESOLUTION --- AGAINST A LABOR PARTY

Presented to 1944 Party Convention

Hal Draper

The present upturn in political-action talk and Labor Party sentiment in the trade union movement is showing increasingly that even substantial sections of the trade union bureaucracy, not to speak of the rank and file, are beginning to realize that the self-limitation of organized labor to economic action only ("pure and simple" trade unionism) is self-defeating.

The point of the long-standing socialist insistence on the necessity of political action is being hammered home especially by the development of increasing political (governmental) intervention in the relations between capital and labor.

Socialists have always been the staunchest proponents of political action by labor. Insofar as objective circumstances themselves are forcing the labor movement to turn to political action, it becomes increasingly important for Socialists to be clear that political action---including political action by labor---can be good or bad, progressive or reactionary; an aid to the socialist development of the working class or an obstacle to it; conservative, reformist, liberal, fascist, or revolutionary.

The criterion of Socialists in their estimation of the character of political formations, or of the development of a given political party, is clear and definite. This is the criterion of class independence.

To pose the question: Shall labor form a Labor Party? is to ask: Would the formation of a Labor Party REALLY lead to a political break-away by labor from capitalist politics?

The question is not answered by deciding to add the word "independent" to "Labor Party." It is only obscured by confusing the formal organizational independence of a party with its political content.

The fact that the British Labor Party, for example, is an independent organization does not reflect on the fact that it does not represent independent working-class political action today. The independence of labor politics---its class independence, not its organizational form---is in the first place a programmatic question.

### The Strategic Analysis of Revolutionary Socialists

Before the present era of capitalist decline, when capitalism was expanding, the formation of a reformist Labor Party with an INDEPENDENT class program was a possibility. It was accomplished in Britain; it was proposed by Marx and Engels for America.

It was a possibility because a reformist struggle for immediate gains economic and political, which the bourgeoisie was able to grant if sufficiently pressed, offered a realistic political perspective. At the same time, and for the very same reason, the reformist parties of social-democracy also were able to play a progressive role in the historical development of the working class.

Today, in both cases, this political perspective is no longer actual. Today, even the successful struggle for immediate demands requires militant, class-struggle, implicitly revolutionary action. The bourgeoisie must tend to withdraw rather than grant further concessions. What gains are made episodically are cancelled out by the development of the capitalist crisis, the imposition of war economy, and tomorrow by post-war breakdown.

The time is past when a working-class political party acting within the programmatic limitations of bourgeois reformism had an independent role to play in organizing the class in independent action for immediate concessions. Today, the only working-class program which is actually---politically---independent of the capitalist class is the revolutionary program.

There is no reason for making any putative American Labor Party a peculiar exception to the rule: Today every political formation is confronted with the harsh alternatives -- defense of capitalism or the fight for socialism. Only individuals without responsibility, theorists, demagogues and impotent groups can continue to talk in terms of a dreamed-up middle ground. The possibility of finding footing in a middle ground is no longer there for any serious political movement. The pressure of social forces does not permit this escape from reality to any serious political organization which has to act, on real problems,

The old type of reformist program which, in a different period, provided this middle ground, has now been taken over by the most enlightened section of the bourgeoisie itself -- the "left" New Deal Democrats, the Rooseveltians, the "liberal" wing of capitalist politics. It is in this sense that we used to make the observation that the Roosevelt administration may be called the social-democratic phase of American political development. It is that social-democratic phase, not in its "classic" form naturally, but in the crabbed, reactionary, telescoped and already senile form inevitable under the new conditions of chronic capitalist decline and chronic war and revolution. The lusty reformism of the old days, with its progressive consequences and politically independent programmatic base, is no more possible for it than it is possible for the labor bureaucracy.

## "Social-Patriotic...but Politically Independent of Capitalism" I

This analysis is made starkly concrete by the imperialist war now raging. As long as the revolution does not appear as a pressing threat, the setting up of a labor party would mean for the reformist leaders setting up in politics against the leaders of capitalism whom they support and FROM WHOM THEY HAVE NO ESSENTIALLY DIFFERENT PROGRAM.

To them, as to us, the war question is paramount. Less than ever are they willing to "break national unity" at this time when they are acting as whips to line the workers up behind the capitalist government's war policy, and specifically behind Roosevelt.

The United States is in the midst of the second imperialist world war. The criterion of class independence becomes translated into terms of the war. In the midst of an imperialist war, a social-patriotic party and a party independent of capitalist politics can never be the same thing.

We cannot give political support to a pro-war Labor Party, the only kind of Labor Party conceivable in the coming period. We cannot support pro-war candidates, whether running on the ticket of the Democrats, Republicans or of the ALP (the existing "independent labor party"). We cannot wish the creation of a reformist, social-patriotic political machine, born for the purpose of "independently" rallying the workers to the support of the demagogic wing of capitalist politics.

### The Threat of "Labor" Third-Party-ism

This analysis determines the political perspective of the labor party movement in America which---though it is today still on a much lower organizational level than it has been at least twice before in America since 1918---may yet burgeon into a more serious organizational development.

Such an eventuality could occur under the pressure of three inter-related forces:

(1) Generally speaking, a greatly intensified discontent by the rank and file of labor with the bourgeois politics of the labor movement -- a healthy impulse from the grass roots which would have to be "ridden" and channelized by the leadership if it could not merely be knocked down.

(2) The ending of the Roosevelt era and the triumph of the more openly reactionary wing of capitalist politics, with a consequent extrusion of the bourgeois left, homeless, into the political cold, and their rapprochement with the labor bureaucracy.

(3) The sweep of revolution in Europe, in its effect on class relations in America, together with the direct backwash of the war on the revolutionization of American Labor.

Under the impact of such forces, the formation of an independent Third Party in America, representing the coalition of the labor bureaucracy and the bourgeois left, is a potent threat.

Whether such a party is entitled the American Labor Party or not, whether it is heralded forth at a trade union convention or in a Washington hotel or at the former following the latter, its political character will be

unchanged. With its mass basis in the trade union workers -- the liberals will not escape this inevitable present-day accompaniment of any Third Party movement which wants to be of greater consequence than the Lemke party of 1936 -- it bodies forth the characteristic combination of the People's Front: the generals-without-an-army of bourgeois reformism bestriding and reigning in the body of labor.

It does no good to say: We want a "genuine" independent labor party, not a Third Party. We ask, and there is no answer: What basic difference of today are these two labels supposed to refer to? In program? support of capitalism? methods? mass basis? The labels are nostalgic historical references to a dichotomy that has ceased to exist.

### Two Labor Parties: the Reality of the A.L.P. -- the Dream of a "Revolutionary Labor Party"

The Marxist analysis of the labor party problem has been confirmed at all points by the only existing "independent labor party" in the country -- the American Labor Party of New York State.

This "independent labor party" took its inception in the fear of the labor bureaucracy that progressive labor in New York was turning away from Roosevelt and the New Deal in disillusionment. It was formed in order to ride this progressive impulse of discontent with bourgeois politics, and rein it toward support of Roosevelt.

Like any other today, this labor party was the continuation of class-collaborationist politics---by other means.

This "independent labor party" has since acted completely as the "loyal" wing in New York of the Roosevelt Democracy; Its structure and organization is if anything more bureaucratized than are the trade union bodies on which it is formally based. Its farthest step in the direction of "independence" was the running of an "independent labor" candidate for the high post of Governor of the State of New York -- Dean Alfange! -- as a bold move for independent action -- by the Roosevelt wing of the Democratic Party.

If a Third Party of bourgeois reformism had been formed in New York "instead of" the A.L.P.---how possibly could it have differed from the actually-existent A.L.P.? If a Third Party is formed nationally, how possibly will it differ from a national extension of the A.L.P.?

To call for the creation of a national American Labor Party means to take responsibility for it before the working class -- at least, before that section of the working class which heeds our call: namely, the most advanced, militant, class-conscious workers. Criticisms of ("refusal to take responsibility for") this, that, or every other specific action by the Labor Party does not absolve us of our responsibility for the effect of its existence on the class struggle for socialism.

The desire to find a by-pass to the creation of a mass revolutionary party is a common concession to the mood of the times. It even leads to the notion that a national American Labor Party can be that mass revolutionary party itself! This theory of how a revolutionary party can be forged is by far less plausible than the average theory on this basic question which Bolshevism has had to reject and combat. We teach that a revolutionary socialist party must be founded on a revolutionary program and built around that program. A wealth of



historical experience, including that of the Norwegian Labor Party, has confirmed this in every instance. We have seen no reason advanced to make an exception for America in this regard.

To teach the most advanced workers to look toward a Labor Party as the political rallying center of American labor (let alone as the future revolutionary party instrument of American labor!) is to teach a falsehood and a delusion. It will be precisely the best, most advanced workers who will be disillusioned with a Labor Party first. Our job is to hasten this process, if it turns out that they must go through it. It is not our job now to point to the Labor Party as the way out of the post-war breakdown which we predict or as the shield against fascism, but to insist with all our strength that only revolutionary socialist politics and a revolutionary party can solve these problems. We must tell the truth about the Labor Party, that it will not be able to solve "even the most pressing immediate problems" of labor.

### The Policy of Revolutionary Socialists

We therefore do not advocate the formation of a Labor Party. Still less do we advance the defeatist concept that if a Labor Party is not formed, the alternative for the workers is defeat and doom.

Our attitude toward existing or future labor parties or labor party movements is a question of tactics. We have always said and say again that we will stand at the side of the working class without separating ourselves from them, in every phase of their political development.

We stand ready to enter and work within any labor party that is set up, in a struggle for real independent action and program. We will advance and fight for the immediate and transitional demands which we propose for the working class. We will seek to utilize whatever arena the labor party provides for these purposes and for socialist education. To any labor party movement we say: "Your leaders have ostensibly organized for independent political action and in order to solve your pressing problems. It is our opinion that they and the labor party will do neither. You don't agree with us? Then see for yourselves; fight for class-struggle candidates and a class-struggle program. We intend to fight along with you for those objectives. We will show you in action that socialist politics is the only way out." --- This is the general sense of a revolutionist's agitation and propaganda with respect to a labor party movement.

But our job is to attempt to shorten by our own efforts any hypothetical labor-party phase of working-class political development; to convince at least the vanguard now that they must come directly to the revolutionary party, and to utilize their experiences, especially their experiences with the labor party, now for this purpose. Our job is to foster disillusionment with the reformist, pro-war, collaborationist machine, instead of strengthening illusions by our own advocacy. We do not wish the character of the labor party to be exposed solely by experience. We wish the advanced workers to turn to the others and say: "This party told us the truth about the labor party; it showed us the way soonest; it is a good party."

It is primarily by our work in the trade union movement that the best elements of our class will be drawn to us and the revolutionary party built. The prospect ahead is one of world-wide revolution and crises. In modern days these have always developed through a rising tempo of strike action, political strike movements included; the break-up of reformist formations; the merging of economic

action into political action through the variety of organization forms which the working class inexhaustibly invents, of which the soviets were the type -- shop committees, councils of action, etc.

This is how the revolutionary politicalization of the working class expresses itself. This is real independent political action by a working class movement. This is the end to which we shape our policy.

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