

Bulletin

OF THE WORKERS PARTY

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The following articles, or excerpts from articles, written in the past on the question of the labor party were submitted for publication in the Bulletin by Comrade Draper. While the editors do not consider that the republication of articles which are available to interested comrades in other forms is the most fruitful or germane way of discussing the question of a labor party today and that it tends to reduce the discussion to a purely academic or historical plane, they have nevertheless decided to publish this material upon the request of Comrade Draper.

Editors

PART I.

THE POSITION OF THE PARTY BEFORE 1938 (AGAINST A LABOR PARTY)

(The present position of the Party -- FOR a labor party -- was first adopted in 1938. The present section, Part I, presents the position and arguments of the Trotskyist movement on this question BEFORE this change of policy. The first document below is from an article by Max Shachtman in the New International of March 1935. In 1935 the Communist Party came out for a labor party after many years of opposing it. The main argument given by the CP was that there was a "new" mass movement for a labor party. In the first part of his article, Shachtman riddles this motivation and then gives a detailed account of the Communist movement's experiences with the labor party question in 1922-23, and the lessons drawn from it. The article then continues below with a political and theoretical analysis of the whole question.)

THE PROBLEM OF THE LABOR PARTY

by Max Shachtman

(New International, March 1935)

What appears to us to follow plainly from the experiences of the past, substantiated also by what can be seen in the country today, is the following conclusion:

There is no room in the present conditions of the class struggle for the stable, unartificial existence of a "class Labor" party (to say nothing of the fantastic two-class "class Farmer-Labor party) which is distinct from a third capitalist party as well as from the revolutionary party of the proletariat. The only genuine labor party is the party of revolutionary Marxism. Past experiences in this country -- not to mention the experiences in other lands! -- show that the evolution of the British Labour party, namely, its degeneration from a great progressive force which separated the proletariat politically from the bourgeoisie to a reactionary obstacle to progress which ties the proletariat politically to the bourgeoisie is accomplished in the United States under conditions of capitalist decline in a far more telescoped period of time.

To attempt to foist upon the American revolutionary movement the obsolete advice given by Engels to the Marxist emigrants in the United States of fifty years ago, and to conclude from it that it is our task to found a Labor Party now, is to do violence to the whole spirit of Marxism, is to ignore the tremendous changes that have taken place throughout the world (the United States not excepted) in capitalism, in the labor movement and in the revolutionary movement. Lovestonc, for example, is perfectly willing to start at exactly the point where Engels left off in his letters to Florence Wischnowetzky in 1887, as if nothing had happened since that time!

The attempt, in theory and practice, to force the American working class, in 1935, to go through a faithful, mechanical repetition of every stage through which the British working class was obliged to pass at the beginning of the

century, is to reveal a blatant ignorance of scientific socialism and the laws of development of the labor movement. The British Labour party rose and was an indisputably progressive factor in the working class in the period of the rise of capitalism. Not only was it a "unique party," a bloc of organizations, with no program of its own, with no special discipline, with liberty of agitation for revolutionary groups within it, but, like all the reformist parties of the Second International before the war and regardless of how defectively, it contributed to the historical advancement of the proletariat as a class.

Conditionally, Lenin considered it possible even after the war to advise the British communists to seek affiliation with it because of its "unique" character, even though he emphasized that properly speaking it was a bourgeois party of workers and not a proletarian party. The opportunists are aiming to make it a "real party with local organizations and a program," argued the Communist International in Lenin's time, to "create a large opportunist party which is to retard the revolutionary development of the masses. If this tendency were to succeed, the Labour party would never afford the socialist organizations which form part of it the right to an individual communist policy, nor to the propagation of the revolutionary struggle. It would bind their freedom of action hand and foot. It is thus evident that no kind of organization seeking to carry out a communist policy could possibly belong to the Labour party. It would then become necessary, after a most energetic struggle against this tendency, to leave the Labour party and to endeavor to keep in touch with the working masses by means of increasing the communist activity in the trade unions, by detaching these trade unions from the Labour opportunist parties and persuading them to go over directly to communism." (The I.L.P. and the Third International, p. 53.)

As what would the American "Labor" party start: as the British Labour party of 1906, or of 1935? Closer, far closer to the latter date and condition than to the former! We mean of course a genuine "Labor party", that is, a reformist party, with a reformist program, with a reformist leadership, and with the reformist unions (organizations, not individuals) at its base -- assuming that one is to be established. Would such a party, in view of the British experiences and what we know to be the situation in this country, be of a kind that would meet the requirements for affiliation by a revolutionary Marxian party set out in 1920 by Lenin? In all likelihood, no. In any case, the attitude of the revolutionary party towards a genuine, mass "Labor" party would have to be determined not by what it may or may not be if and when it is formed, not by what we would like to have it be, but by what it would be once it was formed. For, it is not the business of the revolutionary Marxists, above all in the present stage of the relationship between capitalist disintegration and social reformism, to initiate or to help organize and found in addition to their own party another party for the "second class citizens," for the "backward workers," a "Labor" party, i.e., a third capitalist party, even if composed predominantly of workers.

Wherein would that golden-haired dream child common to the aspirations of Louis Waldman, Norman Thomas, Jay Lovestone and Earl Browder differ fundamentally from a "Third party", say from the 1924 LaFollette party, or the Farmer-Labor party of Minnesota? -- In respect to program? Leadership? Composition? Methods? Goal? -- It would be interesting to learn what the concrete and detailed differences are presumed to be in all five respects!

Whoever hopes to establish or invent an essential difference is simply disregarding the unambiguous lessons of the past. What was clearly revealed more than ten years ago gives no reason for pessimism. It was not proved that the working class and even the farmers must inevitably fall under the influence of petty bourgeois demagogues of Third partyism in the struggle for hegemony between the latter and the revolutionary Marxists. Not at all! What was proved was that

in the battle between the revolutionary party and the third capitalist party for the support of the masses who are breaking away from the old bourgeois parties, the slogan of the "Labor" party -- or even the slogan of the "mass, class Labor party" (whatever that is) -- does not possess sufficient class vitality or distinction from the Third party to make it possible to wean the masses away from the latter by means of it. That vitally important task can only be accomplished under the banner and on the fighting program of the revolutionary proletarian party. Not, it goes without saying, by mere recruiting campaigns, but by the concrete leadership which such a party is able to offer the workers (in contrast to the petty bourgeois politicians and the trade union bureaucracy) in the course of their daily struggles for immediate demands.

The Labor party is not an abstraction; it must be considered concretely. Assuming that it is formed in the United States (and its creation is by no means a foreordained certainty, an inevitable stage the American workers must experience before they can think of revolutionary struggle!), it is more likely than not that it will take shape as a directly anti-revolutionary (ergo, anti-progressive) party. With a stormy forward march of the American masses, in the course of which they may skip "stages" with even greater ease and speed than their Russian brothers, the petty bourgeois reformers plus the socialist and trade union bureaucracy might conceivably form a "Labor" party for the express purpose of thwarting the progress of the working class. These pseudo-revolutionists who are so frenziedly anxious to see a Labor party in the U.S. so long as it looks something like its British predecessor, undoubtedly have some "exceptional" surprises in store for them.

We speak of course of a "Labor" party in the true sense of the word. If it does not greatly resemble the fantasmagoria just brewed out of the witches' cauldrons of Stalinism, that it hardly our fault, for such a "Labor" party as the C.P. now proposes to inflict upon the proletariat, never has been and never will be seen by God or man or beast or the elfin folk who see pretty near everything. "There is only one revolutionary party," declares the Daily Worker (Feb. 16), "and that is the communist party." So the Labor party will be reformist? No, it continues. "This does not mean that the Labor party that the communists propose would be reformist." Then it would be revolutionary? No, answers Stachel, the "Labor party is not a revolutionary party" (loc.cit., p.19). Not revolutionary, not reformist! Won't this be a creature compared with which a live-historic ichthyosaurus would deserve as much attention as a sparrow? Then what will it be? According to Stachel again, it will be nothing more or less than "a genuine Labor party." A barrel of tar would be clearer than a Stalinist explanation. And what is its function? It will, to return to the Daily Worker, "lead the masses in their struggle for immediate demands... Communists will point out to the workers that their revolutionary program is the further development of the minimum policy of the Labor party. They will always advocate the full revolutionary program of the communist party." If this galimathias means anything, it is that there is to be a strict division of labor: the Labor party is to lead the workers every day in their struggle for all their immediate demands -- that's its job; the C.P. is to lead the workers on the day of the insurrection -- that's its job. Whence it is clear that neither separately nor together are they capable of leading the workers in any struggle. According to Stachel (Feb. 16), who drips light with every drop of ink, this Labor party, which is not revolutionary, it is true, but not reformist either, which is to exclude the trade union bureaucrats, Sinclair, Olson, the S.P. bureaucracy and even the Lovestoneites, which is, in a word, something we'd give a pretty penny to see in the flesh -- will "really carry on the struggle for the workers for wage increases, for the Workers Unemployment and Social Insurance Bill, for the 30-hour week without reduction in pay, for the needs of the farmers, for the rights of the Negro masses, for the right to organize, strike, etc., against the growing menace of war and Fascism!" The Labor party

that carries on a struggle (and a real one, too) against war and Fascism! If it can do all this (and probably other things as well), what worker will ask for more? What will be his need for the communist party? What indeed?

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From

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

(December 31, 1937)

For such reasons, the revolutionary party cannot....properly take the initiative in advocating the formation of Labor or Farmer-Labor parties.

Nevertheless, the labor party movement, from the point of view of the workers themselves, does reveal a progressive development in general toward class consciousness. In spite of the channels into which it is led by the bureaucrats, it shows in the masses a growing realization of the true character of capitalist politics as summed up in the Republican and Democratic parties and a striving for independent political action. To stand aside completely from such a development where it comprises the bulk of the militant and advanced sections of the workers would be hopelessly sectarian for the revolutionists. Where the labor party develops as a genuine mass movement separate from the capitalist parties, the revolutionists must remain in the midst of the workers who are passing through that experience precisely in order to make certain that the workers will draw the lessons from that experience which are required in order to go on from it to revolutionary class politics. Uncompromising, programmatic independence on the part of the revolutionary party is an indispensable precondition for any activity in which revolutionists may engage, especially through their trade unions in broad and significant labor party movements. Whenever the revolutionists find themselves in a Labor Party, they will stand at each stage for those concrete policies and actions which sum up a progressive and class perspective; for complete breaks with the capitalist parties and no support of candidates on capitalist tickets; for direct mass actions and avoidance of limitation to parliamentary activities; for full internal democracy; for support and defense of concrete working class rights against their invasion from any source, including invasions from candidates of the Labor Party itself; etc.

THE CHALLENGE AND THE ANSWER

Discussion Article for the Majority on the Labor Party

by Max Shachtman and James Burnham

(New International, August 1938)

Political formations in the United States are undergoing a radical re-alignment, and in addition to the old formations, new ones are appearing on the scene. The changes in the situation are of such a nature as to dictate a change in or amplification of the tactics pursued by the revolutionary Marxists in this country.

Two unprecedented economic crises, the second following the first before it reached the stage of boom; the increasingly deep social crisis in which the bourgeoisie finds it impossible to solve the problems of its social order in any of the traditional ways; and the crystallization of the workers in the basic, mass-production industries under the banner of the CIO, numbering more than three million genuine-proletarians, have not only brought into existence an unmistakable movement for working class political action, but have developed it -- for all its backwardness -- on a vast scale, one never before known in the U.S.A.

The Labor Non-Partisan League, the direct intervention of the unions in the Detroit and Seattle elections and in the Pennsylvania primaries -- these are only superficially similar to the ancient Gompers' policy of "reward your friends and punish your enemies"; the formation of the American Labor Party in New York is an even sharper break from the traditional position of the labor movement. The advance consists in the fact that for the first time the American unionists are being mobilized as a class to participate in politics. The leaders of labor, however, strive to confine this movement to the old capitalist parties, that is, to prevent this class movement from exceeding the bounds of bourgeois politics, and taking the form of independent working class political action. The movement is not temporary or accidental. Under the impulsion of the social crisis it will grow and find clearer expression. Who can challenge this save those who expect an early stabilization of U.S. capitalism, an easy surmounting of the crisis?

Side by side with this movement, however, exists and develops the movement for a "third party". Its most concrete form to date is the organization of the National Progressives. This too is not the product of an individual caprice or aberration, but is based objectively upon the discontent and the dilemma of the middle classes suffering intensely from the crisis, which have been deliberately exploited by demagogues like LaFollette. While its very class basis deprives it of an enduring character, at least with its present form and program, it is an important sign of the times.

More important is the simultaneous movement to develop the "American form" of coalition in one party -- a reconstituted Democratic party, freed of the "conservatives," and composed of Roosevelt's "liberals," plus the Republican "progressives" and supported by the LNPL, the ALP, and the two trade union movements. The division in the Democratic camp in 1936, the violent inner-Democratic fights in Congress, the present primary campaign, all of which are based on social conflicts within the party itself, indicate the lines of the schism which the crisis will only deepen and toward which many right wing and left wing Democrats are consciously working. Both camps realize that the old alignments no longer correspond to the needs of the new situation.

What, then, are the actual possibilities of development for working class political action on a mass scale in the next period? There appear to us to be three.

A national Labor party, similar in scope and position to the British Labour Party, would be far the most probable development if one could arbitrarily transfer the present forces back to the period of America's expansion and rise, approximating the present period of capitalist decline, so forcefully evident in the United States as well, such a development is distinctly less likely. The social limitations imposed upon a reformist party by desperate, decaying capitalism, set the political limits of such a party. Those who believe that a Labor party in the U.S. would play the same progressive role, and for the same period of time, as the British Labour Party, are guilty of flagrant dogmatism and of blindness to those very national peculiarities which they accuse their critics of ignoring. While local Labor party movements are already crystallizing and others will undoubtedly develop, there are few outstanding leaders of the trade unions consciously and firmly working toward a Labor party. On the other hand, other movements, now more powerful and having more conscious and determined leaders, are at work absorbing the incipient Labor party trends.

A "third party" is not unlikely to develop. On a small (state) scale at least, its establishment is even certain. But its class instability, especially under the brutal blows of the crisis, gives it no great future and indicates that it will split in two extreme directions before it even grows to full stature. A long-lived independent middle-class party, especially in our times, is a chimera; politically, the middle class must fly apart, one section following the leadership of the workers, the other -- under fascism -- the leadership of big capital.

A reorganized Democratic party, embracing in one coalition all the classic components of the People's Front, has powerful forces working for its development. They include not only the Roosevelt wing, but virtually all the prominent leaders of the unions, especially of the CIO, and the powerful machinery of the Stalinist party, which is now firmly mobilized against the organization of a Labor party or any other form of independent working class political action. The almost certain reorganization of the Democratic party, while it does not necessarily exclude the other possibilities mentioned, could, for a short but indeterminate period, swallow up the other movements. In the worst case, which is not at all excluded, its realization might conclusively prevent the American working class from developing a Labor party on any important scale. It would, instead, open up two direct roads, one leading straight to revolutionary politics, the other to fascism.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that a new world war -- no small or remote factor! -- might well interrupt the whole process, especially the trend toward a Labor party, and at all events impel it to find new channels and forms of expression.

2.

The position on the question of a Labor party held up to now by the Socialist Workers Party and the movement out of which it developed, may be summarized as follows: The "revolutionary party [cannot] properly take the initiative in advocating the formation of Labor or Farmer-Labor parties" which our Declaration of Principles characterizes as reformist by virtue of "their false program and perspective"; further, "far from constituting independent class politics, the present labor party development is, from the point of view of the

bureaucrats and the bourgeoisie, the method for preventing the growth of independent class politics"; however, "the labor party movement, from the point of view of the workers themselves, does reveal a progressive development in general towards class consciousness"; therefore, "where the labor party develops as a genuine mass movement separate from the capitalist parties, the revolutionists must remain in the midst of the workers.../and/ stand at each stage for those concrete policies and actions which sum up a progressive and class perspective." (Our emphasis.--J.B.-M.S.).

A study of the development of our position indicates that we based ourselves on two alternatives. If there is no mass reformist party, or movement for it, we do not initiate or form one as a substitute for the revolutionary party, but build the latter directly as a mass party. Where a mass Labor party does exist, we, to whom sectarianism is alien, are flexible in our tactics and, generally, give critical support to such a party; and, as is known, we followed this course in Minnesota where there is an established Farmer-Labor party, supported by the mass of the unions.

But our analysis was incomplete, and in some respects, not sufficiently clear. It did not allow for the present stage of development, in which an undeveloped and only partly conscious mass movement exists and is torn by warring tendencies of progress and reaction, but is not yet crystallized. A contributory cause preventing us from supplementing our analysis was the need of concentrating our attention and attack upon the reformist Labor party conceptions of the right wingers and centrists in the old Socialist party, in connection, particularly, with the problem of the ALP which originated not as a break-away from the old parties, but as a machine to break the advanced and traditional socialist influence upon the New York workers and to corral the labor vote for an old capitalist party and ticket.

In brief, our old position cannot and does not effectively answer the problems raised by the present stage of development. It cannot even in theory, for the reason that the new situation was not clearly allowed for. More decisive is the fact that practice has also demonstrated its inadequacy, and consequently, that fact that it does not permit us to give concrete answers, not only such as are understandable and acceptable to the masses, but as will develop more speedily their class consciousness, their break with the bourgeoisie and its parties, and also with their petty bourgeois leaders.

In Pennsylvania, after Kennedy's defeat in the primaries, if we do not urge the workers to put up their own independent ticket on a militant program (which, in view of the election machinery alone that is required, means the decisive step towards a Labor party formation), and break with the Democratic party -- we can only urge them to support in the elections the S.W.P. (which, alas, is yet too weak to put a ticket in the field); in effect, therefore, we leave the CIO bureaucracy and the Stalinists associated with them a free hand in keeping the masses tied to the Democratic party. In New Jersey, our participation in the conferences of the LNPL is sterilized because we do not counterpose in the most concrete form independent political action to the Holderman-Stalinist policy of paralyzing the movement, disorienting it, rendering it passive and delivering it to one gang or another in the capitalist parties. In the ALP, similar indecision deprives us in advance of the possibility of playing any role whatsoever.

Our old position, irrespective of whether it was right or wrong, or of what specific position we adopt now, must be brought up to date. We advocate a positive policy, one that is based upon the present reality, as well as the objective needs of the working class.

Our attitude toward the present movement for workers' political action must give concrete and unambiguous answer to these questions:

Are we indifferent to it? We are not indifferent, and cannot be, toward any mass movement of the workers.

Is the movement, in so far as it represents and expresses a break with the tradition of supporting the old capitalist parties, progressive or reactionary? On the part of the workers, as we have declared in the past, it is obviously progressive.

Will the trend towards independent working class political action, towards increased political consciousness of the working class, grow weaker or stronger in the coming period? One cannot seriously hold to the belief that the social crisis in the United States is deepening, that sharper class conflicts are ahead, that the bourgeoisie must seek to burden the masses increasingly with the cost of the crisis, that mere economic action will prove increasingly difficult and insufficient and therefore give greater point to the urgency of political action -- without concluding that the American workers are certain to move at a faster and clearer pace towards independent political class action in the period ahead, whatever organizational forms it may at any given moment take.

Will this movement, in any decisive respect, take the form of a mass revolutionary Marxian party during the next period? At most, one can say that it is not theoretically excluded; but all practical and realistic considerations indicate that this will not be the case.

The actual alternatives, therefore, are the development of a mass Labor party, or the immersion and sterilization of the movement into a reorganized Democratic or third party. Powerful political forces are working in the latter direction: the bourgeois and social reformists, the trade union bureaucracy, the Stalinists, the pressure of the petty bourgeoisie, etc. They are all deliberately impeding the development of an independent Labor party.

In this concrete dispute, we have, and must have, an active preference. As against the last-named elements and their strategy, we are positively in favor of the political organization of the American workers as a class, that is, of a Labor party. This alone makes it possible for us to intervene in the labor movement in such a way as to heighten the class consciousness of the workers in the given circumstances, to sharpen their antagonism to the bourgeois parties, to widen the breach between them and their class-collaborationist, bureaucratic misleadership.

In Pennsylvania, we counterpose to the capitulatory policy of the CIO chiefs, the proposal that labor should enter its own ticket, and set up the political-organizational machinery to run this ticket; we conduct a vigorous campaign for this policy which will be realistic and acceptable to thousands of workers, perhaps only a handful of whom will be interested in an S.W.P. ticket. And the policy will be correct not only because it is "realistic and acceptable," but because it will impel thousands of workers to break from the Democratic party, to break with bourgeois politics and also its sponsors in the CIO and AFL, and to seek the road to independent class action. When the bosses of a Labor Non-Partisan League conference propose the endorsement of Democratic Smith or Republican Jones, we cannot seriously counterpose Trotskyist Robinson; it is entirely correct, however, and fruitful for our movement, to fight at the conference for a candidate put forward by labor itself, for a Labor party organized

and controlled by the workers. In the ensuing fight, the militant, advanced, comparatively conscious workers will rally to our side and, in time, swell the ranks of the revolutionary party.

Do we then become a "Labor-party party," which, like the Lovestoneites and Thomasites, will carry on an abstract, general, universal and perpetual campaign for a Labor party? Nothing of the kind. We need a position that enables us to give the concrete revolutionary answer to the specific situations that arise (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Michigan, the ALP, Workers Alliance, etc.). But more important than this is the fundamental point of difference between our revolutionary position and the opportunist position of the Lovestone and Thomas groups. They are the advocates and defenders of a reformist Labor party, a "good" reformist party. Our Declaration of Principles properly defines the present Labor party movement as reformist on the basis of its "false program and perspective." The Socialist Workers Party does not and cannot advocate or support this program and perspective.

Let us put it more concretely. We are not the advocates of a Labor party "in general," in the abstract, or even of the Labor party as it stands now. We say to the workers: You want to break from the capitalist parties, to form a party of your own? Excellent! That is a step forward, it is progressive. Such a step we will support; we will urge all workers to do likewise. A political party is formed to take control of the affairs of the nation, and we are for the workers taking such control. But -- you cannot take control and impose your will and interests by means of a reformist program and tactics or under a reformist leadership. That is demonstrated by the experiences in England; right now in the United States; in fact, throughout the world. We of the S.W.P. are a revolutionary party. We therefore propose to you, not a program of petty reforms which the deepening crisis prevents from really improving your conditions; not a program of reforms for reconciling you with your hateful class enemy and its bankrupt social order; but a program of revolutionary transitional demands which correspond at once to your needs and desires and to the objective situation. We propose, in order to advance the Labor party movement toward class struggle and not class collaboration, that you adopt a program calling for workers' control of production, for militant Labor Defense Guards to protect our democratic rights and combat fascism, for the expropriation of the industrial and financial dictators of the country, etc., etc.

This is our program. If the workers do not adopt it as a whole, or at all, we continue to give support to the Labor party, but critical support. We are not sectarians or ultimatists. We give the labor movement no ultimatum: Accept our program, join our party or we will have nothing to do with you. On the other hand, we accept no ultimatums, even from the labor movement. We have our views, and if labor does not accept them in full, we continue with our comradely criticism and do not make our own the inadequacies or mistakes of the working class; but support unmistakably every progressive step, even small ones. In this way, we help to revolutionize the mass movement, and to make a mass movement out of the revolutionary party. There is no other way.

Our main aim is to build the revolutionary party, and all tactics must subservise this aim. The Labor party tactic is not, of course, given for all time. It is imperative for the period ahead. If the trend toward a Labor party is swallowed up in the coming period by a third party or "Democratic Front," the Labor party slogan may lose its effectiveness, and the struggle will take the form of combat for direct leadership of the masses between the revolutionary party and the reformist-patriotic movement. The coming war, after a short period, would, for example, enormously sharpen all relations and problems. It will be recalled that the big reformist movements after the last war broke in

two, with such large sections coming over to revolutionary Marxism that the small communist sects in many countries became mass parties almost overnight. Such a perspective is far from excluded in the United States. But it is still not on the immediate horizon.

While the next period does not indicate the likelihood of the revolutionary party directly becoming a mass party, there is no reason at all for lack of confidence. The adoption of the Labor party slogan, as elucidated by us, does not mean giving up the revolutionary party; it means the best way, under the concrete circumstances, of rooting the party in the living mass movement and of building it into a stronger force. Given a correct policy on our part, the very same forces pushing the workers now toward a Labor party will, as they deepen and as experience is accumulated, push the workers even more firmly towards the revolutionary party. The terrific social crisis, and the impending war, open out directly revolutionary perspectives, with a concomitant tumultuous growth of our party which will bring the United States to the very forefront of this old world. We need only know how to exploit the vast possibilities in a realistic, practical, effective, i.e., Marxist manner. An arena in which our ideas are brought to the masses and our party built -- it is in this sense, above all, that our tactics toward the Labor party must be understood.

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FOR THE PRESENT PARTY POSITION

Discussion Article for the Minority, Against a Labor Party

by Hal Draper

(New International, August 1938)

The present party position on the Labor party question as embodied in our Declarations of Principles -- now the position of the National Committee Minority in the discussion going on -- was adopted only last December. What has happened since to make the Political Committee decide that we must advocate the formation of a labor party?

Where is the Labor Party Movement Going? The present trend in the labor party movement is further away from independent class politics than when the Declaration was written. The LNPL leadership is intent upon following its present policy of tailing after the capitalist parties. Their perspective is the formation of a third party movement, through a coalition with the left Democrats, banking on a split in the Democratic party -- a bourgeois Democratic Front with or without the Stalinists. The Communist Party has dropped even the slogan of a labor party. In practice, the LNPL has produced hardly a single instance of independent labor candidacy. In such a place as New Jersey, the LNPL has proved itself incapable of capturing the enthusiasm and loyalty of the same workers who are conducting militant strikes on the economic field -- the New Jersey LNPL leaders admit they are "generals without an army." In New York, the ALP Branch meetings are attended largely by the "politicals" -- social democrats, S.P.'ers, Stalinists, independent radicals, etc. -- assembling under the disguise of the ALP in order to work on each other.

Certainly nothing to stampede us into reversing our position... provided that our basic approach itself has not changed.

Our Basic Approach. This trend which we saw and foresaw is not accidental or the result merely of a particular conjuncture of personalities at the head of the movement. It is rooted in objective social forces, in the role of reformism in the period of declining capitalism.

At the time when reformist advances were still possible under a rising capitalist order, the formation of a labor party might have been able to play a part in raising the working class to higher levels of class consciousness. But today and increasingly, "even the most immediate pressing problems of the workers" cannot be solved except through the social revolution, for the ravages of the capitalist crisis cancel whatever gains may be made by the struggle organs of the working class. A labor party has to meet these harsh alternatives: For socialism, or for the defense of capitalism---which? In periods of sharp social crisis, middle grounds crumble away, forcing one to take refuge on one side or the other.

Today, the program which might have been the basis of an attempt at a "middle-ground" labor party has been taken over by the New Deal Democrats. Is it any wonder then that the LNPL, which has no other program than this, finds no political basis for independent working class action?

It is for these reasons that we came to our conclusion: In this period of capitalism, a labor party can play no progressive role. Without having made a single attempt to show why this analysis is false, indeed while even admitting that it still holds true today, the Majority speaks of the labor party as playing a progressive role! "Theoretically," this "abstract" analysis holds good -- but what are you going to do in Pennsylvania? ... this is the answer of the Majority.

Can a Labor Party Be Progressive? The "abstractly" reactionary role played by a Labor party manifests itself quite concretely. Here we must consider two questions.

1. If we take our own words seriously, the outbreak of imperialist war is imminent. And unless one believes that we are going to, or can, get such an animal as a "revolutionary labor party," the outbreak of war will find the labor party or labor party movement not only a strong bulwark of imperialism but one of the main means of deceiving the masses. The channelization of the workers into the labor party means putting them directly under the influence of the social-patriotic machine; building the labor party means building our political rival, a tremendous obstacle to our work.

Our job now is to attack and discredit in advance every political tendency which acts as one of the channels of imperialist influence or illusions on the working class. Our job is to warn the workers now against the sources of their betrayal in time of war. To advocate a labor party, on the other hand, means precisely to put it before the workers as the center for them to rally about, and so make it all the harder to break them away from their social-patriotic organizational allegiance in time of war.

Here is a central question: are we going to tell the workers the truth as to what the labor party will mean to them -- that it cannot solve "even their most pressing immediate problems," that it cannot fight war but on the contrary will lead the workers into the next imperialist slaughter, that it plays capitalist politics? And how can we tell them this and at the same time tell them to build this labor party -- which will do nothing significant for them? On the basis of the Majority position, this contradiction must be solved in practise (whatever the protestations) only by fostering the illusion that the labor party

can do something, and thereby sowing the seeds of disillusionment not only with the labor party but also with ourselves.

2. But, say the Majority, the swing of sections of the workers away from the old parties toward a labor party is a progressive development, and we must encourage it. -- This is true; from the viewpoint of the subjective development of the workers there is progress. But the same thing is true when a worker quits the Republican party and joins the Communist Party because he believes it to be a working class party. The same thing is true when a worker who voted for Roosevelt in 1932 under the Democratic label, voted for him in 1936 under the ALP label. In each case, the worker is manifesting a progressive sentiment, but in each case this sentiment has been corraled into a reactionary channel. There is the point: the workers want independent political action? that is fine; but the crystallization of this trend into the organizational form of a labor party has only reactionary consequences objectively.

Further on this point, the Majority bases itself on the belief that the formation of an independent labor party would raise the political class consciousness of the workers. Actually the relationship is the other way round. Suppose the desire for independent political action assumed large proportions and threatened to get out of hand, leaving the LNPL heads behind: the classic answer of the bureaucrats is to run around in front of the movement and form the "independent labor party" which is demanded, in order to continue playing capitalist politics with an independent party as the instrument instead of an LNPL---capitalist politics in a subtler and more deceptive form. This is the old device of going-along-with for a distance, if sufficiently pushed, in order to stem the movement more effectively and siphon it back into the old channels.

"Far from constituting independent class politics, the present labor party development is, from the point of view of the bureaucrats and the bourgeoisie, the method for preventing the growth of independent class politics," says the Declaration of Principles. And this is also the answer to that variety of the Majority position which is represented by Comrades Shachtman and Carter, who emphasize the fact that since the labor bureaucrats don't want a "real, independent labor party," by advocating it ourselves we set the workers into collision with their leadership. "The resistance of the bureaucracy to this mass pressure will be broken," the Majority resolution assures us; an independent labor party will be formed -- but why necessarily over the heads of the bureaucrats? Who will be left holding the bag when Lewis and Hillman are mass-pressured into forming their version of an "independent labor party"?

How Independent Is an Independent Labor Party? So far we have accepted the category of "independent labor party." But what is it independent of?

According to the Majority resolution, if the LNPL coalesces with a split-off wing of the Democratic party, the resulting party would be a bourgeois third party, unworthy of our support. But if the LNPL forms a party on the basis of its own forces, that would be the independent labor party, the good kind.

But what makes one a "third party" and the other a "labor party" -- both being equally independent of the old parties in the sense of running their own candidates? Program? Where does the LNPL differ in program with the left Democrats? - Mass basis? The mass basis of the coalition party would necessarily be the LNPL trade unions. - Methods? Support of capitalism?

It is not enough for the majority to paste on labels -- how would they tell the difference? After all, there is no scarcity of left Democratic elements in the ALP now -- Eleanor Horrick, etc. And wouldn't the Majority be in

a pickle if the LNPL formed their "independent" party -- the S.W.P. gives it "complete and unambiguous support" -- and then a split-off section of the Democratic party becomes ripe for a coalition! Would this "independent labor party" automatically become a "third party" as the result of such a coalition after its founding?

The point is evident: in this period, a party may be independent of the old capitalist parties in the same way that LaFollette's aggregation is--- in the formal, organizational sense---but in the political sense, independence from capitalist politics means revolutionary politics. Here again there is no middle ground.

The Transitional Program. Thus far we have considered the question on the basis of considerations held by our party for some time. Some of the supporters of the Majority, however, especially emphasize the fact that the adoption of our Transitional Program and of the analysis of the social crisis of capitalism contained in our general thesis automatically indicates the tactic of advocating a labor party. They attempt to attach the P.C.'s labor party position as a kind of "rider" to the Transitional Program.

Now the Minority bases itself upon the acceptance of the Transitional Program as the correct strategical line for our party in this period. The question is: what effect does our new strategy---the general thesis---have upon our labor party position? We must state that so far the attempt of the Majority to show why, if you accept the Transitional Program, you must also accept their reversal on the labor party, has remained in the stage of mere assertion.

The first point of the general thesis is that American capitalism has entered the period of an intense social crisis, not merely one of the periodic depressions which have come and gone, but this time a permanent, chronic crisis of the system itself, with fluctuations but no prospect of lifting to another boom era. This, we are convinced, is correct.

But if it was correct for us to say (as we did) that in a period of capitalist decline, a labor party cannot be progressive---and if the Majority has still not a word to say against this analysis except to call it correct but "abstract"---then what are we to believe? This, according to the Majority: that in a period of capitalist decline it is abstractly true to state that a labor party cannot be progressive, BUT---just when this capitalist decline becomes sharpest, enters the stage of permanent social crisis, makes it necessary to lead toward the question of power, THEN the labor party does become progressive! This is literally their position, make sense of it who can.

One could take almost every paragraph of the general thesis and lay it beside the proposal to advocate a labor party with nothing but astonishment; but the sharpest and most basic contradiction is with the perspective embodied in the general thesis that we must begin now laying the ground for the development of soviets, the slogan for the formation of shop and factory committees, etc. This is the organizational form which we present as the means of carrying out the Transitional Program---workers' organs of struggle on the extra-parliamentary field. Again we ask---how in the world does the Majority square the proposal to prepare the soviets and to advocate the labor party at the same time? Are we going to build the labor party and soviets side by side?

A Line of Action for the Party. It is precisely the Transitional Program which represents the alternative to the labor party approach---from the

point of view of the question: how are we to build the revolutionary party?

The line of the Majority is: there is now a mass movement for a labor party, and we have to be in; the easiest way to get in is to ourselves come out as advocates of a labor party; and once in, we can put forward the Transitional Program in order that it may be carried out by the labor party.

It is our opinion that the existence of a mass movement for something we don't want (whether it be war or a labor party) doesn't change our minds about not wanting it. If it is true that a labor party can play only a reactionary role in society today, then precisely because of the illusions in the minds of the workers, it is our duty to speak out the truth about it. Otherwise the disillusionment with the labor party will react upon us too.

What then? Does speaking the truth about the labor party doom us to isolation from the "mass movement"? Nonsense!

Even if we advocate a labor party we can have influence only in proportion to the extent and effectiveness of our work in the trade unions, and our fractions in the labor party movement -- i.e., only in so far as we seriously undertake and carry through mass work. This is the key. As long as we have our roots in the union movement we cannot be isolated, no matter what position we take on the labor party.

Our main line of approach to the militant workers must be the presentation of our Transitional Program in every situation which opens up the opportunity. In New Jersey, concentration on agitation for workers defense against the Hague menace, not the panacea of a labor party. The extra-parliamentary action of the workers, on the economic field, in workers defense corps, etc., along the lines of our transitional demands. Political agitation pointing to the necessity of revolutionary organization to solve the basic problems of the workers: the only lesson we can draw from our analysis of the situation of capitalism.

On this basis, the labor party movement itself offers us an excellent forum, an arena, for our agitation. It is absolutely necessary that we undertake serious fraction work inside the labor party movements, putting our transitional demands before them, etc.

Speaking of the labor party movement, the Declaration of Principles says: "To stand aside completely from such a development where it comprises the bulk of the militant and advanced sections of the workers would be hopelessly sectarian for the revolutionists... the revolutionists must remain in the midst of the workers who are passing through that experience..." This is the real conclusion to be drawn from the existence of a "mass movement" for a labor party: not that we too therefore advocate it, but we must go through the experiences side by side with the workers in order to point out the lessons---but not merely to point out the lessons after the workers have found them out for themselves, but IN ADVANCE, NOW.

In our fraction work inside the labor party movements, our concrete policies become a matter of tactically adapting our proposals to the stage of development of the workers and the concrete circumstances: critical support to labor party candidates under certain conditions; where the organization endorses capitalist party candidates, we raise the slogan of independent labor candidates; inner-party democracy, etc.; where independent candidates are put forth, we concentrate on raising programmatic questions. But whatever the form of our tactics, the main line is the utilization of these experiences, before and after, to dis-

illusion the workers with labor party politics and break them away. While the Majority also of course favors work inside the labor party movement, their main line must necessarily be to convince the workers of the necessity of building and broadening the labor party. There the lines part, in precisely the vital spot.

It well may be that this dispute may turn out to be more important symptomatically than in itself, as a reflection of pessimistic, conservative and opportunist currents within the party. The key is a plan of action to build the party, including a line for our work inside the labor party movement. This the Minority will elaborate further in the course of the discussion.

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PART II.

THE 1944 PARTY CONVENTION

DISCUSSION AND RESOLUTIONS ON THE LABOR PARTY

(Soon after the 1938 discussion, the labor-party movement, particularly the LNPL, began to decline markedly, even before the outbreak of the war. This trend continued during the following years. The dispute over the labor party question, however, receded into the background, because of the split with the SWP, the Russian question, etc.

(When the 1944 Party Convention was approaching, the labor-party position had been on the books for six years -- but no new document had ever been written by the Majority to revise or supplement the original 1938 Resolution, to give a new analysis or draw a balance-sheet, to review that position in the light of six years of experience and events. Our press continued to repeat the slogan, for a labor party, but the political reasoning behind that slogan was still to be found only in the 1938 Resolution.

(The first document below was therefore written for the discussion preceding the 1944 Convention. It was written to do three things: (1) to recall to the minds of the party membership - and leadership - the political analysis on which the labor-party slogan of the Party was still presumably founded; (2) to challenge the N.C. Majority to make clear whether they still held to this 1938 Resolution and its motivation; (3) to point out that the political analysis of the Minority had never been answered by Shachtman or any other spokesman for the labor-party position. This first document below is therefore in part a review of the 1938 discussion.)

THE STATUS OF THE LABOR-PARTY QUESTION IN THE PARTY

by Hal Draper

(Internal Bulletin, December 1943)

The first thing which needs to be made clear at the present moment is the status of the Labor Party question in our movement. This article will be concerned solely with this, and with related questions of methodology, in order to reopen the discussion in the Party ranks.

Too many comrades are under the impression that the Labor Party question is one that has been "settled" in the Party; of course it can be re-opened and re-settled, but then it would simply be a matter of re-affirming or rejecting a previously "settled" position. Such is the opinion.

It is not true that this is the status of the question. The issue before the coming Convention is not simply to re-affirm, re-adopt or reject an existing party document or position.

The Convention has to adopt a Party position.

---"What! Don't we now have a Party position on the Labor Party?!"

Yes and no.

We have a Party policy: For the Creation of an Independent Labor Party. That is all we have, strictly all.

That does not yet add up to a party position on the question. Or to put it in other words: the eight words above constitute a political conclusion but not an analysis, a theoretical motivation, an exposition of our political approach to the Labor Party issue.

For example: We do have a party position on the nature of the Russian state. It is contained in a resolution which gives a theoretical analysis and political motivation for the conclusion that Russia is a bureaucratic-collectivist exploitative state. The convention can either reaffirm or reject it -- but there is no doubt that it exists.

The same is not true with respect to the Labor Party question. Only the conclusion exists. The documented position does not exist.

It is the duty of the N.C. to present this Convention with such a position, and of the Convention to adopt it or reject it in favor of another.

---"But the Party has a documented position on the Labor Party; it has a theoretical analysis and a political motivation!!"

Where?

---"Why...in the 1938 Resolution of the united SWP, which our party carried over with it after the split."

Yes, this is the only document to which the party's present party policy can be referred. If this is pointed to as expressing even the fundamentals of our present theoretical analysis and political motivation (even with the legiti-

note proviso that naturally it has to be "brought up to date"), then the opening remarks of this article are at least 50% wrong.

I have nevertheless ventured those remarks because I do not believe that this 1938 Resolution will today be defended either by the majority of the N.C. as a whole or by Comrade Shachtman in particular. That is to say---it has been scrapped. And if this is not so, I should like that fact to be made very clear.

The Judgment of Events on the Party Resolution

Why do I consider it fairly safe to say that this original (and still formally effective) 1938 party resolution will not be defended?

Primarily, for a simple reason: because it is indefensible. It will be more than sufficient to prove the almost-complete incorrectness of --

- (A) its analysis of the political situation;
- (B) its methodology and the theoretical bases of its arguments;
- (C) its predictions.

Points (A) and (C) have already been admitted by Comrade Shachtman. During the faction fight in the SWP which led to the split, Shachtman made a report to a Minority Caucus meeting at Stuyvesant Casino, New York, on March 17 in which he discussed the objective validity of factional points of view. He chose as his illustrative example the previous Labor Party discussion, and I quote his hindsight on this point verbatim: (Emphasis in all quotations is mine unless otherwise noted.)

"I regret to say that Draper was indubitably right in saying that no real movement existed for a Labor Party in 1938---HD. Some factional viewpoints are immediately confirmed; others take time. In the case of the Labor Party, it took one or two years to prove our analysis incorrect.

"The question of a Labor Party can still be debated -- that is to say, was it correct to advocate it at the time. As for myself, I am quite willing to say that Draper was indubitably correct in analyzing the movement for a Labor Party."

This demonstration of candor is not just an incidental admission. As I shall show, the nature of the 1938 party resolution was such that its analysis of the political situation ("proven incorrect") was crucial, decisive and vital to its theoretical method and to its conclusion. Take out of it this "proven incorrect" analysis of the then situation, and literally not a sentence nor a phrase remains which even purports to give a reason why revolutionary socialists should work for the creation of a Labor Party.

This does not settle the Labor Party question -- far from it, as Shachtman correctly notes. All that it settles is the 1938 resolution itself. But this happens to be THE party document upon which the present Labor Party conclusion of the Party is founded!

A re-examination of this basic document is therefore necessary, and it has the further advantage of being illuminating.

The Basic Party Resolution on the Labor Party Question

This resolution is unknown to many party members and forgotten by most others. I must therefore resuscitate it from the Undead.

The heart of this resolution is contained in one passage, to which I wish to devote my main attention. But in order to present the contents of the resolution fairly, and in order to bring to the party's attention the whole of the resolution which is supposed to be guiding its political action, I shall summarize the context in which this passage appears, together with notes on the methodology displayed by its formulations.

(1). This document was in 1938 presented by the N.C. as a kind of "rider" to the Transitional Program then also proposed; and its opening passage correctly points out--

"the inadequacy of the purely economic struggle to solve even the most pressing immediate problems of the workers."

Why? Because the economic decline and social crisis cancels out any strike gains and even threatens the union movement's existence. Therefore the tendency of the masses to turn to political action.

Neither here nor at any other point is the next obvious question asked or answered. Economic action cannot solve "even the most pressing immediate problems of the workers;" only political action can. AGREED. But what kind of political action can do this? CAN A LABOR PARTY?

If the American Labor Party will likewise not be able to do this, why usher in the resolution with this "radical" phraseology? And if the authors believe that it will or can solve the workers' problems, it would aid the discussion if they would only vouchsafe us their opinion.

But there is no answer. There is no attempt at an answer, you understand, not even an unsuccessful one. Having correctly raised the basic question, the resolution apparently considers its concrete application to the Labor Party as unnecessary. This is known as window-dressing.

(2) In 1937-38, the new Labor's Non-Partisan League (LNPL) was flourishing. The resolution describes it as a "systematic and increasingly determined effort to organize and mobilize the political strength of the workers as a single unit." This was true. It is also as true that the same description applies to the present Political Action Committee of the AFL and CIO. Both represent systematic efforts to organize and mobilize the political strength of the workers as adjuncts to the capitalist political machinery.

But that is not what the enthusiastic Labor Party proponents saw. To them, the LNPL was "a profound departure from the old Gompers school of labor politics" -- no less -- "although on the surface profound people the two may appear to be identical." What precisely was the profound difference? It seems it was this: Gompersism endorsed this or that fakor and let it go at that; the LNPL endorsed this or that fakor and then set about systematically organizing the workers to vote for said fakor as a "friend of labor." Do you see the profound class angle?

Yes, in 1937-38 many workers were once again awakening to their political strength. That is why the LNPL was formed, and the New York ALP, and today the labor Political Action Committees. Labor unawakened can be adequately

taken care of on election day without any special apparatus. The ward machine will do. Awakening labor has to be bridled and saddled.

(3) There is a profound impulse -- says the Resolution -- of the masses of workers towards completely independent political action. It adds: "This impulse is progressive."

An absolutely incontrovertible statement. As indisputable as Trotsky's observation that workers' patriotism based on a hatred of Nazism conceals a healthy and progressive impulse behind it.

Note it conceals it, it distorts it, while at the same time riding on the back of it. Does the channelization of this impulse in the famous Labor Party fructify and stimulate this progressive impulse, or does it too conceal and distort it while riding on its back?

No answer. It is enough to wax enthusiastic about the progressive "impulse." The reader's subconscious is depended upon to bridge the gap from the "progressive impulse" to the "progressive Labor Party."

(4) The indicated reservations are made. We must head off the dangers of a bourgeois Third Party being substituted for a "genuine" Labor Party. We advance the program of transitional demands "in order to fructify the mass movement in favor of a Labor Party and lead it in a revolutionary direction." The party preserves its own full organizational and political independence. We struggle against and expose the trade union bureaucracy, the Stalinists, etc., who want to prevent the creation of a Labor Party or to head it off toward a Third Party. Our party "does not and will not, however, take upon itself any responsibility for this Labor Party." We occupy a critical position in it.

So goes the resolution, and further remarks on these conditions are reserved since they do not affect the basic motivations advanced.

Some Predictions -- by "Realists"

(5) The last sentences of the Resolution are noteworthy:

"In its very essence the Labor Party can preserve progressive significance only during a comparatively short transitional period. The further sharpening of the revolutionary situation will inevitably break the shell of the labor party and permit the SWP to rally around the banner of the Fourth International the revolutionary vanguard of the American proletariat."

This was written five years ago. A world war has broken out, the U.S. has entered it, and we are now in the midst of it. This eventuality was not mentioned in the resolution, or rather only hinted at in the passage quoted above. Does this paragraph now have force -- or does a Labor Party first have to be created before the Labor Party idea can possibly lose progressive significance? Fuller discussion of this aspect too I reserve from the present. The pre-Labor-Party majority have reserved it since the outbreak of the war.

(6) There are four unqualified predictions put forward by the resolution, all integral with the general outlook of the document. As Shachtman noted, all four were 100% wrong.

Prediction No. 1:

"The further development of the crisis is certain to strengthen this tendency toward labor political action."

As a matter of record, the high point of the Labor Party movement was past not long after this prediction was voted to be "certain" by a majority of hands, and the Labor Party movement since has not even approached it.

Prediction No. 2:

"This new movement, represented by the LNPL, must be characterized as a stage in the development of the labor movement from complete to the political parties of big capital, to an independent party of the workers."

But the (official) labor movement is today at a peak of complete subservience to the political parties of big capital. ---"But that is because of the war!" ---Yes, yes, it is because of the war. An annoying interruption, this war, to the proper "stages of development"! Even leaving all mention of it out of the Labor Party thesis and ignoring it didn't stop it from interfering.

Prediction No. 3:

"The powerfully developing trade unions under the conditions of a developing crisis of capitalism will project themselves all the more irresistibly upon the road of political struggle and upon the road of crystallization into a Labor Party."

But the trade union bureaucracy will oppose it? The resolution has the final and boldest seersaying to offer. Prediction No. 4:

"Nevertheless we can with sufficient assurance predict that the resistance of the bureaucracy will be broken. The movement in favor of a labor party will continue to grow."

The opposition of the bureaucracy to a real independent labor party will be "broken" by the aroused rank-and-file, who will drive ahead to this political break with capitalism over the heads of their reformist leaders. This was the prediction. Forbearing to rub salt into the wounds of the seers, I merely ask: Would not this anticipated event both require and constitute a "further sharpening of the revolutionary situation"---and to an epoch-making extent? A phenomenon such as is here confidently predicted does not happen every Monday in the relations between the rank and file and its reformist leadership!

But "the further sharpening of the revolutionary situation," i.e., the intensification of class struggle, i.e., the deepening of the workers' militancy, i.e., the prerequisite for "breaking the resistance of the bureaucracy to a Labor Party"... why, that is precisely what "will inevitably break the shell of the Labor Party," is it not?

No, this is not a contradiction. The resolution has unwittingly blundered into the truth of the matter. Insofar as the workers drive toward really independent class political action, insofar as they really move into making a real political break with capitalism (naturally, over the heads of their reformist bureaucracy, of course), insofar as this happens, the basis for a Labor Party is broken!

The conditions necessary for real independent class political action are precisely what make the "independent Labor Party" a fantasy.

The Motivation of the Party's Labor Party Document

But these remarks in the resolution are mainly incidental. The resolution's main job---it had to be---was to give some kind of answer to the question why the party was changing over from opposition to and exposure of Labor Party politics, to a pro-Labor Party position. It had to make a stab at a political justification and motivation. The following served. I quote the passage in full:

"At the time of our national convention, we took insufficient account of the new developments in the labor movement, especially in their political aspects, and fell into the error of repeating abstract formulas on the question of the Labor Party which, in the light of great new developments, had become obsolete. It is necessary now to reconsider the question and to make a radical change in our tactics in regard to the developing Labor Party movement. Over a period of years we have discussed and debated this question with the opportunists only in the abstract. That could not be otherwise, because neither a Labor Party nor a formidable movement for its creation was anywhere to be seen. In these discussions we saw only two aspects of the question --- a Labor Party which did not exist in reality, but which the opportunists sought to suck out of their fingers, or a possible fully developed Labor Party some time in the future. We now have to gear our practical activity toward a third and hitherto insufficiently appreciated aspect of the question--- namely, a powerful mass movement in the direction of a Labor Party which has not yet taken a clearly defined shape. We have always said that, confronted with a fully developed Labor Party, based on the trade unions, we would take a positive attitude toward it and most likely participate in it. We are now confronted with the necessity of concretizing this general point of view and of taking a direct part in the present developing movement for a labor party and of working with all our strength to push it on the road of independence."

Billed down, then, it amounts to this: We must change our negative position toward the Labor Party question, which was determined by the absence of a practical mass movement which made it a practical problem. Now there is a mass movement and it is a question of our party's participation among these masses and influencing their course.

The Abstract Formulas

Our previous anti-Labor Party analysis, which had been rather fully elaborated in theoretical, educational and agitational documents, receives its due meed of notice in the above document...in two words. These are: "abstract formulas."

Thus---literally thus---were close to ten years of theoretical and political analyses disposed of. Outside of what I have quoted, there was never another word written in revaluation of the point of view which was in the process of being given up. Indeed Cannon went so far in 1938 as to limit his "refutation" of the concepts he was then abandoning to calling them--

"abstract formulas which remain unassailable from the point of view of principle but outworn by events."

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theoretical motivation of the Majority (as expressed in its resolution) consisted in toto of this incorrect analysis. The theoretical motivation of the Minority has never even been assailed (let alone its being "unassailable in principle").

Comrade Shachtman and those who agree with him still have this challenge before them. I suggest they take Shachtman's 1935 article as their mark. It is eight years old; let them examine its predictions as well as its theory... The party resolution's predictions---every one of them from the first page to the last---were proven incorrect; the prognosis of 1935 can sit beside the realities of 1943 without a blush. The "abstract formulas" must have had something.

On Overlooking Mass Movements

I have shown that the pro-Labor Party Majority based its case, not upon a criticism and revision of its previous political concepts on the Labor Party question, but on the claim that those previous concepts had flowed primarily from the lack of any mass movement for a Labor Party; that it had somehow failed to take this eventuality into prior consideration. It would seem that before 1938 it just had never occurred to us as even a hypothetical possibility, let alone a reality.

As the party resolution put it: In those previous discussions, we saw only two aspects of the question"---namely, nothing at all stirring on the Labor Party front, or else a finished Labor Party; and it was therefore that we overlooked an attitude toward any intermediate state.

Or as Shachtman-Burnham put it in their 1938 New International article:

"Our previous analysis was incomplete, and in some respects, not sufficiently clear. It did not allow for the present stage of development, in which an undeveloped and only partly conscious mass movement exists and is torn by warring tendencies of progress and reaction but is not yet crystallized... In brief, our old position cannot and does not effectively answer the problems raised by the present stage of development. It cannot even in theory, for the reason that the new situation was not clearly allowed for."

The reader can convince himself that this is the sum total, the alpha and omega of their answer to the Shachtman-of-1935 by securing the article itself.

This polemical doodle -- the allegation of this peculiar oversight -- is not even a legitimate mistake. There was hardly a time before 1938 when the movement debated the Labor Party question with another political tendency but that it had to face, take up concretely and analyze this "third" aspect which (Shachtman later told us) it "never saw". We had to take it up during the stay of the Trotskyists in the Socialist Party, when Labor Party agitation was developing, especially in the advancing CIO, and the socialist centrists cast this up to us.

As a matter of fact, the 1935 article by Shachtman was written DIRECTLY on this "unforeseen" third aspect -- in Direct explicit answer to the problem which the Shachtman-of-1938 blandly claimed had never crossed his mind!

In 1935 the Communist Party changed its line, from against to for the creation of a Labor Party. Browder made a speech explaining the change in line. Was the CP, by chance, reversing its views on this question? Oh no, explained

Browder. Why then the change in "tactic"? Shachtman quotes Browder:

"We must change our negative position towards the Labor Party question, which was determined by the absence of a practical mass movement which made it a practical problem."

Shachtman comments:

"But it was determined by exactly opposite considerations in 1930; the mass movement was indeed there..."

Browder, continued:

"Now there is a mass movement, and it is a question of our party's participation among these masses and influencing their course."

And Browder again:

"There does not yet exist a clearly defined Labor Party movement. There is only the beginning mass break-away, within which a struggle is going on between two main class forces."

It was on this speech that Shachtman wrote his article. It is obvious that the theoretical motivation of the party resolution is---not similar---but identical as two peas with Browder's political explanation. I do not cite this as necessarily damning evidence against the former. But conversely, the mere fact that it was Browder putting it forth did not damn it in our eyes either, then. Shachtman had to analyze it and tear it to shreds politically.

One can go further. Shachtman quoted above referred to the "mass movement" for a Labor Party which existed in 1930. The same 1935 article goes into the most detailed discussion, however, of the previous experience of the American revolutionary movement with the Labor Party question, in 1922-23. Shachtman writes of this period:

"In 1922, the just organized legal communist party (the Workers Party) put forward for the first time the slogan for a Labor Party and launched a campaign to realize it. The reasons for the new policy were fourfold: (1) there was not only a strong Labor Party sentiment among the workers, but a national Farmer-Labor Party, strongly supported by many trade union bodies, actually existed; (2) the railroad Brotherhoods, together with other national unions and farm organizations, had launched the Conference for Progressive Political Action in Chicago in February 1922;....

"Easier to understand in retrospect than to have perceived it at the time, the so-called Labor Party movement developed simultaneously and in significant combination with the so-called Third Party movement. The former may be summed up as the first post-war reformist political expression of the discontent of the workers with the capitalist regime of its two parties, dissatisfaction with the hoary official policy of "reward your friends and punish your enemies," a groping toward independent working class expression on the political field. ... Anxious to break with the sectarian past of their underground existence, apprehensive lest they remain isolated from the political development of the masses, the communists flung themselves into the campaign for a Labor Party, with a rising overestimation of its hold upon the masses, its distinctive class character, its possibilities and its virtues."

This was a living mass movement for a Labor Party, fully equipped with progressive "impulses," stronger than anything which has hit the American working class since.

And it was mainly on the basis of the lessons of this experience with a mass movement that the Trotskyist movement developed its anti-Labor Party analysis! It played the same role for the movement in this respect that the Chinese Revolution or the Anglo-Russian Committee did in more important regards. Yet comes 1938, and another upsurge of Labor Party sentiment, and Comrade Shachtman tells us that "we saw only two aspects of the question," and that we never allowed for this "unforeseen" development, not even in theory!

The "Mass Movement" Theory and the Methodology of Opportunism

All this would be quite useless to recount if it were merely water under the bridge. But here is the disturbing fact: The state of the party's political thought on the Labor Party question is EXACTLY the same today as in 1938.

Trotsky said that a good housekeeper does not permit cobwebs to accumulate in her house, nor dare the party permit cobwebs to remain in its theory. One may get too used to cobwebs as a regular part of the furnishings.

The worst theoretical education our party has ever received was the campaign of the Labor Party advocates to convince it that the existence of widespread sentiment for a Labor Party was adequate and sufficient reason for OUR support to this aim of Labor Party organization, and that it even made a negligible bagatelle of the serious analysis we had previously made, and which many continued to make, of the meaning of Labor Party organization.

Within the ranks of the party, this type of methodology is translated in cruder terms:

"I spoke for a Labor Party in Local Umpteen and boy, did it go over big!"

"Look at the union resolutions for a Labor Party. There's the issue for us!"

"Here's a positive proposal we can make on a union floor."
(The word "positive" in this vocabulary defines a proposal to solve problems of labor which large numbers of them are at present ready to accept.)

The Labor Party proposition can in some cases be a good talking point in a union. Since this is a fact, and since our party members are not sectarians, this makes it legitimately attractive to all of us. And it is true that this attractive advantage has been more effective in convincing comrades of the "correctness" of the Labor Party policy than all the attempts at theoretical rationalization by the supporters of it. This method of deriving political line from tactical opportunities is alien to Marxism---it is of course the methodology of opportunism---but it has become increasingly possible for a number of comrades on this question because it is given factitious weight by the kind of argumentation employed by the party resolution and the political leaders of the party.

The existence of a workers' mass movement for ANYTHING, a mass sentiment for ANYTHING, is an impressive fact. In absolutely NO case can it fail to affect

our political activities. There is one thing it CANNOT do: prevent us from asking "Mass sentiment for WHAT?" and beginning our analysis with this question.

There is or was working class mass sentiment for the war against Hitler Germany. On the basis of theoretical analysis and political motivations, we adopt our own attitude toward the war. In the peculiar vocabulary of a Labor Party enthusiast, it is not a "positive" one. It is also unpopular, let us say. It is likewise often difficult and not infrequently impossible to give an adequate presentation of our view on a union floor. In many cases we have had to "sit out" discussions bearing upon it. We trim and adapt the form and emphases of our political agitation.

That this sad state of affairs does not feaze us determines the Marxist character of our party. Our attitude was expressed by Trotsky:

"We have repeated many times that the scientific character of our activity consists in the fact that we adapt our program not to political conjunctures or the thought or mood of the masses as this mood is today, but we adapt our program to the objective situation as it is represented by the economic class structure of society... This program...cannot be understood by the workers as a whole. It would be very good if the vanguard would understand it in the next period and that they would then turn and say to the workers, 'You must save yourself from fascism.'... The reformists have a good smell for what the audience wants... But that is not serious revolutionary activity. We must have the courage to be unpopular, to say 'You are fools,' 'You are stupid,' 'They betray you...!'"

But after ten years of saying "We do not want to see the creation of a Labor Party" and of arguing why, we were told: "There is now mass sentiment for a Labor Party, and that is why WE have to want it also."

MASS Movements and the National Question -- A Case in Point

Our attitude on the war is one type of Marxist reaction to the existence of a mass sentiment. It is Case I, where we deem the goal of this mass movement to be objectively reactionary, and therefore merely trim our sails to the effects of this sentiment.

We do not have to go far for an example of Case II, where we deem the goal of the mass movement to be objectively progressive, and are therefore spurred into activity by it in order to push it the faster toward its progressive end.

The N.C. resolution on the National Question in occupied Europe emphasizes the fact that national liberation is the basis of whatever there is today in Europe of a workers' mass movement. That means that we therefore support this movement? NOT SO FAST!

Between the fact of mass sentiment and the conclusion of support is an entire resolution which goes from one to the other by giving a theoretical foundation and a political motivation for three not-inconsequential promises for that conclusion. They are:

- (1) There is a real question of national liberation involved in the European situation today, not just an imperialist-conceived demagogic slogan. The resolution considers it necessary to prove this with some detail.

- (2) We are for the aim of national liberation, which if and when achieved would have a progressive effect on the class struggle for socialism. The N.C. recognizes the need for proving this with argument, theoretical considerations and political analyses.
- (3) The struggle for this aim is one which leads to breaking the workers away from capitalism and toward the socialist revolution.

Having first established the above, the NC's emphasis upon the existence of the mass movement in Europe and the necessity for the vanguard's participation is a model of Bolshevik strategy. And as against Comrades Johnson, O'Connor, &c. it is trebly important to emphasize the significance of the European mass movement inasmuch as in words they subscribe to Points 1, 2 and 3!

BUT on the Labor Party...

Before 1938, we had already analyzed the meaning of the mass "impulses" for a Labor Party that had cropped up? ---No matter; there is now another mass impulse.

Before 1938, we had already said that a Labor Party would be reactionary? ---No matter; it never occurred to us that mass sentiment for a Labor Party might precede its finished formation.

Before 1938, we had said a Labor Party would be an obstacle to breaking the workers away from capitalist politics? ---No matter; their "impulse" is progressive, so the Labor Party itself must be too.

Before 1938, we had said that a Labor Party that would really be independent of capitalist politics was an anachronistic fantasy? ---No matter; it's a good talking point.

Before 1938, we had said that it is our business to combat the Labor Party illusions of the workers? ---No matter; we must not be "negative."

A Challenge

The 1938 party resolution represents the present status of the Labor Party question in the party's theory---as it exists in authoritative documented form. Scrapped though in effect it was not long after it was passed, its methodology and conclusions lived on. It is dead; but it walks abroad in the pages of Labor Action, and periodically clanks in a given section of the current Political Resolution. It is the zombie resolution of the party. What it needs is either a soul or a stake through its heart.

We have a right to demand that the pro-Labor Party leadership of the party present a documented theoretical and political analysis and motivation for their position, in opposition to the previous analysis of the Trotskyist movement (as represented by Shachtman's 1935 article) and to the present analysis of the opposition in the party. I shall not murmur at the absolutely inevitable flinging of "sectarian," "isolationist," and "negative" in the direction of all points of the compass, provided that this exercise follows, and does not substitute for, such a motivation. I should like to reduce somewhat the present figure of from ten to fifteen different (and in half the cases, mutually exclusive) theories evolved by comrades in justification of the Labor Party line, for lack of a party analysis.

If Comrade Shachtman or any other authoritative spokesman for the pro-Labor Party policy finds it possible to take up this challenge, this will have achieved enough of its purpose

Substitute Resolution on the Labor Party Question

LABOR-PARTYISM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

1. The labor movement in the United States is characterized by a great gap between the comparatively high degree of economic organization and militancy and its extreme political backwardness. Objective social forces are pushing the workers towards increasing political consciousness. The most important of these is the increased intervention of the capitalist state into the economic structure and particularly into the relations between labor and capital. Increasingly Labor's problems, even immediate problems, have to be solved with reference to the political policies of the government. This is a trend which has already been set forth in party documents at length.

The PAC

2. The conclusion which the trade union bureaucracy has drawn from this fact is that it requires their vigorous intervention into politics - into capitalist politics - in order to influence the policies of the government. The organizational expression of this conclusion is the PAC, with its policy of "rewarding friends and punishing enemies" in the two capitalist parties. The PAC today differs from the old AFL-Gompers line of "rewarding friends and punishing enemies" insofar as it is far more concerned with this activity and organizes a special arm of the labor movement to do so.

The Trend to Third-Partyism

3. This policy is proving its bankruptcy; and at the same time the development of the class struggle forces sharper realignments within the old parties, even among the capitalist politicians, on the traditional ground of whether labor can best be kept in line by means of clubs or honeyed words. The old two-party system has not broken up, but the forces of disintegration within it are running apace. Especially as the politicalization of labor advances, the meaningless division between Democrats and Republicans may possibly give way before a realignment between a capitalist-conservative section (represented by the Republican-Southern Democrat bloc) and a capitalist-liberal section (represented by the remnants of the New Dealers, Ickes, Wallace, etc.).

4. The formation of such a "liberal" Ickes-Wallace movement - either as a split or as the result of a reshuffling of Democrats and Republicans - this is what we have referred to as the trend toward a Third Party of Capitalism. The mass base for such a Third Party can no longer be sought in the agrarian population of the middle west, as was true of Third Parties in the past; nor certainly in any number of generals-without-an-army like Ickes and Wallace themselves. The mass base of such a Third Party, if it is really to exist in any influential form, can only be the mass trade unions, the trade unions which now support the PAC.

The Future of the PAC and the "Third Party"

5. The coalition of the PAC with Ickes-Wallace, "liberal" Democrats and assorted fake "progressive" politicians is, then, the inevitable complexion of any significant Third Party which is formed in the U.S. today. Whether the initiative is taken from the side of the PAC or from the side of the New Dealers, the result is equally a new capitalist party demagogically bestriding the labor movement with capitalist politicians as its leaders, whether these capitalist politicians are former Roosevelt office-holders or "labor men" like Hillman and other American equivalents of the British Bevin and Attlee.

6. For the trade union bureaucracy, the formation of such a Third Party would be only a new form of their intervention in capitalist politics. It would mean that the labor movement would gain organizational independence from the Democrats and Republicans, by forming a new capitalist party with the labor movement tied to its tail.

7. This is not independent labor politics, obviously. Independent political action by labor, to be progressive, means not merely an organizational break with the Democrats and Republicans but independence from capitalist politics.

The Lesson of the A.L.P.

8. This analysis is fully confirmed at all points by the only existing expressions of labor-partyism in the country, the American Labor Party of New York state and the Michigan Commonwealth Federation. The ALP took its inception in the fear of the labor bureaucracy that progressive labor in New York was turning away from Roosevelt and the New Deal in disillusionment. It was formed in order to ride this progressive impulse of discontent with bourgeois politics, and rein it toward support of Roosevelt. The MCF took its inception in the complete breakdown of the regular Democratic Party organization in Michigan, and its practical-political effect was to substitute for it a labor-colored Rooseveltian electoral machine. Like any other today, these labor parties represented the continuation of class-collaborationist politics by other means.

9. The ALP, since its inception, acted completely as the "loyal" (that is, Rooseveltian) wing in New York of the Roosevelt Democratic Party. Its structure and organization has been, if anything, more bureaucratized than the trade union bodies on which it is based. Its farthest step in the direction of "independence" was the running of a Tammany politician, Dean Alfange, for the high post of Governor - as a "bold" move for independent action, independent action by the Roosevelt wing of the Democratic Party. All this was completely true before the capture of the ALP by the united front of Hillman and the Stalinists. If a Third Party of bourgeois liberalism had been formed in New York "instead of" the ALP, how possibly could it have differed from the actually existent ALP? If a Third Party is formed nationally, how possibly will it differ from a national extension of the ALP?

The "Laborite Third Party" Today

10. Whether the trade union bureaucracy breaks with its present policy of "reward and punish" in favor of such an independent third-party movement depends primarily upon one factor: the growing radicalization of the workers from below, a wave of radicalization which would face them with the task of channelizing it back into "safe" capitalist waters. As the 1944 Convention Resolution of the party put it truly, the likeliest possibility is that:

"the sharpening of class antagonisms in the country will generate enough pressure upon at least a section of the labor bureaucracy to impel it to take the leadership of an independent labor political party lest the movement of the masses 'get out of hand'."

This is exactly the point, straight out of the mouths of the advocates of labor-partyism: the objective political meaning of the formation of a so-called labor party can only be the heading-off and reactionary channelizing of the politicalization of the workers. What this describes is not the condition for the organization of a "genuine independent labor party," but the condition for the formation of a Third Capitalist Party, no matter what name may be attached to it.

11. As a matter of fact, in our era of capitalism, the historical distinction between a Third Capitalist Party on the one hand and a "genuine" labor party on the other has become obsolete. Today any significant Third Party must be based on the trade union masses. So also today, a reformist trade union party (a labor party) must remain politically tied to capitalist politics. These two historical categories tend to merge today in the trend toward a "laborite Third Party."

The British Labor Party

12. This is what is shown us today by the British Labor Party, which functions today as the "Third Party" of British capitalism. (More exactly, it is the First Party of British Capitalism!) This is not at all to deny that it is also as much of a Labor Party as is possible under the conditions of capitalism today. This is a paradox only in terms of outlived concepts. What the British Labor Party demonstrates in life is the merging of the concepts of Third Capitalist Party and reformist labor party, and the impossibility of distinguishing between them in practical politics. The distinctive origin and mass composition of the British Labor Party, as well as the illusions of the workers regarding it, have an important effect on our tactics with regard to it as an existing obstacle to the socialist revolution, but not upon our political estimation of it.

"Independent Labor Party" - A Dream of Yesterday

13. In the U.S., precisely because the trade union bureaucracy has not even broken organizationally with the Democrats and Republicans, it is still possible to dream of a labor party which will

find a middle ground - that is, which will be neither politically a Third Party of capitalism nor yet a revolutionary socialist party. Obviously it is possible even to speak of an "independent labor party based on the reformist trade unions" only on the basis of such a dream. There used to be such a middle ground; it no longer exists.

14. The possibility of such a middle ground existed before the present era of capitalist decline, when capitalism was still expanding. It was a possibility then because a reformist struggle for immediate gains economical and political, which the bourgeoisie was able to grant if sufficiently pressed, offered a realistic political perspective. At the same time, and for the very same reason, the reformist parties of social-democracy also were able to play a progressive role in the historical development of the working class.

15. Today, both in the case of reformist labor parties and reformist social-democratic parties, this political perspective is no longer actual. Today even the successful struggle for immediate demands requires militant, class-struggle, implicitly revolutionary action. The bourgeoisie must tend to withdraw rather than grant further concessions. What gains are made episodically are cancelled out by the development of the capitalist crisis. The time is past when a working class political party acting within the programmatic limitations of bourgeois reformism had an independent role to play in organizing the class in independent action for immediate concessions. Today the only working class program which is actually - politically - independent of the capitalist class is the revolutionary program.

16. There is no reason for making any putative American labor party a peculiar exception to the rule: Today every political formation is confronted with the harsh alternatives - defense of capitalism or the fight for socialism. Only individuals without responsibility, theorists and paper resolutions can continue to talk in terms of a dreamed-up middle ground. The possibility of finding footing in a middle ground is no longer there for any serious political movement. The pressure of social forces does not permit this escape from reality to any political organization which has to act on real problems.

17. The old type of reformist program, which in a different period provided this middle ground, has now been taken over by the most enlightened section of the bourgeoisie itself - the "left" New Dealers, the Roosevelt Democrats, the "liberal" wing of capitalist politics. It is in this sense that we used to make the observation that the Roosevelt administrations may be called the "social-democratic phase" of American political development. It is that social-democratic phase, not in its "classic" form naturally; but in the crabbed, reactionary, telescoped and already senile form inevitable under the new conditions of chronic capitalist decline and chronic war and revolution. The lusty reformism of the old days, with its progressive consequences and politically independent programmatic base, is no more possible for it than it is possible for the labor bureaucracy.

Attitude on Labor-Partyism

18. The desire to find a by-pass to the creation of a mass revolutionary party is a common concession to the mood of the times. It even leads to the notion that a national American labor party can be that mass revolutionary party itself! This theory of how a revolutionary party can be forged is by far less plausible than the average theory on this basic question which Bolshevism has had to reject and combat. We teach that a revolutionary socialist party must be founded on a revolutionary program and built around that program. A wealth of historical experience has confirmed this in every instance. There is no reason advanced to make an exception for America in this regard.

19. To teach the most advanced workers to look toward a labor party as the political rallying center of American labor (let alone as the future revolutionary party instrument of American labor!) is to teach a falsehood and a delusion. It will be precisely the best, most advanced workers who will be disillusioned with a labor party first. Our job is to hasten this process, if it turns out that they must go through it. It is not our job now to point to the labor party as the way out of the post-war breakdown which is coming, or as the shield against fascism, but to insist with all our strength that only revolutionary socialist politics and a revolutionary party can solve these problems. We must tell the truth about the labor party, that it will not be able to solve "even the most immediately pressing problems of labor."

20. We do not advocate the formation of a laborite third party. We do not advance the defeatist concept that if a labor party is not formed, the alternative for the workers is defeat and doom. We do not believe that a labor party is an inevitable stage which the American working class must go through on the road to socialism. Still less do we present the even more dangerous concept that the labor party is, can be or should be looked to as the party of the socialist revolution.

21. The question that is now presented in the U.S. is that of advocating the creation of a labor party, where none now exists. If in the future (as is the case in the present in England) a labor party or laborite third party should come into existence and become a political reality, our attitude towards it becomes a question of tactics. We have always said and say again that we will stand at the side of the working class without separating ourselves from them, in every phase of their political development.

22. We stand ready to enter and work within any labor party that is set up, in a tactical approach which would be determined neither by opportunist or sectarian "principles" but by the concrete conditions and opportunities. We will advance and fight for the immediate and transitional demands which we propose for the working class. We will seek to utilize whatever arena the labor party provides for these purposes and for socialist education. To any labor party movement we say: "Your leaders have ostensibly organized for independent political action and in order to solve your pressing problems. It is our opinion that they and the labor party

can do neither. You don't agree with us? Then see for yourselves; fight for class-struggle candidates and a class-struggle program. We intend to fight along with you for these objectives. We will show you in action that socialist politics is the only way out." - This is the general sense of a revolutionist's agitation and propaganda with respect to a labor party.

23. But our job is to attempt to shorten by our own efforts any hypothetical labor-party phase of working-class political development; to convince at least the vanguard now that they must come directly to the revolutionary party, and to utilize their experiences, especially their experiences with the labor party, now for this purpose. Our job is to foster disillusionment with the reformist, pro-war, collaborationist machine, instead of strengthening illusions by our own advocacy. We do not wish the character of the labor party to be exposed solely by experience. We wish the advanced workers to turn to the others, and say: "This party told us the truth about the labor party; it showed us the way soonest; it is a good party."

Political Consciousness and the Task of the Party

24. The desire of workers to break with the Democratic and Republican parties of capitalism is an inevitable and progressive sign of their radicalization and advance in political consciousness. As always, the danger is that this advance in thinking may be organizationally crystallized and corraled in reactionary ways. When a radicalized worker joins the Communist Party, this is what has happened. When a radicalized worker voted for Roosevelt under the ALP symbol instead of the Democratic, this is what happened. This is also the relationship between political radicalization and a laborite third party.

25. Such radicalization and politicalization of the rank and file of labor is the fertilized ground upon which we grow. If it crystallizes into the reactionary form of a reformist labor-third party, we will go through this experience with them too. But it is not our job to recommend that they make this mistake in order to teach them to know better. The working class will make many such mistakes without our aid, on its road to a socialist revolution. We, the revolutionary party, have only a certain amount of forces, and energy, and time at our disposal. It is our job to use them to point to the real political solution, not to any other. That is to teach the necessity of revolutionary socialist organization; in action, in agitation, in propaganda and in theory.

The Line of the Transitional Program

26. The main line toward the building of the revolutionary Workers Party is laid down in the 1938 theses of our movement on "The Death Agony of Capitalism" and the necessity of a revolutionary Transitional Program. This line does not consist merely of a series of concrete demands. The concept here is that of channelizing the inevitably increasing social and political consciousness of the workers in the direction of a struggle which goes outside the framework of capitalism. This means not only a struggle for

"reasonable" transitional demands whose realization however is incompatible with capitalism, but also a struggle for those organizational forms which lead outside the capitalist framework of parliamentarism and reformist trade-unionism.

27. How will our program take hold in the workers' mass movement?* The Transitional Program prepares the way for putting the question of power on the agenda. The main line which the party must follow in implementing the Transitional Program is to teach the workers the necessity of depending on their own extra-parliamentary strength and organization - certainly not to teach them to depend upon or hold to any present illusions in the ability of a labor party to carry out this Transitional Program. What organizational forms must we strive for to carry out the Transitional Program? Under Section A of the national thesis (Economic Demands): "The organizations best fitted to cope with the problems of workers control at the point of production are the shop-committees. Every effort must be exerted to organize the shop-committees, which may become organs of dual power in the factory and the nucleus of soviets, as the crisis takes on a revolutionary character in the future." Under Section B (The Struggle Against Fascism): "the organization of the workers' defense guard, the workers' militia. In Section C (Struggle Against War) the need for extra-parliamentary organization, here most immediately counterposed to the perspective of a labor party, is most obvious. Section D (the slogan of a Workers Government) means for us, as the form for which we strive, a workers' government based upon the councils of workers and farmers. Although the workers may have to pass through the experience of a labor party government, we must realize the danger of ourselves giving this content to the slogan, in our own agitation. Carefully the party must lead the workers through the experiences of the shop-committees, the workers' defense guard, etc., to the creation of councils of workers and farmers, and toward the national consolidation of these extra-parliamentary organs of struggle as the crisis matures. That is the course which we must set in motion among the masses to counteract the peoples-frontism and democratic front of the Stalinists and liberals. If this is the main line we put before the masses, our main line in political agitation is also to keep before their eyes the necessity for revolutionary organization. We cannot point both toward soviets and a reformist labor party as the means of carrying out our revolutionary transitional program.

28. The above expresses our concept of the goal toward which we are striving to channelize the radicalization and politicalization of the workers. It is the direction to which our revolutionary propaganda points. The extent to which it can become the center of our daily agitation will, of course, depend on the tempo with which the U.S. goes through any temporary post-war economic boom and the consequent rapidity and depth of the inevitably oncoming period of sharp social crisis. While the U.S. has not yet entered

* This entire paragraph is reproduced in toto from the Minority Resolution on the labor party question which I presented in 1938, when the party first adopted its present pro-labor party position.
--H.D.

its post-war future of deepgoing social crisis, the comparatively brief interlude, which we are now in and which will steadily mount up to it, must be utilized to prepare-- to prepare our own cadres and the ranks of advanced workers. It is in this sense that our theses on "The Death Agony of Capitalism" and the necessity of a revolutionary Transitional Program provide the alternative to the concept of the reformist labor party as the inevitable next stage of working class development.

Hal Draper
Anne Russell