

The Prospects for a Labor Party

by Herbert Zam

There is growing sentiment among large sections of workers, farmers, intellectuals, professionals, lower middle class elements, for independent political action, that is, for political action independent of and opposed to the two capitalist parties. This sentiment, which has grown out of the depression and the exposure of the Democratic and Republican parties as open instruments of the top most layer of the capitalist class in this country can crystallize in two directions—either into a third capitalist party dominated by and representing the interests of the petty bourgeoisie, a so-called liberal party; or into a Labor or Farmer-Labor party based upon the exploited workers and farmers and carrying on a struggle against the ruling class on the basis of the immediate needs of the exploited masses. It is not a matter of indifference to revolutionists as to which direction this sentiment takes. Should it develop into a Labor party, it would mark a big step forward in the development of the American working class toward political consciousness as a class, an absolute prerequisite for its development toward Communism. Should a third capitalist party result from the present fermentation, it would mark the damping of this anti-capitalist sentiment and the return of the dissatisfied masses to the fold of the Democratic-Republican parties. Revolutionists who wish to carry on revolutionary activity in a realistic manner in the United States (not in Moscow, Berlin or Prinkipo) must therefore endeavor to help crystallize the present vague sentiment into a movement for the establishment of a Labor party. In doing so they need not for one moment lose sight of the shortcomings of such a movement, its narrowness, its backwardness, its "loyalty to American institutions," its anti-Communist moods. These all represent necessary stages in the political development of the workers. They must not lead to the abandonment of the masses as hopeless; they must cause the revolutionists to act in such a

manner as to help the masses get over these diseases as quickly and with as few unfortunate consequences as possible. This requires that the revolutionists, the Communists, participate in the Labor party movement, help develop it and help guide it in the right direction.

Since the crisis began there have been a whole series of events indicating the trend of sentiment among many workers. These have included the unemployed march of Father Cox, the founding of the Liberty and Jobless parties, the B. E. F. the Khaki-Shirt movement, the resurrection of the Nonpartisan League in a number of agricultural states, the establishment of local Labor parties, the sweeping victories of the Farmer-Labor party of Minnesota and the growth of the League for Independent Political Action. Only a person with his eyes tightly shut can fail to see these events and recognize their significance. The Democratic Party, which has always had its ear close to the ground, has recognized the symptoms of tremendous discontent and has hauled its radical dress out of the wardrobe for the Presidential campaign.

How can the Democratic demagogy be exposed? What is the answer to the Jobless-Liberty parties? to the Fascist Khaki-Shirts, to the millions of disappointed veterans? Only a Labor party can serve to rally the discontented masses away from the false leaders and on to the right road.

How can an effective struggle be conducted against the bureaucracy of the American Federation of Labor and its non-partisan policies? What instrument can serve to rally the rank and file of the American trade unions, against the wishes of their leaders, for independent political action thru their own class organizations, better than a Labor party, whose main base is made up by the organizations of the workers?

A Labor party is the only effective means for defeating the efforts being made in many directions for the formation of a third capitalist party, which would be dominated by the middle class. In the early stages the difference in program between the third-partyites and the Labor partyites may not be great, as an examination of the program adopted at the last conference of the League for Independent Political Action will show. In fact, in many respects, the third-partyites are more radical than the Labor partyites; the L. I. P. A. for instance, has endorsed Thomas for President, while the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party is for Roosevelt. The decisive difference is in social base, in composition and structure. A Labor party is based upon the organizations of labor, trade unions fraternal organizations, political parties and groups, and upon the organizations of the farmers, cooperatives, farmers leagues, farmers educational societies. Individual membership constitutes a very secondary factor. A Labor party appeals not merely to individual workers but primarily to the bodies of workers already organized and therefore is capable of influencing masses of those not organized.

In contrast, a third party is based upon individual membership, predominantly of the middle class. The L. I. P. A. reported, at its last conference that its membership and support came from "doctors, lawyers, teachers . . . except manual workers." This is an inevitable characteristic of any third party movement. An effort has even been made to justify this situation, and to try to enroll the workers in a party led by the middle class by declaring that the middle class was "numerically the largest in society," an obvious falsehood, and then by emphasizing its important role in society. The last conference of the L. I. P. A. gave definite proof that all its talk of "labor", "party of the workers and farmers", etc., was nothing but an endeavor to gain the support of the workers and farmers for a third party of the middle class. These efforts must be fought as injurious to the best interests of the working class. They can be fought most effectively by a drive for the formation of a Labor party. The leaders of the L. I. P. A. must be made to see that if there is to be formed a party championing the interests of the masses, it must be a Labor party, and not merely in words, but in social base and structure. The use of the word "labor" to cover up a new bourgeois party will not fool anyone. There can be no objection to members of the middle class being in a Labor party or helping to form one, if they understand that the party must be led by the workers and by no other class.

There can be no doubt that in the struggle between the Labor and third party tendencies, the latter have the advantage at the present time. This is due in no small degree to the negative attitude taken by the two main political bodies in the ranks of the working class—the Communist Party and the Socialist party. The Communist Party, which abandoned its pro-Labor party attitude when the ultra-left line was adopted, puts up the Communist Party as the alternative to all other forces in society today. To the backward but discontented masses, who are just breaking away from the capitalist parties, this is obviously so abrupt a jump that they can not be expected to make it. Their development to Communism will be thru a series of stages, of which the Labor party can be made one. The Communist Party today declares that any new party distinct from the Communist Party can only be "social-fascist" and it is consequently opposed to the Labor party movement, opposed to the formation of a Labor Party and declares its intention of fighting it if it is formed.

The Socialist party has adopted an analogous attitude, more subtly cloaked. It declares that it will cooperate with a Labor party if one is formed but sees "not the faintest sign on the horizon", and refuses to do anything at all to develop a movement for a Labor party or to help form one. Like the animals in the Mother Goose story, who all refused to help the little red hen plant the wheat, or harvest it, or grind it, or

SOME HESITATION

by Pau

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Our comrades often hesitate to apply correctly our trade union policy in the A. F. of L. and other conservative mass organizations. This hesitation is in most cases a result of the attacks and slander hurled against us by the Party bureaucrats. Our comrades are at great pains to prove to the Party that we, within the conservative organizations, have not merged with the reactionary leadership, as the Party maintains, often to the injury of our work.

Our comrades have, on occasions put forward propositions in mass organizations which, with the best administrations, were unrealizable, because of the weakness of the organization. It was, for instance, wrong on our part to fight against the recent agreement in the cloak industry made between the reactionary International officials and the cloak manufacturers, knowing that, because of the looseness and demoralization of the union ranks, the workers were incapable of a long and militant fight to gain better conditions. Such a strike at this time, in my opinion, could only end in disaster for the union. In no industry have the American workers fought back successfully the many wage-cuts and other attacks against their standards of living since the present industrial crisis set in. It would be too shallow to lay the entire blame for this upon their union officials only. The few truly militant struggles that have taken place, and that are still in progress, are mere convulsions of our class caught unprepared to the general onslaught by the bourgeoisie. On the whole the bourgeoisie had little difficulty in reducing the workers standard of living.

The cloakmakers are no exception. By our insisting for a strike we could not help appearing adventurous to the mass of cloakmakers. In spite of their

bake it, but were very willing to help eat the bread, the Socialist party will not lift a finger for a Labor party when there is no Labor party but will magnanimously step in and "cooperate," that is, try to benefit from it, after someone else has organized the Labor party. Both the Communist and the Socialist parties suffer from sectarianism, from a belief that they are themselves sufficient to absorb the tremendous discontent which exists today among the workers. Subsequent events will demonstrate their error.

Only the smaller groups in the labor movement, the Communist Party (Majority Group), the Conference for Progressive Labor Action, and some workers and farmers groups in the West, have come out in favor of the formation of an inclusive Labor party. While they cannot of course, take the initiative in forming a Labor party, which must come from large authoritative labor bodies, they can do a good deal of agitational work in this connection, and, if they coordinate their activities, they may succeed in stimulating larger groups in the same direction. And no better time for this work can be hoped for than the present Presidential election campaign.

is, caste) emancipation of the Negro cannot come as the result of any "purely racial" movement—of any movement deliberately aiming to subordinate, in the name of an unreal "racial unity," the masses of the Negro people to the narrow interests of the Negro bourgeoisie (who work hand in glove with their white paymasters), of any movement consciously striving to divorce the liberation struggle of the Negro people from the chief social movement of our times, the class war of labor against capital. The racial emancipation of the American Negro, in the present historical situation, is possible only as an integral aspect and as an inevitable consequence of the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system, of the victory of the proletariat.

The Immediate Struggle and the General Perspective

29. It is clear that this far-reaching perspective can today assume vi-

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