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## UPS AND DOWNS OF THE PARTY LINE ON THE A. L. P.

PAUL TEMPLE

It is to be hoped that the comrades have very carefully followed the articles in our press on the internal fight in the American Labor Party in New York State.

A political line is not only tested by events. It is also elucidated by its application to events. After voting that our whole political perspective for America revolves around the rise of a genuine Labor Party of sterling independence -- and that real soon -- they should be eager to understand what has happened to the ALP, so soon after the dissolution of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party.

I do not know how much understanding they have been able to get from the articles on the ALP published in LABOR ACTION and the NEW INTERNATIONAL. Such a congeries of inconsistency and confusion as there appeared is unusual for us, and the reader may not have been able to find his way.

Let us take first the most important question which had to be analyzed and see what the Political Committee did with it. This question is:

What were the two groups fighting about? --- the Hillman-Stalinist combination on the one hand, and the Dubinsky-Rose so-called Right Wing on the other.

### A COUPLE OF SUPERFICIALITIES

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In the February, NI, Shachtman tells us that the Cannonites dismiss the whole situation with a "superficial phrase," which he paraphrases as follows: "Two unprincipled cliques, with no real programmatic differences -- they both support Roosevelt and the war -- are fighting for bureaucratic power and control of the machine. A plague on both their houses."

The Cannonite analysis, as Shachtman describes it, certainly is superficial. But what is his reply? This --

"If this were the sum and substance of the situation we would have here one of those rare but not impossible cases of pure political gangsterism -- a fight for power in which no political differences are involved."

One hesitates even to make fun of this. Such "rare" cases are thickly studded from here to the birth of Christ. But the "reply" is even more amazing since it is precisely LABOR ACTION which has insisted more and once that there was no political difference involved in the ALP fight.

The April 10 issue of L.A. in a front-page editorial explains why we proposed voting for Dubinsky as the lesser evil to Hillman:

"This was an organizational fight for control of the party. The workers were not faced with a political choice. No political program was involved in a direct or immediate sense."

Of course, maybe Shachtman didn't write this editorial....

### A COUPLE OF PLAGUES

Shachtman adds that the SWP's superficial analysis carried to its logical conclusion would paint the whole nation-wide fight between the Stalinists and old-line labor officialdom also as "an unprincipled fight between two sets of political gangsters, and we, whom this fight does not concern, must say: A plague on both your houses."

Now, in the first place, saying "A plague on both your houses" -- that is, refusing to support either side -- is NOT equivalent to saying "This fight does not concern us," as Shachtman assumes for purely polemical (i.e., obscurantist) reasons. Our attitude on the imperialist war is sufficient example. This kind of "analysis" is considered hot stuff in a high-school debate.

Before we can take a stand with one house or the other, we must know what they are fighting over. Or is the question decided for us by the fact that the Stalinists are ranged on one side, and we must therefore forthwith rush to the defense of the other? Formulations in L.A. have more than once appealed to such vulgar anti-Stalinism, in discussing the ALP fight. We may forgive it as an agitational device, but cannot accept it as an aid to analysis.

Well, now, what was the difference between the Hillman group allied with the CP, on the one side, and the Dubinsky-Rose so-called Right Wing on the other? Let us take a look at the recent formulations in our press.

### THE ALP "AS IT WAS"

The ALP, as it was under the Dubinsky-Rose leadership is thoroughly characterized as follows. The reader is invited to keep the following description in mind.

- (1) "It is not a labor party." (LA - 2/4)
- (2) It is "not a working class party" (LA - 3/27).
- (3) It was "set up to prevent the development of independent labor political action, and has been maintained in the same spirit." (LA-3/27)
- (4) The Dubinsky-Rose group "administered the party as a bargaining center for establishing a 'working' relationship with the Republican and Democratic Parties of the state." Its aim then and now was and is "to rally the labor and independent vote for Roosevelt." (LA - 4/10)
- (5) They "are desperately afraid of genuine independent labor action." (LA - 4/10).
- (6) Their aim: to organize the workers as a "pressure group" on the capitalist parties. (LA - 4/10).
- (7) The Dubinsky-Rose wing "stands in the way of a genuine labor Party." (LA - 2/14).

This is pretty clear. It is the Dubinsky-Rose wing that LA is talking about.

Why then were Dubinsky and Hillman at loggerheads? How does Hillman differ with the ALP character and aims thus described "as it was"?

#### A COUPLE OF SORDID MOTIVES

Shachtman ridicules the idea that it was merely a sordid struggle for machine power. All right, it wasn't.

Shachtman recognizes that both "have the same political program: . . . pro-Roosevelt, pro-New Deal, pro-war." It was not, then, a fight over any more or less broad political issue. Agreed.

Did Dubinsky-Rose fall out with Hillman because the latter allied himself with the CP, whom the former cannot stomach? Was it merely that Dubinsky-Rose did not want their N.Y. political machine taken over by the CP, because they too want to have an organized power behind the NI? But this once again makes it merely a "sordid struggle for power", an interpretation which Shachtman ridicules.

Or was this antagonism due to the inevitable conflict between native trade-union reformism and Russian-based Stalinism? This conflict indubitably exists and even for the reasons explained by Shachtman in the NI. But this explains little.

For native-reformist Hillman and his group choose to make a political bloc with the CP (in spite of this conflict) while native-reformist Dubinsky does not. Is this difference due to their diverse personalities, or perhaps to Hillman's personal ambitions in the Democratic Party? --Pardon, we are not going to explain the situation in terms of such sordid political motives.

#### THE GREAT HILLMAN MYSTERY

I repeat: the significant butt of analysis is to explain the split between Dubinsky-Rose and Hillman, to explain why Hillman could overlook his differences with Stalinism and make such an alliance with them as against Dubinsky. It will not do to explain that the Stalinists wanted to capture the ALP... therefore the fight between Dubinsky and Hillman.

It is not here a question of minimizing the importance or danger of the Stalinists in the ALP or labor movement. But I assume that Hillman was aware of this too, and not eager to hand the ALP over to Joe's battalions. (In places, LA has written as if Hillman suddenly became a fellow-traveler and front man for Browder, a simple stooge. That of course is nonsense properly left for Dies.) What motivated him?

LA tried a formulation (2/14): "Hillman formed a bloc with the CP for the purpose of taking over the ALP and reducing it to a pro-Roosevelt bargaining agency, bargaining with the Democratic machine in the State of New York."

So everything is explained. I have quoted the characterization by LA of the ALP as a "bargaining center" with the capitalist parties ever

since its inception. The Dubinsky-Rose group, we were told, maintained the party in the same spirit. So Hillman comes along and starts a fight .... to "reduce it to a pro-Roosevelt bargaining agency" all over again

Very enlightening.

#### A COUPLE OF EXPLANATIONS

In the same article, LA tries its hand again. It is "explaining" how come Hillman and the CP have gotten together against the Right Wing, and on what grounds..

"Hillman is against a Labor Party! The CP is against a Labor Party... Hillman and his CP allies have utilized the CIO Political Action Committee, organized to hogtie American labor to Roosevelt's machine and for a fourth term, to prevent genuine independent labor politics by labor and for the formation of a genuine Labor Party..."

Now it is all clear. LA has previously made plain that Dubinsky-Rose have worked since the inception of the ALP to "prevent" the formulation of a genuine Labor Party and to rally the labor vote for Roosevelt, being "desperately afraid" of real independent action. Not only that -- they succeeded in this. So Hillman, being anxious to do the same thing.... fights Dubinsky.

We are not much forwarder, are we?

Let us try another stab at it, says Shachtman.

"The issue before N.Y. labor right now is, therefore, to prevent the Stalinists from winning control of the ALP -- WHICH WOULD THEN BECOME A TOOL OF THE KREMLIN AND THE RUSSIAN FOREIGN OFFICE." (LA -- 3/27).

Obviously this was not the issue for the Hillman group, which does not want the ALP to become a tool of the Kremlin. Given the position of the party it is unobjectionable agitation, but unilluminating analysis. In proportion as Shachtman finds himself unable to speak clearly about the Hillman policy, does he dwell solely upon the Stalinist danger, like a man who has been stuttering in embarrassment and then finally finds something he can say with a degree of conviction.

#### A COUPLE OF CONTRADICTIONS

See how this is done again in still another attempt at a formulation counterposing Dubinsky-Rose and Hillman (April N.I.):

Dubinsky-Rose, writes Shachtman, "stood, more or less, for the ALP as it was -- a political machine of the reformist labor officialdom for corraling labor votes for Roosevelt in return for modest concessions, and for putting up minor candidates 'independently' here and there."

This is supposed to describe the ALP "as it was" -- under the Right Wing -- and what did the other faction stand for?

"The latter stood for destroying the ALP as it was ...." begins Shachtman. We may take it first that this means: changing the character of the ALP. What does Hillman want to change it to? Just what is unsatisfactory about the character of the ALP "as it was"? This is the same question we started with. Let us finish Shachtman's sentence:

"The latter stood for destroying the ALP as it was, and certainly for destroying the chances of making it what it should be...."

That is, I presume, an independent labor party. But the party's characterization of the ALP as it was, detailed above, makes it clear not only that the Dubinsky-Rose leadership stood for preventing making the ALP "what it should be" but that they have been amply successful.

But we have not yet finished Shachtman's sentence which winds up thusly: "....in order more easily to turn it into an instrument with which the Stalinists...can operate within the Democratic party." This, the only part of the formulation which has its feet on the ground, once again reveals the Stalinists' motives (not a very hard job) but still leaves Hillman a mystery.

#### FOR THE COME-COME-MAKE-UP-YOUR-MIND DEPARTMENT

But perhaps by "destroying the ALP as it was", Shachtman means merely "destroying the ALP," period. That is, liquidating it bodily. Indeed, in one issue, LA assured us that Hillman was telling his intimates that such was his intent. If Hillman is aiming to dissolve the party, then we do have a difference between him and the Right Wing (we shall come to this point shortly), though we still have to ask HEY Hillman wants to do this. But in most cases the party press has been much more equivocal. LA has most often alternated between (1) hinting that Hillman wants to dissolve the ALP, and (2) that Hillman wants to change the character of the ALP -- from what to what, the Lord alone knows.

This equivocation reached its height in LA of 2/14 when both alternative explanations were forcibly compressed into one sentence:

"The Dubinsky-Counts-Rose group would retain the ALP as an independent third party -- not a genuine Labor Party -- whereas the Stalinist-Hillman combination would destroy the ALP and turn it into an appendage of the Roosevelt machine."

What's this? The Hillman group would both destroy the ALP and also turn it into a Roosevelt appendage? To an English-speaking person, one would seem to exclude the other. If it is really to be killed, how can it be "turned into" anything -- whether a "Roosevelt appendage" or "a tool of the Kremlin" -- in fact, into anything but a corpse? I forbear repeating that, according to the party press itself, it is carrying coal to Newcastle for Hillman to try to "turn" the ALP into a Roosevelt appendage.

WE FINALLY GET SOMEWHERE

It is possible to go on like this for several more pages -- for weeks LA and the NI have been full of these meaningless formulations -- but the point is NOT merely that Shachtman and the party's ALP analysis are writing meaningless formulations. And it is certainly not that these stupid contradictions are due to stupidity or inability to handle English.

They cannot squarely face the question of the Dubinsky vs. Hillman split because the answer which stares them in the face is. . . inconvenient. They show themselves aware of it, but only to gloss over it.

I have quoted the several attempts in our press to explain the fight between Dubinsky and Hillman, and pointed out how they explain nothing. There is one other attempt, however, about which this cannot be wholly said. It is in LA for 3/27 in a report of a speech in N.Y. by Shachtman:

"Both wings of the ALP...have the same political program. They both are pro-Roosevelt, pre-New Deal, pro-war. It is the fight over the Hillman plan, then, merely a fight for power between rival political gangs?"

This is rejected, and Shachtman starts going through the same routine on the "difference" between the two groups:

"They (the Hillman-CP wing) want control of the ALP in order to prevent its developing in the direction of a genuine Labor Party. Hillman and the Stalinists are both on record against independent political action by labor . . ."

Nothing which distinguishes them from the Right Wing, so far.

". . . against any Labor Party. . . ."

Dit to.

". . . and against even any third party."

Well, well! here's the statement of a real difference between Hillman and Dubinsky: made, of course, only in a prepositional phrase in one sentence of one article, among many long articles, but still something to hang on to.

LABOR PARTY AND THIRD PARTY

What does this difference turn out to be?

Not at all concerned with independent labor action, as 95% of the party's propaganda on the question has tried to make out.

Dubinsky is for a third capitalist party. Hillman is against a third capitalist party, at least now. This is the difference.

Aside from the rejected theory of machine politics as the motiva-

tion, this is the only possible difference. Outside of the last-cited six words, the other 10,000 words poured into LA and the NI on the question were so much mumbo-jumbo, weren't they?

Shachtman distinguishes between a labor party and a third party. Very correct. Our movement has always done so, even when it was not in favor of advocating a labor party. It has always drawn a line between parties like LaFollette's Progressives, which are attempts at a liberal capitalist political formation with middle-class support, and attempts at forming a party based on the trade unions along the lines of the British Labor Party.

This distinction between a liberal capitalist "third party" and a labor party has expressed itself in our policy at all times. Before 1938, when we were still against advocating a reformist labor party, we yet declared that IF such a labor party WERE formed based on the mass trade unions, we were ready to participate in it and even give critical support to its candidates; whereas our attitude to a new third party of the type described above could be only unqualified opposition.

After 1938, when the party adopted the pro-labor party position, it still stressed that the movement for and organization of a "third party" was not only still reactionary but indeed a principal danger to the development of working-class independence, and that any such third-party movement must be combatted.

And it must be remembered that at that time, and up to now, when we spoke of a third party in these terms we had in mind an independent third party -- a third party which was at any rate organizationally independent of the other two capitalist parties.

The ALP? It is not an independent Labor Party, not a Labor Party at all, not even a degenerated labor party; it is a third party -- and not even an independent third party! It is a third party of capitalism organized and maintained for the purpose of corralling liberalistic votes for the FIRST party of capitalism.

#### WHAT'S THE ALP "BETWEEN"?

One could not expect Shachtman to come right out with it and characterize the ALP as such a third party of capitalism. For one thing, his own thinking on the question is too confused to permit him the luxury of any positive statement. For the most part, the party press tells us what it is not, as detailed in the beginning of this article. This description of what the ALP is not, translated into positive terms, is a fine summary of the third-party type of political organization. In a shuffling fashion he has even implied the positive conclusion.

I have quoted LA's incidental remark that "The Dubinsky-Counts-Rose group would retain the ALP as an independent third party" -- noting only that this incorrectly ascribes to these gentlemen an independent role even as a third party.

In another place (Feb. NI) Shachtman mentions that the Stalinists "are opposed even to the ALP acting as a consistent 'third party'", though this does not commit him to saying that this is how the ALP has been acting.



In his article "Ups and Downs of the Labor Party Movement" in the April NI, Shachtman makes a pass at another "analysis". The ALP is an attempt at a combination "between bourgeois politics pursued by labor and independent politics." It is in a limbo of its own, a "hard-to-define movement," as he puts it. This is as far as he goes.

Similarly in the February NI, where at least he shows himself at least conscious of the "third party" question.

"Except for its name, it is not a labor party; it is not the political organization of the organized working class. It is far more removed from being that than it is from being a mere 'third party.' It is much closer in type to the LaFollette-Wheeler 'party' of the 1924 elections than it is to, say, the British Labour Party. Like the LaFollette-Wheeler machine of 1924, it is a middle class party with labor pretensions. The 1924 organization at least had many organized trade unions represented at the convention which nominated the two presidential candidates. The ALP's connections with the trade unions is confined to keeping them at arm's length in the capacity of an 'advisory committee' composed of union officials without direct power, accompanied by a flat refusal to allow the trade unions to affiliate with the party and to exercise their legitimate role within it."

This again seems to say that the ALP is somewhere "between" a third party and a labor party; but when it enters into a concrete comparison with the actual third party movement of 1924, the advantages are all on LaFollette's side! Not an atom of analysis is advanced to justify the "between" status conferred on the ALP.

A candid look at this comparison would seem to indicate something else. The LaFollette party was a third party organized against the other two capitalist parties. It strove at least to weaken each of the other two and strengthen itself. The ALP is a third party "set up as a labor vote-getter" for Roosevelt and "maintained in the same spirit." Let us adopt Shachtman's method of spacing these parties geographically betwixt and between. The ALP is not somewhere "between" a third party and a good labor party. It is rather "between" a third party and. . . the left wing of the Democratic Party!

#### THE CONTEMPORARY THIRD PARTY MOVEMENT

Shachtman is in a bind because he cannot call the ALP either a labor party or a third party. Therefore it is "in-between" and to be scientifically defined as a "hard-to-define movement."

Far be it from me to insist that every political development without exception must be ticketed with a fixed label like an item in a Sears Roebuck catalogue. (This is only the obverse of those desperate muddleheads who think that by calling something a "process" they get rid of the need for characterizing it politically.) But the fact is that Shachtman's whole "betwixt and between" approach is worthless.

The terms "capitalist third party" and "labor party" have had fairly distinct meanings in American history. They were two types of political organizations, with different class roots, different compositions, different programs. Shachtman's quandary arises from his inability to tear his eyes away from this traditional but past distinction.

In the dynamic class context of American capitalist society today, both of these traditional categories are pushed in each other's direction, and tend to be telescoped into a fused political form.

No serious liberal-capitalist third party can arise in this country today without a heavy labor base and decisive labor alliances. The important third-party movements of the era now gone arose on the basis of the farmers and lower middle class predominantly. Today, with the vastly increased social weight of the working class, it can arise only with the labor-liberals standing in their shoes.

Conversely, in the 19th century, when an independent labor fight to wrest reforms from a lustier capitalism was possible without calling into question the very stability of capitalism itself, reformist labor leaders could aim at organizing labor's independent strength without running head-long against their own basic capitalistic convictions. Not so today, when the greater explosiveness of labor class consciousness and the more delicate equilibrium of capitalism make really independent class organization too greatly fraught with implications from which they must turn back.

Thus the concepts "third party" and "labor party", each from its own internal compulsions under the conditions of contemporary capitalism, have converged into a third party of a modified type. It might be called a "labor third party". It is the liberal third party of today. It is the labor party of today.

It should be understood that capitalism in its period of reactionary decline sharpens political choices. The half-way houses are "coordinated" or wiped out. This is the process; it is only accelerated, not created, by a capitalism-at-war or a capitalism-turned-fascism. The expanse of no-man's-land moves toward disappearance in the class struggle as it has in war. As a ghost it can still exist in an individual's consciousness (as it does in the minds of the American workers as a mass); in a verbally-coined political platform (like the New York Liberal Party's); in labor-reform demagogy; or in the political perspective of those who think that an "independent" labor party can arise which can in actual politics walk the tight-rope between support of capitalist politics and support of revolutionary socialist politics.

Such is the political matrix of the labor-party movement today, and only those who today persist in analyzing the American labor movement's development in terms of obsolete forms can continue to pose such theological questions as whether the ALP is "between" a third party or a labor party and just how much removed from either, or continue to make historically meaningless distinctions between reformist labor parties that are "genuine" or "class" or "real" or "independent" or simply "hard-to-define" parties.

#### HOW TO BE REALISTIC

When, therefore, in his New York speech, Shachtman raised the question

of taking sides in this Dubinsky-Fillman scrap, the question actually posed was:

Shall the party support the liberal supporters of third-party politics against the more conservative opponents of third-party politics?

His answer was: Support the Dubinsky-Rose third-party-ites in the primaries against Fillman.

Now the less important thing to be said about this policy is the following:

Shachtman proposed a double-barrelled policy. Support the third-party-ites in the primaries, but if they win in the primaries, do not vote for them in the regular elections.

When Shachtman debated the labor party question at the last national convention, he beat his breast as a "realist", and by God, not a sectarian -- a man with a "positive" answer and a "practical" position to offer to workers on electoral policy. It is also as the same kind of realist, positivist and practical politician that he feels called upon to advise support of the liberal third-party-ites in the primaries. After all, we have a comrade in a union and the question of Dubinsky-Rose versus Fillman comes up. Naturally, it would be a very fine thing if he could put forward a third slate, but if this is out of the question, he is going to say "A plague on both your houses," or -- god forbid -- say nothing at all? For a positively practical realist, this proposal cannot seriously be considered. A choice must be made, and naturally one chooses the lesser of the two evils (hampht you wouldn't expect him to choose the greater of two evils, would you?). To be sure, (as Shachtman is perfectly willing to admit in any subordinate clause of not more than six words), the lesser-evil people are not supporters of an independent labor party, of a dependant labor party, nor even of an independent third party --- but they are better, aren't they, than the other fellows who aren't for any kind of third party, even a bad one. It is a positive principle of the realistic fellows that a fake labor party is better than none at all, and it follows that a bad third party is better than none at all. And while coming out in support of the latter (who are also to be sure the "desperate" opponents of even a fake labor party) one can "utilize the arena" to make a speech about what we really need is a revolutionary labor party, only we have to take a first step in that direction by supporting Dubinsky, who (gulp) stands in the way of a labor party. . .

#### HOW TO AVOID SECTARIANISM

Certainly no one can say that this policy is sectarian. So our comrade in the trade union avoids the twin evils of sectarianism and silence and speaks out for supporting Dubinsky's men. And since, as all realists emphasize, we must be the most vigorous advocates of all steps toward a labor party, he vigorously urges his brothers to vote for the Dubinsky candidates in the primaries as the lesser evil compared with the Fillman-CP slate, since the former are at least in favor of maintaining the AIP as a middle-class third party.

If successful in making the Dubinsky men the representatives of the AIP, is he to vote for them in the November elections?

No, says Shachtman. We must support these people in the primaries, but ---

"However, this is not giving it support politically in the November elections. For no worker believing in independent political action by labor can support at the polls an auxiliary of the Democratic Party -- which the ALP now is."

That is, "the ALP now is" an auxiliary of the Democratic Party under the leadership of the same men whom we are supporting for continued leadership. We can vote that they continue to be the leaders, but we cannot support the party in November because, by gosh, they are the leaders.

It is correct to vote for Dubinsky in the primaries but not in November . . . When he is running against the Hillmanites, he is the lesser evil and deserves (critical) political support --- because, forsooth, Hillman wants to turn the ALP into a Roosevelt appendage." But when Dubinsky is running against Republicans and such, we cannot give him (critical) political support. . . because he is just a Roosevelt appendage HIMSELF!

The victory of the Dubinsky leadership inside the ALP is a boon to the prospects of labor independence, But we must help to insure his defeat outside the ALP in the regular elections, because a victory by the ALP against (say) Republicans is no first step toward labor independence. And if we thus demonstrate that Dubinsky cannot even get the votes of his own party for his men, will we strengthen Hillman's and the CP's next attack or weaken it? A leadership's hold on a party is maintained by its practical electoral successes as much as it is created by one primary victory. So --- we must insist on Dubinsky's men being our candidates, but tell the workers not to vote for them.

Hillman's victory prevented this contradiction from being brought to a head.

#### HOW TO BE DEVILISELY PRACTICAL

The "Hillman plan" for the ALP was to replace the control of the party by district clubs with control by trade-union affiliates. LA replies: This is superficially a good proposal, it is progressive, it is correct; but as put forward by the Hillman-CP group, it is only a device for entrenching CP control of the party, since the only unions that would affiliate with the ALP are predominantly CP-controlled themselves.

We too, says LA, are for trade-union control of the ALP but ONLY by "all unions that stand unequivocally for independent labor political action, i.e., for an independent Labor Party." (LA--2/14).

This proposal is "cleverly" designed to exclude from our mass labor party based on the mass trade unions all "the Stalinist-controlled unions" (LA explains), the Hillman-controlled unions, and "any union which is opposed to independent political action and a Labor Party."

That New York unions would be eligible for this very pure labor party -- purged on one side of the labor-liberals, on another of the Stalinist-controlled unions and on a third of the Hillmanites? To be terribly statis-

tical about it, how much is left? Naturally LA does not present any list of eligible unequivocal unions. . .

"Until this idea gains widespread support in the unions, which it does not have now, Comrade Shachtman said, we cannot ignore the fate of the ALP."  
(LA -- 3/27).

Shachtman (Feb. MI) nostalgically complains that if only the Dubinsky-Rose group had campaigned against Hillman on this platform, the latter could have been routed. Maybe. But the whole point is that the Dubinsky group is if anything farther from wanting a trade-union controlled independent labor party than Hillman! One might as well base the party policy on the petulant reproach that if only the CP could tear itself away from Stalin and Browder's control, it could be a Socialist organization. Shachtman writes as a left wing of the Dubinsky bloc, giving these fakers excellent advice on how not to be fakers; giving these labor-liberals tips on how they should act if they were not liberals; giving these Roosevelt appendages the low-down on what to do if they were not Roosevelt appendages.

#### VANGUARDISM ON THE HALF-SHELL

Shachtman does not think the ALP under Dubinsky is a first step toward independent political action. Therefore he refused to accord it support in November.

The British Labor Party (which Shachtman referred to as the arch-type of the genuine labor party) developed organically out of the official trade union movement of that country while following a fairly consistent policy of alliance with the capitalist liberals. It did not begin with independent political action and never achieved consistently independent action. The mass trade unions were first organized politically as they were and then developed more or less as a whole in the direction of greater organizational independence.

Shachtman proposes that in America the development of an independent labor party proceed from the other direction -- first form a "pure" labor party with little or no forces, and then try to bring the others in. His instinct is correct. The British traveled their road in another period, under a younger, more progressive capitalism, and in a different social context in which the capitalist politics played by the British trade unions yet served a progressive function of organizing labor politically for reforms which were still meaningful. Today such politics can play no progressive role at all, Shachtman implicitly recognizes; therefore we must advocate, so to speak, a vanguard-type of independent labor party, a pump-priming labor party.

Thus the party policy is forced into bizarre variations by the force of the very facts of society which it chose to ignore. What happens to the oft-repeated motivation that a labor party founded on the mass trade unions as they are, no matter how conservative, would be a "step forward" for American labor? Dropped out of the bottom, because it does not fit the facts. Insofar as the party policy faces further concrete realities of the labor party movement, as it has just done in a single episode, it will go through other permutations, empirically fudged up to fit the opportunity.

Shachtman and other party theoreticians have, of course, adopted this theory not as the result of any basic analysis, but as the result of butting their heads against a concrete situation:

"The 'concrete situations' which demand tactical consideration generally arise today in those hard-to-define movements which are located somewhere between the outright capitalist politics of the AFL and the independent working class politics of a genuine labor party, genuine at least in the sense of the conditions set forth above." (April NI).

And the full measure of Shachtman's lack of comprehension of the nature of these hard-to-define movements is to be found in the next three sentences:

"Such movements are an inevitable stage in the political evolution of the American workers. They were an inevitable stage in the British and German evolution. What will distinguish the American development from, broadly speaking, the European, will be its duration or durability."

The very kernel, the truest essence of Shachtman's position on the labor party is to be found nowhere else but in the above three sentences.

#### HISTORY SAUTEED

In England and Germany, during the halcyon period of capitalism before 1914, the working class united politically around reformist parties and leaderships -- in England the British Labor Party; in Germany the Social Democratic Party. They were not revolutionary parties. They were reformist working-class parties. In this sense, true enough, they were "somewhere between" outright capitalist politics and fully independent working-class politics. But this statement of Shachtman's, referring to the British and German parties, makes sense only if fully "independent working class politics" is understood to mean "revolutionary socialist politics."

Without this proviso, why on earth is the German S. D. Party described as "somewhere between" -- that is, short of -- independent working class politics? What did the German S. D. Party lack of deserving being called an "independent working class party," what if not revolutionary Marxism and that alone?

In throwing the German S. D.'s into the same category with the AIP, as "somewhere between", Shachtman is clearly thinking of his "independent working class politics of a genuine labor party" as being equivalent to a revolutionary socialist party. But it is precisely this which is denied by his whole approach to the labor party in America. Here, Shachtman has told us time and again, a labor party is necessary because labor is not ready for a revolutionary socialist party; he presents his dream of an "independent" labor party as being something realizable short of a revolutionary party. Could there be more confusion created in three short sentences?

#### A THEORY OF STAGES

Shachtman's perspective is clear. American labor, like the British

and Germans in their time, must inevitably go through (1) the stage of rallying around a reformist party and leadership, (2) be betrayed by it, and (3) only then come over in any numbers to a revolutionary party. The political development of labor under conditions of the period of the Second World War and in the present stage of senile American capitalism, can be nothing else but a condensed version of the development that labor went through under the peaceful, expanding, stabler capitalism of pre-1914 days. History will take out the old film for a second run and wind it through more quickly, that is all. The actors and their roles and the scenario will be essentially the same.

This is 100 per cent false.

Even now, at the beginning of the picture so to speak, it is obvious that we are seeing not a mere re-run but a new plot. I have raised the question whether the German party was "somewhere between". How about the British Labor Party?

Shachtman admits the ALP is "not a working class party," and certainly "not a labor party." The British Labor Party was a working class party and was a labor party. To throw them both into the same historical stew as "somewhere between" and thereupon draw the lesson of the inevitable parallelism between American and British development is a perfect example of how Shachtman makes those two words function as a substitute for historical analysis.

But the British Labor Party also "played capitalist politics" in its famous Liberal-Labour alliance in which it tailed after the Liberal Party. The ALP plays capitalist politics and tails after the Democratic Party. Aren't they both "somewhere between"?

The ALP has played and still plays nothing but capitalist politics. It was, Shachtman himself tells us, organized and maintained as a labor vote-getter for the capitalist parties. This was and is its political role, its reason for existence. For the ALP, this is not an opportunistic and short-sighted deviation from an independent policy; it is the very heart and body of its policy. The ALP did not and does not consider its alliance with the Democratic Party as a first step or necessary compromise for the purpose of furthering independent working-class policy; it is "desperately afraid" of the latter.

The politics of the ALP is bourgeois politics flavored with labor demagogy. The politics of the British and German reformists was LABOR POLITICS distorted by bourgeois opportunism.

So Shachtman looks on the ALP and the European parties and sagely observes: "Obviously both are somewhere between OUTRIGHT capitalist politics and COMPLETE independence. One can see that we are at an inevitable stage of the same road. . .!"

#### PROGRESSIVE OR REACTIONARY?

But we have not yet come to the main point about Shachtman's caricature of a Marxist analysis.

In spite of their reformism and opportunism, the British and German

labor parties played an essentially progressive role in the political development of the labor movement in those countries for a substantial period before 1914. In what did this progressive role consist?

These reformist leaderships taught the main mass of workers their first lessons in independent political action; brought the main body of workers up to their level; brought political organization to them. The creation of these parties was a step in advance of the consciousness of the class at that time.

It was this service which made those parties progressive. It is precisely this service which a labor party will not perform in America today!

Who says so? Why, Shachtman and the party thesis (adopted at the last convention). This document considers the possibility of the formation of a labor party in this country and presents two alternative paths -- both based on the same assumption; that the creation of a labor party would be the result, not the cause, of independent action sentiment among the main mass of workers.

"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 political party as the AIP 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, 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.'"

Note: in the case of both alternative paths, the creation of the labor party becomes possible only if and when the basic layers of the working class are already imbued with the need for independent political action; and so thoroughly and militantly imbued, indeed, that they are thereby roused to a revolt "from below" comparable only (in fact more tremendous than) the sit-down strike wave --- the hurling down of the top leaderships of the two great labor bureaucracies --- or at least hovering on the brink of this so portentously that these bureaucracies hasten to form a labor



party. . . in order to castrate it. In the same way as, in the wake of the Russian Revolution, the European social-democrats set up "socialist" governments. . . in order to prevent socialism.

A government of socialists is no doubt a more progressive government than a government of capitalists -- but not a government of these socialists, not a government set up in this context and with this political meaning. An independent party of labor is a progressive step, similarly, but not an "independent labor party" created to prevent independent labor action.

#### AN ANALOGY

In the case of the European reformist parties, the progressive significance of these parties began to decline and turn into its opposite as soon as (and insofar as) the workers, having been brought up to that level, began to crowd by their reformist leaders, to by-pass them and surge beyond them. America is to begin with this state of affairs. The ALP began under these auspices. A labor party in America would play a reactionary role from its birth.

This question, as raised by Shachtman's three sentences, is distinctly reminiscent.

Analogies are illustrations, not arguments; and in polemical writing, where the tendency is to score a debater's point rather than weigh objectively, analogies are usually "answered" by pointing to the differences between the two cases -- which naturally exist precisely because it is an analogy, not an identity. But they can be helpful especially in highlighting a similarity in methodology.

In the discussions among the Russian Socialists before 1914, the Mensheviks argued: "According to Marx, the more advanced country shows the less advanced the image of its own future. Western Europe was pushed from feudalism to democratic capitalism by the movement of the rising bourgeoisie. Such movements are an inevitable stage in the political evolution of the Russian state. They were an inevitable stage in the British and French evolution. What will distinguish the Russian development from, broadly speaking, the West European, will be its duration or durability." --- They therefore advocated support to the liberal bourgeoisie as a progressive anti-Tsarist force.

Lenin and also Trotsky answered: "That was in a different period of capitalism. In Russia, developing late in the midst of a world capitalism already declining, the bourgeoisie develops as a reactionary force from the day of its birth. Progressive democratic action means proletarian revolutionary action."

Yes, yes, the nature of the problems are different. Shachtman's methodology is. . . reminiscent.

#### HOW SHACHTMAN DISCARDS HIS INHIBITIONS

There remains one other theoretical sally by Shachtman which bears upon this question of the nature of the hard-to-define ALP, to be found leading off his article on "Ups and Downs" in the April NI.

Here is what he actually writes (underlining its mine):

"If one is not inhibited by the nominal similarity with the British or Belgian or Australian Labor Parties, that is, by the mysticism of words, there are no limitations placed in advance upon the revolutionary development of such a party. We have known parties bearing the NAME 'Labor Party' which were reformist through and through but, as in the case of the Social-Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks) of Russia and, for a time, the Norwegian Labor Party, there have also been revolutionary parties with that name."

Only a political line bankrupt in theory can give birth to drivel like this. If the theoretical leader of the party can write this, I may be excused for treating it seriously.

Shachtman wants a labor party in America. There is a Labor Party in England and one in Australia, as everybody knows, which function in the present period of capitalism as reactionary obstacles in the path of the socialist emancipation of the workers and as desperate enemies of the socialist struggle. And these are "genuine" labor parties, make no mistake, based on the mass trade unions (and their bureaucracies!). No socialist movement can get far in these countries except insofar as it succeeds in breaking down whatever faith and confidence the workers have in these labor parties. Is this not something to give the American neo-labor-party-ite pause, lest he too be experimenting with a Frankenstein monster?

Think nothing of it, says Shachtman. The similarity is purely . . . nominal. Just because a party has the words "Labor Party" in its title has no bearing on its character as reformist or revolutionary, and is no reason why it can't be as revolutionary as . . . the Bolsheviks.

Having, as we have seen, succeeded in throwing both the ALP and the German Social Democrats into the same bag as being similarly "somewhere between", Shachtman now throws the American labor party into the same bag with the Bolsheviks -- no less -- on the scholarly ground that if Lenin's party could have the two words "Labor Party" as part of its name, there is no reason to believe that a labor party organized by our trade union bureaucrats could not also be or become a revolutionary party likewise. After all, what's in a name?

#### THE MYSTICISM OF WORDS

A "Labor Party" is not just a couple of words in a party name. It is a particular TYPE of working class party. It is not just ANY working class party or any "party of labor." It is certainly not just any party with the two words in its title! (While Shachtman is discarding inhibitions, he might as well refer to the "National Socialist German Labor Party" and conclude profoundly that "there are no limitations placed in advance" upon the fascist development of a labor party. The analytical brilliance displayed would be just as dazzling.)

The official party name of the Bolsheviks included the words "Labor Party", but the Bolsheviks were NOT a Labor Party --- that is, not a Labor

Party type of political organization. They were a vanguard-type revolutionary Marxist party. (When a Russian social-democrat, Larin, proposed that the Russian Marxists work for the creation of a Labor Party in Russia -- i.e., a Labor Party type of organization --- Lenin and the Bolsheviki denounced this proposal as "liquidationism.")

The Norwegian Labor Party was a Labor Party, but it was never a revolutionary party, not even "for a time". What Shachtman is skittering over is the fact that the Norwegian L.P. was for a time affiliated with the Comintern --- this "time" being the few years after 1918 when European revolutions were breaking around the ears of the Norwegian leaders, their rank-and-file became revolutionary, and the leaders yielded to the latter's demand for affiliation to the Comintern -- IN ORDER TO PREVENT the development of a revolutionary communist party! (P.S.: They pretty much succeeded too, since the untrained Norwegian revolutionary workers had not yet acquired certain inhibitions.)

The British Labor Party and its Australian and Belgian counterparts were Labor Parties, not only in name but in type.

They have acted as betrayers of the class struggle, not because they were called "Labor Parties" but because they were Labor Parties. These Labor Parties are in point of fact not so much "parties of labor" as "parties of the labor fakers." The same trade union bureaucrats who maintain their control of the trade unions likewise control the program, activities and policies of the Labor Party. Rejecting the socialist revolution with genuine horror, as these labor lieutenants of capitalism do, they have in this day and age no political alternative except hanging on to the coat-tails of the capitalist politicians. Their encrusted political-bureaucratic character could be changed only by a tidal wave of revolt from the depths of the rank and file which would sweep away the entire leadership of the national labor movement. A tidal wave of this proportion can and will come, but when it does it will be called the socialist revolution, and the leadership of the Labor Parties will not be the most important among the structures swept away.

#### "GOOD" AND "BAD" REFORMIST PARTIES

Having gotten rid of the mysticism of words, as we have just seen, Shachtman proceeds to emphasize that what is decisive about the Labor Party is its program. Good. He then projects his dream of an "independent" labor party in America which will at least function organizationally independent of the capitalist parties. This, he says, "is a workers' party, even though, by virtue of its reformist program, it is a middle class workers' party."

So in the decisive respect -- program -- Shachtman's dream party is a reformist party. Once again a spectre rises before him -- the spectre of the greatest reformist party of all time, the German Social-Democratic Party, numbering its members and followers by the millions, its union bureaucrats and "independent" office-holders by the thousands, and its betrayals by the hundreds. And so Shachtman is constrained to add a paragraph.

Before quoting this precious paragraph, I must add that Shachtman had just written: "A party that does not have a revolutionary program merits the support of the working class only if it meets two minimum requirements:

that it be organized separately from the capitalist parties and run its own independent candidates; and that it be the political machine of the organized working class."

Obviously, on the face of it, the German Social-Democratic Party fulfilled Shachtman's minimum (nay, modest) requirements amply. It may have drowned one developing German revolution in blood and betrayed two others; it may have greased the road for the seizure of power by Hitler, hamstringing every militant labor move against the Hitler danger and finally collapsed ignominiously --- but there is no gainsaying that it had the distinction of meeting Shachtman's minimums. Did it therefore merit the support of the working class? Obviously not, and you can see why Shachtman has to add his paragraph after admitting that his dream Labor Party is, after all, a reformist affair too.

"It must be added (Shachtman writes) that it is not a reformist workers' party in the same way as, say, the German Social-Democratic Party. It is a special kind of reformist party."

All right, the German S. D. was a bad reformist party. Shachtman's Labor Party will be a good reformist party. That's a special kind. He has two points to make to account for this contrast. His next sentence runs:

"It is -- that is, it should be -- constituted by the trade unions, based upon them, controlled by them."

This, I take it, is Special Difference No. 1. The German party was a membership organization, not a federation of trade unions, but it was nonetheless based on and controlled by the trade unions (which were also led by S. D. party men). The majority of the party was trade unionist, and the last words in the party councils were said by the Social Democratic trade union leaders. This is well known. Why then was this a "bad" reformist party? Because it did not have the federated trade-union structure of Shachtman's dream labor party??? All this meant was that the trade union bureaucracy had to exercise their controlling power in the German party indirectly, whereas in the federated structure of the British Labor Party or Shachtman's dream party they exercise their crushing influence directly and in the crude form of bloc votes! This is the "special difference".

Shachtman's next sentences:

"The trade unions embrace all political opinions. Their control of the Labor Party makes it an arena in which the revolutionizing of the party (again, more accurately, of the decisive elements in the party) may take place; consequently an arena in which the Marxian vanguard can and must function."

The German S.D. Party did not "embrace all political opinions." Its millions of members and followers were all of a Socialist complexion. Therefore (this is Special Difference No.2). . . therefore it was a "bad" reformist party, whereas the dream labor party which will also "embrace" Democrats, Republicans, liberals, reactionaries and fascists will be a reformist party "not in the same way" but of a "special kind", i.e. a "good"

reformist party. . . You see before you the power of Marxist analysis.

Thus Shachtman valiantly smudges a line between his own proposed reformist party (which we must create!) and the discredited Social-Democratic type of reformist party (which we view with historical distaste). As in the case of his comparison of the ALP with LaFollette, the comparison again does not rebound to the credit of the intended. After all, there was absolutely nothing wrong with the German Social-Democratic Party as an "independent working class party" except that it was opportunist, not revolutionary! It was in a great social crisis that this opportunism showed itself to be equivalent to counter-revolutionary reaction.

Compared with the ALP or the MCF, the German S.D. was a model of working class (not to speak of socialist!) integrity. And it is perfectly true that the reformist labor party of Shachtman's dreams will also be a "special kind" of reformist party. No mass reformist leadership will ever arise in America one quarter as advanced as even the German S. D. in its dog days. The stage of a mass reformist party playing a progressive role has been over-passed in America. Revolutionary Marxists are deceiving themselves and the working class in pointing that road.

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