

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' 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 this 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, become bigamists by the laws of another. There have even been cases, such as the Chaloner 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 passed which 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.

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. For this they use the "due pro-

cess of law" clause of the 14th amendment which was smuggled by a corporation lawyer into the constitutional amendment supposed to safeguard the rights of the Negro in the South.

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 make themselves felt and most strongly so.

Local Governments as Strike Breakers

The greatest stimulus to the formation of a Labor Party is the use of the courts, police and other government agencies as strike breaker. 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 national step of labor towards independent political action is aimed at the local government which is used against him and he 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 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 U. S. army and the national government that have been used against strikers, 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 merely so centralized as are the governments of most European countries—for all these reasons and for the reason also that local labor councils are most responsible to the needs and desires of the rank and file, the natural mode of formation of a labor party in America is thru the formation of various local labor and farmer labor parties, at least in the states 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.

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.

If the various units of the party all over the country create the proper pre-conditions 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 can be formed.