

We are making the following document available as background material for the discussion on "Strategies Toward a Labor Party." It is a working draft for a program for the Bay Area Coalition for a Labor Party (BACL P). Please note that it is still open to amendment and change within the Coalition. Some proposed amendments by Paul Roose, a member of the Coalition, are included. Unfortunately, people from California who would have spoken at this conference on the work of the BACL P are unable to attend because of the Air Traffic controllers' strike.

ANNOUNCING:

# A Political Strategy for Organized Labor

## Towards An Independent Labor Party

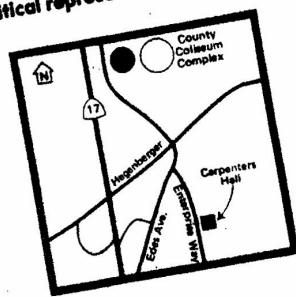
Endorsed by  
**A PUBLIC FORUM**  
**DATE: Friday, May 15**  
**TIME: 7:30 p.m.**  
**PLACE: Carpenters Local 36 Union Hall, 8460 Enterprise Way, Oakland**

- Blanche Babbs  
Exec. Bd. member  
SEIU Local 250\*
- Paul Roose  
Recording Secretary  
National Association  
of Letter Carriers  
Branch 74\*
- John Reimann  
Recording Secretary  
Carpenters Union  
Local 36\*
- Ester Beer  
Boarding  
Committee member  
AFT Local 1403\*
- Gene Anderson  
Treasurer  
Carpenters Union  
Local 36\*
- Fred Bruhn  
Business Rep.  
Carpenters Union  
Local 482\*
- Mike Berkowitz  
Exec. Bd. member  
Pres., Berkeley Chapter  
SEIU Local 335\*
- Margie Clouser  
Exec. Bd. member  
CWA Local 9410\*
- Bob Miele  
Secretary Trans.  
IAM Local 342\*
- Gilbert Manderson  
Vice President  
IAM Local 342\*

The present major parties have failed American working people. Can either of them ever be expected to fully represent labor?  
 Every social program for working people (including unemployment, insurance, social security and OSHA) is now being threatened.  
 A number of unions and locals have endorsed the idea of an independent labor party (including the California State Council of Carpenters, AFT Local 1078, UEW, and Carpenters Local 36). This forum will present ideas on why we need a labor party and how we can defend ourselves now against the threats of the Reagan administration.  
 We will also discuss the need to carry out the resolution passed at the last convention of the California Labor Federation which called for a series of public demonstrations to defend labor's political interests.

All union members and supporters welcome.  
 This forum is being planned by local officers and concerned members who want to see a move towards a labor party and believe that the initiative must start at the local level. We include members from the Carpenters, SEIU, Stationary Engineers, AFT, OPEU, Ironworkers and others.  
**"American workers need their own political representation."**

- Speakers will include:  
**Lloyd Vandover**  
 President, United Electrical Workers  
 Local 1412†, Gen. Exec. Bd. member  
**Miguel Salas**  
 B.A., elect  
 Ironworkers Local 627†  
**John Reimann**  
 Recording Secretary  
 Carpenters Local 36†  
 and others



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL: 261-4141 or 761-4009.  
 \*Organizations listed for identification purposes only.

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## PROPOSED PROGRAM FOR THE BAY AREA COALITION FOR A LABOR PARTY

### Introduction

The struggle for an independent labor party in the United States is practically as old as the American trade union movement. In the 1890's, trade union militants and socialists in the midwest sought to merge with the Farmers Alliance in forming a Labor Populist party. Other attempts were made during World War I, in the 1920's, the 1930's, and the 1940's. It is important for us to realize that there are historical precedents for our efforts today.

In each instance, the movement for a labor party came during a period of rising rank and file militancy and radicalism. In the 1890's, for example, the movement came after the nationwide Pullman strike of 1894. The attempt to unite with poor farmers was defeated by resistance from the labor bureaucracy, especially AFL head Samuel Gompers, and large farmers. Racial divisions in the South and ethnic divisions in the North also were a main obstacle to united working class politics at the time.

Perhaps the greatest rank and file upsurge in American labor came during the wave of sitdown strikes of 1936-37. This strike wave, in which workers fought to organize industrial unions, was led by militant, rank and file shop councils. Strong labor party movements accompanied this upsurge. In Minnesota, the Farmer-Labor Party elected a Governor and two US Senators. In Washington, California, and Oregon there were also labor party efforts. Writes one historian: "Local after local of the auto, electrical, and garment workers voted support for the concept of a labour party in a groundswell of political independence that discomfited Lewis and Hillman. A Gallup Poll conducted in August, 1937, following the sitdown wave, showed that at least 21% of the population supported the eventual formation of a national farmer-labour party." (Mike Davis, "New Left Review," Nov.-Dec. 1980)

Unfortunately, this groundswell was never organized into a national movement with a national leadership and was eventually suppressed by the labor bureaucracy.

John L. Lewis, President of the Mineworkers and national leader of the CIO, played an important role in the rank and file upsurge. His break with the old-line bureaucracy in 1935 to form the CIO helped set the stage for the mass sitdown strikes and tremendous organizing drives of the following year. However, while Lewis did in some ways aid this drive, he also played a role in cooling it off and preventing it from spreading. And he prevented it from entering the political arena in the form of a labor party.

The role of Lewis and other labor leaders in derailing the movement should not be underestimated, but it is equally important to note that at the time there was no significant force within the union movement that was willing to remain independent of Lewis and fight it out openly over such questions as shop-floor democracy, political action and need for a labor party. This is a basic reason why the tremendous democracy and militancy of that period was so thoroughly crushed.

What came of that period was a standoff agreement between labor and big business. Realizing that they could not crush organized labor, and that trying to would only create greater problems for them, business decided to make a deal. They agreed to accept the unions, and even toss them a few crumbs, in return for the union leadership's acceptance of every basic social program of business. When business and its political representatives wanted to accept and even encourage lynchings in the South, labor went along with it. When it decided to use World War II as an excuse for windfall profits and attacks on the right to strike,

labor leaders went along with it.

In more recent times, the labor leadership has continued to accept the programs of big business and its political allies—from the Vietnam War to the war in El Salvador, from the rise of the Nazis and the KKK to the planned destruction of environmental safeguards—in the hopes they will be tossed a few crumbs. The only difference is that now the crumbs are being taken away. The end of the longest period of economic prosperity and stability in American history (from the 1940's through the 1960's) has meant that business, or capital, again sees the need to attack and destroy organized labor. And our leaders' insistence on clinging to this broken agreement, this sinking ship, is helping make it possible.

#### Organization of the Coalition

The Bay Area Coalition for a Labor Party will be run in a democratic manner with regular monthly meetings and active, functioning work committees on publicity, organizing and outreach, research and education, finance and social, as well as a steering committee. The steering committee will consist of a chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary treasurer, and three steering committee members at large (all elected by a plurality vote of the members present and voting) as well as the chairperson of each committee (selected by the committee members). The chairperson of the finance and social committee will be the secretary-treasurer. The term of office shall be one year.

In between meetings, the steering committee will be the final decision making body in case of any major problem or dispute.

The steering committee, or any of its members, is subject of immediate recall at a meeting of the Coalition as a whole, provided that notice has been sent out in advance that such a recall vote will be taken.

Unless otherwise agreed on, all funds and names collected by the Coalition will be used only for the functioning of the Coalition.

The steering committee will be responsible for establishing the agenda for regular meetings, as well as coordinating efforts of the various other committees. The steering committee's meetings will be open to those wishing to attend. Any decisions of the committee can be overruled by the meeting of the Coalition.

Non-union members may serve on the steering committee, provided that they do not make up over 1/4 of the committee.

All meetings of the Coalition will be conducted according to Roberts' Rules of Order.

Amendments to "Proposed Program of the BACLP"  
by Paul Roose  
July 9, 1981

I suggest the program be divided into four sections, as follows:

1. Historical Background (new title for original "Introduction")
2. Why BACLP is needed today (substitute for "New Groundswell Needed" and
3. Working Principles of BACLP "A possible Labor Party program")
4. Organizational Structure of BACLP (same as original)

Substitute for "New Groundswell Needed" and "A Possible Labor Party Program"  
the following:

## 2. Why BACLP is Needed Today

Today, many of the problems facing us are hardly addressed by the Republicans and Democrats. Pretending to span the gap between labor and business, there is no way they will ever address these problems in the interests of working people. And even if they did, there is no way they could enforce their programs on the politicians who get elected under their banners. Yet the great majority of our labor leaders continue to tie our fortunes to Democratic, and in a few cases Republican, politics.

Organized labor must be the cornerstone in building a progressive third party in the U.S. Grassroots organizations of minorities, women, tenants, communities and others will of course be natural allies in this political shift. But without labor's organization, money, and millions of members, a third party will fail.

In the last few years, there has been more talk at all levels of the union structure about the need for a labor party than there has been in several decades. Many unions have passed resolutions supporting the formation of a labor party. Yet these efforts have not been tied together or translated into action toward a new political alignment.

The purpose of the BACLP is to help move these labor party sentiments from discussion into an active campaign within the labor movement. The BACLP encourages any steps which tend to get union members (and working people in general) actively fighting for their own interests. A labor party is the means by which the membership of organized labor can influence the political decisions of our unions. As Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the California AFL-CIO Jack Henning said a few years ago, "Labor can put to right what is wrong with America," and BACLP believes that labor must organize, independently to do so.

We believe that there is a section of the union leadership which may well play an important role in forming a labor party, as John L. Lewis did with the CIO. As the beginning groundswell did with Lewis in 1935, it is likely that such a grassroots movement now will encourage and force some national leaders to act for a labor party. This will then really help to get the movement underway in a truly massive, national way. We will support any progressive steps of any union official, from Lane Kirkland on down to our local officers.

### 3. Working Principles of BACLP

A. Once again, the membership of organized labor must lead the way for the entire American working class in a reborn groundswell toward a labor party. This movement may take different forms in different areas, and the role of the established labor leadership may vary greatly.

B. A labor party will not be organized outside of the established union structure. BACLP is organized as a part of the labor movement seeking to involve the entire labor movement in a drive toward a new party. We will help coordinate the efforts of various union locals toward this goal. Wherever we can act as a catalyst on our own, such as in conducting public forums, we will do so. But we believe that a real powerful drive for a labor party must start at the local union level.

C. A third party is needed in the U.S. that is totally independent of the Democrats and Republicans. The pro-business record of the Republicans is well-known. But in fact, the Democratic Party is just as closely tied to sectors of big business as the Republican Party. The increasingly conservative, even reactionary, direction of the Democratic Party can be partly attributed to its growing financial dependence on corporate PAC's.

Despite the traditional ties of organized labor to the Democratic Party, it is not and never has been "Our Party", the party of the working people. In the best of times, it has been a fragile alliance between labor, minorities, and the liberal business establishment to bring about minor reforms in the system. Even these reforms would never have occurred without mass movements such as the civil rights and anti-war movements.

But today, in a time of growing economic and social crisis, the DP has abandoned its reformer role in an attempt to out-Reagan Reagan himself. If there ever was a time when labor needs to break from the DP, it is now.

D. Another key principle of BACLP will be financial independence from big business and its allies. Just as a union that accepts money from the employer becomes a company union, so a labor political organization that accepts employer funding becomes a "company" party. The financial and political strength of a labor party will come from its active mass base among workers and their unions. Our Coalition, in helping to organize such a party, must adhere to the same principle.

E. The platform for a labor party cannot be written today by the BACLP or any tiny fraction of the labor movement. The issues and ideas of a labor party must arise out of the struggle to form such a party on a mass level. We look forward to taking part in that debate when the time comes.

BACLP does, however share a vision of how a labor party would function in the political arena. A labor party would not stop at putting pieces of paper in a ballot box once every few years. The creation of a labor party would be a move to make the solution of the basic social and political problems of American workers part of our daily lives. It would be a move to take political questions out from behind closed doors and into the streets and meeting halls where they belong. A labor party would involve itself in every struggle of working people -- organizing campaigns, strikes, fights against plant closings, community defense actions, and many others.