
Theses on the Workers Party Policy in the Elections of 1924:

Presented by the Anti-Third Party Group, circa April 1924.

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A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 295, ll. 23-32.

I. Forces, Tendencies, Movements.

In outlining a policy for our participation in the election campaigns of 1924, both Presidential and Congressional, we must proceed from the following consideration.

Negative.

- a) The numerical weakness of the Workers Party; the lack of political training on the part of its members.
- b) The organizational weakness of the Left section of the labor movement.
- c) The absence of class-consciousness among the large masses of both organized and unorganized labor.
- d) The traditional mistrust of the average American worker of political parties.
- e) The absence in the USA in the elections of 1924 of a catastrophic situation which would warrant the expectation of a sudden and tremendous change in the political attitude of the working masses.

Positive.

- a) The growing influence of the Workers Party

among the more dissatisfied strata of the working class.

- b) The growing tendency of the Left section of the labor movement towards consolidation into a semblance of a distinct proletarian political party.

- c) The marked dissatisfaction of a portion of the poorer farmers in the various states.

- d) 1. The so-called insurgent movement in the ranks of the capitalist parties, especially the Republican, a movement identified with the name of LaFollette. 2. The Conference for Progressive Political Action.

- e) The oil scandal [Teapot Dome] and the Daugherty investigation.

Each one of these factors must be taken in its proper proportion in any elaboration of plans for the coming election.

The Workers Party.

The number of enrolled members in the Workers Party is in the neighborhood of 25,000.‡ This is the entire portion of the working class that the Workers Party can directly command through its discipline and organization. The number of citizens among the members, entitled to a vote, is still smaller. The Workers Party as such is, therefore, unable to influence *di-*

†- The March 17-18, 1924 plenum of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party of America dispatched William Z. Foster, John Pepper, and Moissaye J. Olgin (representatives of the three main factions) to Moscow to argue before the Communist International the merits of their various programs for the WPA with respect to the Farmer-Labor Party movement. This document was prepared for the Comintern by Olgin to serve as a concise statement of the "Anti-Third Party" ideas of the WPA's "Third Faction," the New York group associated with CEC member Ludwig Lore.

‡- The figure for "enrolled membership" cited here is not to be confused with the actual paid membership of the WPA, which averaged 18,223 during the first quarter of 1924 [see: Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 276, l. 43]. Executive Secretary Ruthenberg noted in his report to the March 17, 1924 CEC session that "at least one-third" of the WPA's membership were not paying dues regularly, however, so the Lore guesstimate of an enrolled WPA membership "in the neighborhood of 25,000" seems reasonable.

rectly in any appreciable degree the outcome of the elections. It cannot throw directly any social weight on the scale of one political formation or the other.

The membership of the Workers Party itself, on the other hand, is not a homogeneous one. It has not yet thoroughly assimilated the Communist idea. It is not thoroughly versed in Communist tactics. This is mainly due to the recent formation of the Workers Party and to internal struggles that precluded normal party life and expansion. What has attracted the membership to the WP and made it proud of the name "Communist" is the position of the party, its outspoken and unwavering class-line in matters political and economic. Any step on the part of the WP which may be construed as a deviation from its radical course must cause a depressing reaction in the membership of the party in its present stage of development and result in abstention from activities in a falling off of an appreciable number of members.

The Left Wing [of the Labor Movement].

The Left Wing of the labor movement is a groping rather than a clear vision, a tendency rather than an organizational consolidation. The workers' organizations represented in the various state Farmer-Labor parties are dissatisfied with capitalist exploitation and disgusted with the political machinery of the old capitalist parties. They have not yet, however, acquired a full understanding of the necessity of organizing a class Labor Party with a proletarian class program. They have not yet learned to rely on their own representatives as distinct from and opposed to bourgeois progressives calling themselves friends of labor. The so-called Farmer-Labor parties have neither control over their members nor even a strong influence over their behavior in times of election. They are loosely knitted formations of very recent origin which have not yet crystallized into effective organizations. Not even the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, the most radical of all those not fully class-conscious political formations, has developed a party loyalty and a conscious party cohesion. This makes it very difficult, if not utterly impossible, to use the Left Wing of labor as a flexible instrument in WP strategy concerning this year's election.

The Bulk of Labor.

There is a vast difference between the Right Wing of labor in America and Europe. In the latter, even the backward workers have learned to rely on their own political representatives, differentiating their parties, however moderate, from the parties of the lower strata of the bourgeoisie. Such is the case particularly in Germany and England. In America the vast masses of the workers are still deluded by the idea of an all embracing rather than a class party. Dissatisfied with the Republicans, they vote for the Democrats. Becoming dissatisfied with the Republicans and Democrats, they may transfer their vote to a third, more radical, bourgeois party if such were to be formed. The only means of splitting them away from the bourgeoisie is the formation of *an outspoken Labor Party* with a form of organization, a program, a line of action, and a personnel of political candidates of such a clear proletarian class character as to become an irresistible force of attraction to the masses of labor. Viewed in this aspect, the formation of a liberal third party, which by its reformist tendencies may strongly attach itself large masses of workers, is a *direct menace* to the future of a proletarian class policy in the USA. It will be much more difficult to combat a third party than it is to prove the exploitationist dictatorship of the two old parties.

Traditional Disgust with "Political Game."

There has been no party life in the USA Congress in recent years, i.e. there has been no marked clash of class-interests in the political squabbles of the Republican and Democratic Parties, both of them representing, as they do, a united front of various economic groups and classes. The average non-Socialist worker grew to look upon party activities as upon something that has only a remote bearing on his daily existence. This attitude is only another form of expression of American individualism, which relies upon immediate clashes of interests in actual life rather than upon political clashes in legislative chambers. Taken as a whole, the American working class is far more revolutionary and class-conscious in daily struggles against capitalism than it is in its political expressions.

The same workingmen who wage enormous battles against the exploiters by means of strikes and protection of strikes, submit unhesitatingly to the political leadership of the exploiters and their agents. "You cannot beat the politician at the political game" is the common conviction of the average American worker. The masses disbelieve pre-election promises of the old parties, yet they have not realized the necessity of founding their own party. Instead, they look with contempt upon all parties, believing that the workers can stand their own aside from the parliamentary strife. The example of the Socialist Party, which even in times of its marked growth only followed in the footsteps of the capitalist parties, soliciting votes through pre-election promises which it could not fulfill and working through a machinery of party politicians who were not of the working class, only added to the disappointment of the labor masses in political action.

Under such conditions, only *a clear-cut party of labor and exploited farmers*, controlled by organized labor and farmers, acting through representatives of workers and farmers, and nominating its own candidates on a definite class program of labor and exploited farmers, can dispel the mistrust of the labor masses, destroy their political inertia and make them fight capitalism through political weapons with at least the same determination as they have hitherto fought capitalism with the weapons of strike and boycott.

No Mass Revolt in 1924.

The political strategy of the WP in 1924 will be greatly impeded by the absence of a sweeping national issue which would stir the laboring masses and lash them into spontaneous mass revolt in the political field. The economic situation is gradually approaching a crisis. Economic depression has been on the increase through the latter part of 1923. Yet there has been no rapid and alarming falling off of production and transportation, and there is no state of panic. Unemployment is evident in various parts of the country, notably in the mining and clothing industries, but it has not assumed and will not assume in the coming few months such proportions as to awaken the working masses to the realization of imminent danger. There is not atmosphere of deep unrest in the industrial centers. There are no signs of political upheavals. Only in

large sections of the farming districts is there profound dissatisfaction due to an acute crisis in agriculture. The millions of farmers who are bankrupt or facing bankruptcy have given rise to a vanguard of radical groups who voice the imminence for the farmers to influence legislation in their own interest and through their own spokesmen. This movement, the like of which has been witnessed in America in former decades, is here and there seeking an alliance with organized labor, yet it is just as eager to form affiliations with the lower strata of the city bourgeoisie wherever the latter are opposed to the dictatorship of big capital and willingly submits to the leadership of liberal politicians. The farmer movement is a typical petty bourgeois movement, and while at present a portion of the dispossessed farmers is deeply stirred, the farmers en masse will naturally gravitate towards a deeply bourgeois party rather than towards a class labor party.

All of these circumstances are obstacles on the path of the WP towards its historic task of utilizing the coming elections to organize the working class, sharpen its class-consciousness, and deepen its war against capitalist dictatorship.

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On the other hand, there are a number of circumstances which augur well for our campaigns in the coming elections and which, when properly utilized, may strengthen the working class and increase the influence of the WP.

Influence of the Workers Party.

The Workers Party has become an influence in excess of its numerical strength. Communist discipline, Communist determined appeal to class struggle, Communist boldness of attack on labor fakirs and wavering labor politicians, Communist revolutionary determination in exposing the viciousness of capitalism and its supporters in whatever disguise they may appear, have won the WP support and recognition wherever it came into contact with organized workers. The WP has become the symbol of straight and unyielding class struggle. This position may be enormously strengthened if we continue to be the crystallizing center for the formation of a class party of workers and exploited

farmers. (The strengthening of our prestige will inevitably result in a greater number of members.) We may be weakened if we becloud our line of action and lose in the eyes of the masses the most precious quality which attracted them to us, often against their will: a revolutionary class policy.

Tendency Towards a Class Party.

The consciousness growing out of the participation in the World War; the disillusionment in the outcome of the war; the growing centralization of power in the hands of the capitalist class; the unemployment of 1921-22; the reaction as expressed in the Open Shop campaign; the strikes of the steel, textile, mine, and railroad workers — all this has not remained without influence on the working masses. A change is coming over the American working class. A tendency towards liberation from the bourgeois ideology is on the increase. While the change is more of a molecular character, while there is no mass revolt and no spontaneous regroupings, there is a growing inclination toward what is vaguely termed as “independent political action.” The various conferences for the formation of labor parties in the last year, the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party [July 3-5, 1923], the conference set for June 17, 1924, are only an expression of the political changes that are taking place in the working class. This creates a favorable medium for our work of propaganda and organization for class struggle. We may become what the Communist Party ought to be in every country — the leader of the working class. The success depends upon our tactics in the near future. We must follow a direct and obvious class line. Into the mass of disillusioned and dismayed workingmen we must bring the class understanding of class division and class war. Into the dimness of political groupings we must pour the light of revolutionary class-consciousness. Of the chaos of a transitional period in the history of the American labor movement we must bring a well organized and well conscious class party. The inarticulate dissatisfaction of masses of workers must through us find its expression and its organized release in political struggle. This we can achieve, not by trying to lead the working class over devious ways of political machinations and obscure paths of dubious political deals with the petty bourgeoisie, but by

remaining Communists throughout, i.e. by not relinquishing our class line in the eyes of the working masses.

The Farmers.

The bitter restlessness of a mass of farmers may be of advantage to our work in that it increases the range of dissatisfaction with the old political parties and creates a number of possible allies for the future mass party of labor. The poorer farmers, as a section of the small bourgeoisie which is exploited by big capital and imbued with the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie, which in substance is opposed to the revolutionary ideology of labor, are situated on the social scale between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Insofar as they yield to the influence of class-conscious labor, they may be an ally in the struggle against capitalism. Insofar as they make the working men yield to bourgeois leadership, they are dangerous to the working class. In the measure that the consciousness of the workingmen will grow and their determination to fight capitalism will become manifest, the poorer farmers will yield to the influence of labor. Our tactics in the coming elections must lead not to the creation of a hegemony of the farmers, however dissatisfied at the present moment, over the masses of labor that are striving toward independent political expression, but to the creation of an alliance between workers and exploited farmers on the basis of a common fight against capitalist rule. The situation is favorable for a class party controlled by the working class. Much depends upon our line of action in the near future.

Republican Insurgency.

Conference for Progressive Political Action.

The so-called insurgency in the ranks of the Republican Party, embodied in small groups in the House of Representatives and Senate and linked with the name of LaFollette, is important for the working class mainly through the general political agitation it creates in the country and particularly through the attacks it levels against the two old capitalist parties. However, it carries also a grave menace for the future of the proletarian party, as it creates a new illusion of an all-embracing national party which is to save labor through strict

adherence to the principles of liberal bourgeois democracy, thereby blurring the class lines. This menace should not be overlooked. It may outweigh the advantages to be derived by the working class even from the formation of a third bourgeois party. Such a party will not change materially the character of American capitalism nor its political domination. It is fallacious to assume that in a highly developed industrial country in the period of its vigorous growth, with powerful industrial corporations and an enormous centralized finance capital, political power will soon pass into the hands of the middle and small bourgeoisie.

A third bourgeois party, at its best, would be no more than a United Front of a portion of the big bourgeoisie (primarily of the manufacturing group) and the mass of the middle and petty bourgeoisie. Such an alliance, coming into existence with the pomp and pretensions of saviors of the nation, may become *an obstacle for the creation of a proletarian party* and may subsequently be much more difficult to combat than an open and avowed enemy of the working people.

Realizing that the movement towards a third bourgeois party is by no means as speedy and spontaneous as to create what is termed in the political jargon as a landslide; realizing that even the formation of a third party under the leadership of an outspoken liberal of the LaFollette type would not mean a fundamental change in the character of American political life inasmuch as actual power would still remain in the hands of a combination of the two old parties; realizing that even the absolutely improbable passing of power into the hands of a third party would mean for the working class infinitely less than the passing of power into the hands of a coalition of reform Socialists and bourgeoisie in the European countries; realizing that it is our duty to warn the working class from falling into the soft arms of the liberal bourgeoisie, which will be just as efficient in squeezing the life blood of the workers as is every variety of the bourgeoisie; realizing that our warning must be not in the nature of negative propaganda only, but in the nature of a separate and distinct party of labor which would *compete* with a third party, and whenever possible hamper its growth so as to give room for the growth of a Labor Party — we still may utilize the political excitement created by the insurgency of the Republicans and by the third party movement. We must come to the work-

ers and farmers who have been stirred by the present political agitation and induce them to create the weapon which is plausible even *to the backward proletarian* — a party of labor. It is not our task to throw our weight in favor of one bourgeois party as opposed to the others; it would be impossible for us to do so even if we wished to, because we have no weight; it would be deviation from our class line if we were to make propaganda in favor of one bourgeois party; it would be an expression of parliamentary fetishism which would destroy our position among the working masses. It is, however, our duty to utilize the political fermentation among the masses in order to drive a wedge between the bourgeoisie, no matter how insurgent and liberal, and the working class, no matter how little enlightened. We must remember not only the immediate outcome of the elections and our glory in its results, but also the future struggles of the working class.

The Conference for Progressive Political Action is an embodiment of that part of organized labor which, under the leadership of reactionary labor officials, allowed its lot to be thrown with the bourgeoisie. Dominated by the bureaucrats of the railroad craft unions, who were eager to deliver the organizations represented in the Conference to the Democratic Party under the candidacy of McAdoo; faced with a scandal which for a while made the nomination of McAdoo undesirable while the appearance of another Democratic candidate with a reputation of a so-called "friend of labor" is highly improbable, the Conference for Progressive Political Action is biding time, still in expectation of a contingency which will make the creation of a third bourgeois party unnecessary. Further than a third party the CPPA is not ready to go. In this it is eagerly sustained by the Socialist Party on the one hand, by the liberal groups, such as the Committee of the 48, etc., on the other. There is little doubt that at best the July 4 conference of the CPPA will result in the proclamation of its readiness to support a third bourgeois party. This departure, being a decisive break with the tradition of labor supporting one of the old capitalist parties, will also strengthen our work in favor of a real class labor party. We still have to create a center which either in these coming elections or in the near future will separate the masses of the workers from their liberal bourgeois leaders, as our activities in the indus-

trial field are trying to separate them from the conservative bourgeoisie in their economic organizations.

The Oil Scandal.

The monstrous frauds unveiled in the entire government machinery in connection with the oil investigations, far from shaking the foundations of American capitalism, or even changing the political complexion of the Congress, has nevertheless created that state of political amazement and widespread mockery at the accepted bourgeois political phraseology which makes the masses more susceptible both to class propaganda and to the formation of a class political party. The material furnished by the investigations, however, must be utilized not in the same spirit as it is done by third party spokesmen, but as a proof of the rottenness of the capitalist system as a whole, and as our urge for the workers to become a political power.

II. Principles of Our Election Policy.

If follows from all these circumstances that our role in the coming elections must be based on the following principles.

1) We pursue the policies of a United Front of Labor as outlined by the Communist International, namely: we strive to unite the largest possible number of workers and poor farmers on a program of struggle against capitalist domination.

2) We do not come to the working masses with a full and detailed program of revolutionary class struggle as exemplified by the program of the WP, but we come with a minimum of class demands which, while drawing a line between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, will make the beginning of a political struggle against bourgeois rule and will be able to attract the adherence of large masses of workers.

3) We work for the formation of a Labor-Farmer Party controlled by workers and farmers and putting forth a minimum of class demands as outlined above.

4) We do not enter into any political maneuvers which may becloud our aims in the eyes of the workers and make them think of us as political manipulators of the old type and not as fighters for the cause of the workers.

5) We view our participation in the election campaigns as one of many occasions for spreading the propaganda of class struggle, for arousing the working class to political activity, for organizing the working class into a political party; we do not view it, however, as a means to achieve immediate and important changes in the American system of legislation. We full recognize the importance of the parliamentary tribune for the class enlightenment and consolidation of the working people, we do not, however, strive for parliamentary seats at the expense of our class position. We hold the same true for the working class as a whole.

6) We aim at strengthening the WP and putting it on the political map as the most radical and most consistent leader of the working masses.

III. Our Line of Action.

Based on these principles, we pursue in connection with the coming elections the following line of action:

Before June 17.

1) We make a many-sided and vigorous campaign for participation at the June 17 convention. The CEC of the WP and every party unit carry the campaign into every accessible labor and farmer organization, the aims being:

a) To enlighten the workers and poor farmers as to their position in capitalist society and the only way to liberation;

b) To induce the workers' and farmers' organizations to form state and city Labor Parties which would appeal for the votes of the laboring masses in time of election;

c) To induce the newly organized Labor-Farmer Parties to affiliate with the Federated Farmer-Labor Party to send delegates to the June 17 convention.

d) To induce each local labor and farmer organization and each local branch of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party to send delegates to the June 17 convention.

2) We carry on a systematic propaganda not only against the old capitalist parties but also against the

third bourgeois party, which is in the process of birth., We point out the bourgeois character of the coming party, using particularly the frankly and openly capitalist nature of the insurgent group's activities in the present Congress. We brand the labor officials who wish to make the workers an appendix to a third party as betrayers of the working class striving to establish political peace with the bourgeoisie where war must be the rule. We point out that "delivering" labor to a third bourgeois party is no less reactionary than delivering it to the old capitalist parties.

3) We do not conceal from the workers and farmers that we are Communists; we make it clear to them what Communism is; we do, however, state that even those workers who do not agree to the methods and aims of Communism must take their fate into their own hands without relying on their enemies of the other classes.

4) We make vigorous propaganda in favor of the formation of a mass party of workers and exploited farmers at the June 17 convention.

5) We instruct every member and every sympathizer of the WP who is elected delegate to the June 17 convention to understand thoroughly our aims in connection with a third party and a Labor-Farmer Party.

At the June 17 Convention.

1) Whatever the number of our members and sympathizers at the gathering may be, we fight *for the formation of a party of labor and exploited farmers* on the following basis:

a) The party is to be composed of organizations of hand and brain workers and exploited farmers; it does not admit organizations of businessmen, manufacturers, bankers, rich farmers, however friendly to labor; it admits individual membership by recommendation of local units of the party.

b) The party strives towards the establishment of a Labor-Farmers' government in the USA.

c) The party program includes nationalization of the key industries; nationalization of the banks, nationalization of the means of transportation, nationalization of natural resources (ores, coal, oil, water power), nationalization of storage facilities for farm products, of elevators and mills; a 5 year moratorium

for the farmers' debts.

d) The party endorses and supports only such candidates as accept both the class control of the party and the party program.

2) If this program is not accepted by the majority of the convention, we may yield on point (c), relating to the party program. We do not, however, yield as to the class composition of the party — fully conscious of the fact that a party controlled by labor and exploited farmers may in time become revolutionary even if it is moderate at its inception, while a party controlled by bourgeois elements must necessarily become reactionary even if it starts out with a liberal program.

3) In the extremely unlikely eventuality that the convention is composed of bourgeois elements and the majority does not agree to the formation of a party on the above specified basis, we secede from the convention with as many farmer and labor delegates as agree to a class party and form such a party independently. The party to nominate its Presidential candidate and candidates for the legislative chambers.

After the June 17 Convention.

Whether a class Labor-Farmer Party emerges from the majority or the minority of the June 17 convention, we aid in consolidating the new party, in carrying on its campaigns, in organizing its publications, all the time, however, emphasizing the difference between Communism and the new party. The attitude of the WP towards other political groups will then be as follows:

1) The WP endorses and supports the candidates of the new Labor-Farmer Party while conducting the election campaign in a strict Communist spirit.

2) The WP urges the new party that in case the negotiations fail it should try to attract as many labor elements from the July 4 conference as will be ready to join a class party.

4) The WP stands for a relentless criticism of the third party to be born at the July 4 conference, under whatever name and with whatever progressive program it may appear, the basis of criticism being that the third party is bourgeois in its composition, since it has refused to accept the control of workers' and farmers' organizations.

5) In local elections we strive towards a United Front on the broadest possible basis, not overstepping, however, the class lines of workers and exploited farmers. We strive to unite all labor elements on a labor program; we support candidates nominated by labor organizations; we make it clear to our WP members that in supporting such candidates we help to unite labor and split it away from the bourgeois parties; we lay particular stress on the idea of bona fide labor representatives being unlikely to betray the cause of the workers while bourgeois parties and their labor supporters are destined to harm the cause of labor. We thus appear in the eyes of our own membership and in the eyes of the masses as the foremost fighters for the cause of labor.

6) By no means do we form election alliances with the third party. The reasons for such a policy may be thus summarized:

a) An alliance would be particularly futile since the WP does not command large masses which could actually influence the outcome of an election;

b) An alliance would perturb the class vision of our membership and cause among them great consternation, appearing to them as an obvious deviation from the straight line of class struggle.

c) An alliance with the third party would make it impossible for us to explain refusal to support a candidate of the Democratic Party in case the candidate is friendly to labor. That some Democratic candidates may be at least as progressive as third party candidates is hardly unlikely.

d) An alliance with the third party would make it impossible for us to criticize it. It is a hazardous and fantastic assumption that we can both support the candidates of the party and at the same time reveal its

bourgeois character and assert its future betrayal of the masses of labor and farmers. It is absurd to assume that we can have common campaigns with the third bourgeois party for its bourgeois candidate, and at the same time conduct an independent campaign for our own program. Even if the strength of the vote at our command should help elect one or the other third party candidate, for the working class to gain from such an election would be far outweighed by the harm caused through blurring the class lines and strengthening the bourgeois party. The idea of giving the workers an object lesson by inducing them to vote for a progressive bourgeois in order that they may later be enlightened by his betrayal, is worth no more than the idea of preaching support of a Democratic nominee in order that his betrayal may later repel the workers from the Democratic Party.

e) An alliance would make it appear to our membership that we put all our hopes in parliamentary reforms and that all our propaganda of mass action is no more than a phrase. Such a disappointment would repel from the WP its progressive adherents who wish to see in it not the tail end of a bourgeois progressive party but a vanguard of militant working masses.

If we put all our forces behind the June 17 convention; if we do preparatory work on a large scale with the aim of making the June 17 convention to the great event in the labor movement rather than to make it a preliminary event to a third bourgeois party convention; if we sincerely wish to have the Labor-Farmer Party the central force in the new political enlightenment of labor — we may avoid a division of forces, and the convention may become the beginning of a new era in the history of class struggle in the US.

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