

FOR A UNITED LABOR TICKET

ARTICLE VII.

WHY A LOCAL LABOR PARTY?

By Bertram D. Wolfe.

THE Workers Party stands committed to the use of all its energies for the building of an American Labor Party on a national scale. Nevertheless, the instructions of the Central Executive Committee to the districts in the 1926 campaign declared: "There will be three forms in which the party will go into the elections: 1. Thru existing farmer and labor parties. 2. Thru placing united front labor tickets on the ballot. 3. By placing Workers (Communist) Party tickets on the ballot."

The question naturally arises: Why this flexibility of tactics? Why this variety of forms?

AMERICAN political conditions, unlike those of England, are such that a national labor party tends to come into being by the foundation of various local and state labor parties, gradually converging towards an American labor party and finally crystallizing when the national sentiment for their unification and for the creation of a single labor party on a national scale is powerful enough.

Sane in Va., Insane in N. Y.

Economically the United States is a single unit, but because of the federal system of government, the states have widely divergent laws and distinct administrations. Thus, in extreme cases, men have been known to be divorced by the laws of one state and yet, marrying again, bigamists by the laws of another. There have even been cases, as the Chalone case, where a man was insane in New York and sane in Virginia.

WHEN the interests of big business require it, "state rights" are promptly forgotten and by all sorts of legal fictions, a unified national law in a given field is put across. Conversely, when capital wishes to block a national law, the theory of state rights is zealously upheld and the law is nullified and declared unconstitutional as an interference with state sovereignty. In this manner, every child labor law thus far put on the statute books has been set aside.

The constitution of the United States prohibits the passage of laws limiting or abridging freedom of speech, press, or assemblage, or limiting the right of every citizen to bear arms. But the constitution has been so interpreted that any state may freely adopt criminal syndicalist laws, laws forbidding the carrying of arms, laws forbidding mass picketing and other forms of free assemblage.

Nevertheless, when the war broke out, a national "espionage" act was effectively used on a national scale along with the numerous criminal syndicalist and criminal anarchy acts of the various states.

Brakes on Progress.

THE courts of the United States have been one of the chief instruments for blocking legislation which expresses the needs of the working class. They have always appealed to precedents established in a period when there was no working class and no modern industry. Thus Professor Commons, who can scarcely be accused of radicalism declares:

"The courts blocking the way of a new aggressive class with precedents created to protect a dominant class, have had, in this country, a high authority unknown in other lands. By vetoing laws which labor in its political struggles has been able to secure, the courts, joined to divergent state policies, have excluded or delayed labor from legislative acts." (History of Labor in the United States, Vol. I, P. 9.)

LABOR protection measures, child labor laws, regulations of the length of the work day, minimum wage measures, social insurance, etc., have been construed by the capitalist courts as state matters and not national ones, therefore the labor movement has had to fight in each state separately for the passage of such laws and consequently, labor political activities tend to be of a local nature.

It is only when such laws are finally passed in a given state that the state supreme court steps in and declares them unconstitutional, and, as a last resort, if the bosses lose, they appeal to the national supreme court which gives the final death blow to the measure in question.

The Central Labor Union.

AGAIN, the natural basis for political activity tends to be the local Central Labor Council in municipal matters and the State Federation of Labor in state matters. These bodies are much closer to the rank and file (particularly the former of them) than is the executive council and the national convention of the American Federation of Labor.

Consequently, it is in the Central Labor Council that the demands of labor for independent political action first makes itself felt and most strongly so.

NOT only is the character of the labor movement greatly diversified according to the state (the question of whether there are large industrial centers in the state or not and what

kinds of industry are determining factors) but the same is also true of the farmer movements which are more or less linked up with the labor party movement.

Agriculture differs greatly from state to state. In one part of the country there is one type of crop and in another part an entirely different type; in some regions there is large scale farming and in other regions, the small farm prevails.

The cotton crop may be very bad and the cotton areas in deep depression with resulting failures, foreclosures and expulsion from the land while the corn belt may be having bumper crops and bumper prices, or vice versa. Yet the farmer is most militant in periods in which the banker and usurer are foreclosing on him and it is then that he thinks most of entering into political activity.

Local Governments as Strikebreakers.

THE greatest stimulus to the formation of a labor party is the use of the courts, police and other governmental agencies as strikebreaker. Yet, except in the basic industries in big national strikes such as railroad and coal strikes or the big steel strike, it is the local or state courts and the local police or the state constabulary and the local and state governmental agencies generally that do the strike-breaking. Consequently, again the first natural step of labor towards independent political action is aimed at the local government which is used against him and makes a demand that a workers' government be set up in the city and state.

Thus, because of the great extent of territory of the United States (it is as if all the countries of Europe were fused into one), because of the diversified industries, because of the division into states containing industrial centers, because of the diversified nature of the farm industry, because of divergent laws in each state and the state and local courts with their injunctions, and because it is generally the local police and the local government rather than the United States army and the national government that have been used against strikes, and because of the doctrine of state rights and the innumerable separate state legislatures, and finally because the government of the United States has only recently become a centralized government and still is not nearly so centralized as are the governments of the European countries—for all these reasons and for the reason also that local labor councils are most responsive to the needs and desires of the rank and file, that the natural mode of formation of a labor party in American is thru the formation of various local labor and farmer-labor parties, at least in the state most favorably disposed, as a preliminary to the formation of a national labor party.

THERE are times, however, such as the period 1920-1923, when the impetus for a national labor party is very much stronger. This was due, in the period mentioned, to the open use of the national government as a strikebreaker in the case of the railroad, coal and steel strikes and therefore such national unions as the railroad brotherhoods made a nation-wide drive for a labor party.

The Task Before Us.

This year, however, it is obvious that no national labor party will be formed and therefore it is the task of our districts according to local conditions, to make the biggest possible steps forward toward the formation of local labor parties and the creation of a sentiment for a national party.

THERE are some states in which farmer-labor parties already exist and the problem of the Communist is to strengthen and broaden them. There are others in which a labor party can be created and still others in which a united labor ticket, as a first step toward a labor party, can be set up. New York falls into this category and every effort must be made to set up a genuine united labor ticket in the New York campaign.

If the various units of the party all over the country create the proper preconditions from below, we can trust the government to create the proper conditions from above so that in 1928 which is a national presidential campaign, a national labor party may be formed.

Auto-Body Makers on Strike Against Open Shop Drive in Jersey

ELIZABETH, N. J., Sept. 21. — Nearly 500 workers at the Hays-Hunt Corporation have struck, according to announcements by officers of Local 13, Upholsterers, Trimmers and Body Makers' Union. The strike came because of alleged discriminations against union workers by the company. Many more of the 2,500 men employed in the plant are expected to join the walkout.