

*A Debate:*

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IN THE  
DEMOCRATIC PARTY?

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(Former Editor, Federated Press)

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# "SHOULD PROGRESSIVES WORK IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY?"

Following is a transcript of a debate sponsored by the Friday Night Socialist Forum and held May 8, 1959, at Eugene V. Debs Hall, 3737 Woodward, Detroit.

Speaking in the affirmative was Carl Haessler, former managing editor, Federated Press. For the negative was George Breitman, former editor, The Militant.

The moderator was Dr. Henry Herrmann, Associate Professor, Philosophy of Education, Wayne State University.

## Carl Haessler: *affirmative*

I wonder why I was asked to participate in this debate. Knowing the gang that the first speaker, the affirmative speaker, would be up against, I suppose the manager of the forum decided it would take a brave man to come up here and present that point of view. I tried it about a year ago at the Central Methodist Church, where I was the unaffiliated speaker, and three other third party speakers had the floor, and I got a pretty good drubbing, but it didn't bother me, especially as one middle-aged bourgeois member of the audience came up and said, "I thank you very much. You have the same persuasive character of presenting the subject as Dr. Henry Hitt Crane." And I don't know if he thought

that was complimentary or not, but I have been compared to preachers before this, although that is not exactly my line.

However, I am serious in taking this side of the case, and not from inexperience. Almost 50 years ago, I debated on this general subject, except it was capitalist parties vs. Socialist Party, at the University of Wisconsin. One of my opponents, white-haired like myself, took one of the opposing views, and I imagine he'll take the floor in the general discussion tonight. I was a Socialist Party member, very active in Milwaukee after I was fired from the University of Illinois. I reached the glory of being a member of the City Central Committee of the Socialist Party there, and also of the five-man State Executive Committee of the Socialist Party. Later on I was active in campaigning for Senator LaFollette when he ran for President in 1924, which was supposed to be the extension to the country as a whole of the third party — the Progressive Party — that had been founded in the state of Wisconsin. And when Henry Wallace, ex-Republican, ran for President in 1948, also using the name of the Progressive Party, I was somewhat active in that campaign. In fact, I remember a debate here, in which a lawyer for the Republican Party, a professor for the Democratic Party, and yours truly for the Progressive Party, discussed the platforms. Well, let's get down to the subject, "Should progressives work in the Democratic Party?"

I take that to mean, should progressives, who are interested in organized political action, work in the Democratic Party. If you are a progressive along general, vague social lines, and don't spend much time on political parties, I should say don't work in any political party. Why work in a party if you're not politically organizationally interested? So I wonder if my adversary will accept that restriction of the subject. I hope he does,

because he has plenty of ammunition besides that, because a year ago, the Democratic Party was much cleaner looking than it is today. Since the November victory, the sweeping November victory of the Democrats in the national election, great things were expected of that party by the labor people who supported it, supported them with money, with speeches, and most of all, with work in the precincts. So far, there has not been very much visible fruit on the national scale, for labor or for progressives, of this victory of the Democratic Party.

In the state of Michigan, of course, there has been some fruit. I should say, for instance, the victory of the Democratic Party in the last elections, not only in '58, but in '56, '54, '50, '48 — that those victories have paved the way, for instance, for the Democratic control of the State Supreme Court for the first time in the history of that body. Democrats were tied once before with the Republicans, but this is the first time that the Democrats have a 5-3 edge in the state Supreme Court. And it was due solely to the fact that Governor Williams, elected by original Democrats and by labor Democrats over and over again, had the opportunity to fill vacancies by appointment on the Supreme Court, and those appointees, in almost all cases, excepting for Justice Clark Adams, were elected when the time came for them to face the voters. And as you know, the greatest fruit of the State Supreme Court Democratic control was the decision in the Ford strike unemployment benefit case. They reversed the previous Republican decision that strikers in one plant of the Ford company would make all members thrown out of work -- all employees thrown out of work at the Ford Motor Co. — ineligible for unemployment benefits. The Republicans, representing General Motors and Ford, thought this was sound doctrine. The Democrats, this year, representing labor and Democrats generally, thought the other interpretation was sound. Well, that's the most outstanding Supreme Court labor victory that has been achieved, I think, any-

where in the United States. And it has been achieved in a state where labor -- organized labor -- has for all practical purposes captured the Democratic Party.

The Democratic Party, without labor, in this state had been nothing except a Governor once in a while who couldn't get anywhere with a Republican legislature. Now with the appointive power in Democratic hands for the courts for these many years, for the circuit courts, the probate courts, the common pleas, here and throughout the state, the judicial temper of a corporation-minded reactionary court in an industrial state has been decisively altered, and I ask you whether this could have been done by any other political means than the means that were actually employed. For instance, to make it personal, because that's what brings it down to cases, could the Socialist Workers Party with its 4,000 votes in the Spring election in the state of Michigan have done anything even approaching that? Could the Socialist Labor Party with a few thousand more votes throughout the state have done anything in that line? I don't have to ask you if the Republican Party could have done it. They could have, but they wouldn't have. The Democratic Party got in a position to do something on the Supreme Court and they did it.

Of course one of the justices on the Supreme Court is a socialist, a man who spent 30 days in jail in the good old militant days of '37, for defying a Republican judge's anti-labor injunction, Justice George Edwards of the Supreme Court; and of course the state chairman of the Democratic Party several times ran for office as a socialist, in and around Ann Arbor; and the man who controls the money bags of the Democratic Party, Walter Reuther, was a socialist within my own experience. In fact in 1938, when I was functioning to some degree as his brain truster, I founded his local union paper and edited it for a number of years, Reuther consulted me as to whether he should continue paying dues to the Socialist Party. I said no. And we discussed it, and I said if you want to

rise in the UAW and reach an important position, and if you'll then want to spread your activities beyond that, don't get tangled up with a small group that's getting nowhere, even faster than Norman Thomas is growing older, but get out from under. Don't have these entangling little alliances sticking to you. Free yourself. And he did. And he freed himself to such a great degree that a few weeks ago, when Jimmy Hoffa, who used to be his friend in West Side strikes, accused Reuther of being a socialist, Reuther said he hadn't ever been in the Socialist Party except one year, during the depression. I know myself he had been a Socialist Party member for 5 years, and his father had been for 30 or 40 years before that, but he's entitled to a change of opinion and he's entitled to change his memory of the facts too. If there are other people with better memories than he has, well, that's their hard luck, because he'll deny it, and everybody will believe him and nobody will believe those who have counter-evidence.

Well, you see, with three former socialists at the controls of the Democratic Party in this state, things are beginning to be done. But you still have a die-hard Republican Senate, as a result of that overbalanced legislature created by an amendment to the constitution, but even that will crumble. Some Senators are fearing for their seats, some Republican Senators; some of them, while they're not exactly afraid for their seats, are ready to make deals with the majority party in the Senate and even more so in the House, and so I think Michigan is a very good example of progressives working for organized political action in the majority party, the Democratic Party, of this state.

Now, there are similar achievements, not quite so great, in other states. There is the state of West Virginia. I was sitting in the United Mine Workers office in Washington, talking to Denny Lewis, the brother of John L., and he was criticizing Reuther, saying he was wasting a lot of money on labor political action,

"and we don't go in for that." And I said, "No, you don't, except in West Virginia." And he said, "Right, Carl." In West Virginia, the United Mine Workers controls the Democratic Party, and they've elected two U.S. Senators, ousting the Republicans in the last election, and they control the Governor, most of the legislature. West Virginia has very good mining legislation, and considering that it's a hill-billy state, up in the mountains, not much doing industrially, West Virginia has a pretty fair record, legislatively, as far as states go. That legislative record was established by the Democratic Party, which is owned by the United Mine Workers of America.

Now let's take the state of Minnesota where the Democratic Party is so thoroughly controlled by the old Farmers Non-Partisan League, the radical farmers in the state, and by the unions, that it really isn't even called the Democratic Party. It's called the Farmer-Labor Democratic Party. And in Minnesota, they've done pretty well, too. They elected a Senator, Eugene McCarthy, to supplant the old Republican die-hard, Senator Thye; they've elected a good number of liberal Congressmen, they've got a Democratic Governor, and things in that state are coming along too. Of course, they've got judicial drags, and there are legislative drags, the press is not Democratic, to say nothing of being pro-labor, but there's a state on the move too.

You take those three states, Michigan, Minnesota and West Virginia, and you have a start for a pretty fair infiltration by progressive labor, meaning those people who are interested in organized political action, toward the beginning of a labor party under the Democratic name. Then if you consider that California went whole-hog against the Republicans in November, and the Democrats control not only all the state offices, except one I believe, but both houses of the legislature, and that good legislation is going through, there's another state -- a state of course of crackpots,



especially around Los Angeles,— but crackpots often make good organizers and good advance guards for the progressives in the party.

And then, north of California, the longshoremen, Bridges' union, the lumber men, and the building trades have had for many years a tight legislative conference which put the fear of labor, if not the fear of God, into the legislators, and lo and behold, in 1958, two of the remaining Republican Congressmen — the state has four Congressmen — were defeated, one Republican is left, three are now Democrats in Congress, and both Oregon Senators are Democrats, where for years and years, no Democrat was ever sent east. The Governor had been Democrat. A liberal Republican defeated him this year, but the legislature keeps track of him, and Oregon is doing pretty well. The legislature, just a few weeks ago, adopted a resolution urging Eisenhower to relax the controls on trade with China. Of course, they did it for business reasons, but there you are, with one more state. North of Oregon is Washington, with a similar record, not quite so advanced, but getting there.

Then you take the state of New York in the east. Of course, the needle trades union sabotaged the promising third party movement when they split the American Labor Party to form a liberal wing. The American Labor Party has since become defunct, the Liberal Party has not yet been buried, but maybe it will revive, or maybe something else will take its place. The defeat of the Democrats in New York City, New York State, because the party there listened to the Tammany gangsters instead of to organized labor, is something that will be remembered, and there's a much better chance than for any of the splinter parties, the little parties, to work.

Now I'd like to make it plain again that I'm not opposed to small parties, to small parties as such; they keep the torch burning and are the vanguard of political thinking, and politi-

cal feeling, which is even more important than thinking. But they don't accomplish anything in this country in an organized political way. It's the major parties, one or the other, that should be infiltrated, and then captured. And the Democratic Party, which is falling apart in two sections -- has been for a number of generations -- is the most promising, and the results I've cited should encourage us to go on with that. The other Democratic states of an industrial character, where the unions are strong, like Connecticut with its big sweep of Congress in the '58 election; Massachusetts, where the Democrats finally got control of the State Senate (they already had the lower house); and New Jersey, where a Republican was retired for a Democratic U. S. Senator; and Ohio -- I know Ohio is regarded by the Militant and other groups as a shining example of what happens when you use the Democratic Party instead of smaller parties for your work -- but Ohio is just in the beginning of the Democratic capture, the Democratic infiltration by labor, and you'll see results there too.

Now what is the objection to this point of view? I've heard it before, and I'm not going to take away George's thunder by outlining it to you. All I want to say is that anything you can say against the Democratic Party you can say -- and much more -- against the Republican Party. I would like my opponent in this discussion to take up the points that I have presented, of considering the practicality of organized political action by taking over an already established party, instead of going through the agony of trying to set up one of your own.

The members of the Socialist Workers Party, who are very strong pluggers for third party action, who work day and night, especially in campaign time, tirelessly too through the rest of the year, certainly excite my admiration. If their purpose is to keep alive a certain doctrine, presented to any who'll

listen, I will say that's fine. But if their purpose is to capture political control of the community, of the state, or of the nation, then I think they are taking the road that is long, tortuous, full of detours, obstacles, costly, and in the end, barring a revolution, unsuccessful. And why?

Well, I think the Socialist Workers' Party members know the difficulties, for instance, of merely getting on the ballot in industrial states. The fatigue, the disappointment, the cheating against petition circulators that those in control of political action exercise, if they fear they might lose some precinct or some ward or some district because a third party is in the picture. And then, also, the inability to attract followers, in that the American voter is swayed not by reason but by emotion, and the emotion of enjoying a defeat is not widespread enough to make a good third party feasible. There should be some prospect of winning once in a while, in order to attract the mass American voter. I don't see it in any of the third parties that have emerged so far.

I have one more point: The organization of a party, of a third party, is a terrific job, and a very disappointing job, and if you have a party shell already set up for you, why not take it over? It's a good Wall Street game, like the American Car and Foundry Company being taken over by lawyers and financiers, to become A.C.F. Wrigleys — Wrigley's Super Markets. The corporate set-up is all there. And so with the Democrats, the political set-up is all there. And if you think you can't sneak up and capture it, you have less imagination and power of adaptive action than I give you credit for. You've captured three key states — Minnesota, West Virginia, Michigan — then you capture another state, and then for a while there's a set-back because the glowing prospects that were held out by the party speakers don't come true all at once. The takeover has to be postponed a little bit. There are obstacles; but at least you're on the right road. Now, George, you knock that down!

# George Breitman: *negative*

I shall begin by defining what I have in mind by the terms "progressive," "work in" and "Democratic Party."

By "progressive" I mean two things: First, the great social forces that have the power to decide the future — the working class and its allies, the working farmers, the Negro people and the youth. Second, I have in mind the smaller, radical groups and individuals who are repelled by the capitalist system; its anarchy, militarism, depressions, regimentation, inequality and debasement of human and cultural values, and who favor the replacement of this system by one based on cooperation, planning, brotherhood and promotion of the interests of the majority. In short, I use the term "progressive" for those who are pro-labor or anti-capitalist, who are anti-war, anti-fascist, anti-Jim Crow, pro-socialist.

By "work in" I mean belong to, become a member of, vote for, support or endorse.

Now, about the nature of the Democratic Party.

Socialists say that political parties represent, express, reflect class interests. This doesn't mean that parties necessarily say they represent class interests; nor that all their members think they do; nor even that all their members come from the same class. (The truth of this proposition doesn't depend on what socialists say, or what anti-socialists say. It can be tested by facts, the evidence of history, objective analysis.)

When socialists say the Democratic Party is a capitalist party, they don't mean that most of its members are capitalists. Obviously not. If the capitalists had to depend on their own numbers, they couldn't elect a justice of the peace,

for they are a tiny part of the population. Actually, most supporters of the Democratic Party are workers, farmers and members of the middle classes. But they aren't the ones who decide the real aims of the party.

Nationally, the Democratic Party is a coalition — of capitalists and union leaders, of Southern white supremacists and Northern Negroes, of corrupt machines in the cities and unorganized or loosely organized farmers on the land, of conservatives and liberals, etc.

This coalition explains why the Democratic Party says the things it says, why it writes the platforms it writes — for it appeals to conflicting interests and tries to hold them together. It also explains why the Democratic Party sometimes says different things than the other capitalist party, the Republican Party, for the Republican Party has a somewhat different composition and following, making its major appeal for support to the middle classes and non-unionized sections of the working class.

But it doesn't determine which interest controls, dominates, runs and uses the Democratic Party. We say it is dominated, as the Republican Party is dominated, by a minority of its members — by a small group of monopoly capitalists who also control the economy, the government, the means of communication and the educational system.

It doesn't matter what the Democratic platform says — the chief function of this party, as of the Republican Party, is to protect the interests of the monopoly capitalists at home and abroad. It doesn't matter what the candidates of this party say during election campaigns (they usually say what they think will win votes, not what they think) — what counts is what its officeholders do about the important issues of the day.

Only a few examples are possible now:

The overwhelming majority of the people of this country, and of the members of both capitalist parties, want peace, the relaxation of international tensions, a ban on nuclear explosions, and so on. But what do they get? Wars, war crises, preparation for war, militarization, the draft, a permanent arms economy and crushing taxes to maintain it, the continuation of the cold war and cold war propaganda. And the Democratic Party's chief complaint against the Republicans is that they don't appropriate and spend enough for these purposes! On this issue the Democratic Party surely serves the interests of the ruling class faithfully and consistently.

The Democrats differ from the Republicans occasionally on what to do about unemployment, because the Democrats usually have greater support among the unemployed and want to retain that support. But their differences are minor, sometimes insignificant. They agree on the basic things: That the present economic system must not be reorganized to abolish unemployment. That when workers are laid off through no fault of their own, they should suffer cuts in their living standards, rather than the employers. That jobless compensation should not be paid for the duration of unemployment. That the work week should not be shortened. These are things the capitalist class thinks too.

The Jim Crow system in the U.S. is the scandal of the world. Nevertheless the American ruling class shows no intention of abolishing it within the time of anyone now living. In the South, the Democratic Party is a one-party dictatorship dedicated to maintaining white supremacy. In Congress, it provides the bulk of the votes against meaningful civil rights legislation. Northern Democrats have to make some gestures to keep the Negro vote, but their liberalism is rarely more than skin deep on this question. If you elect liberals like Hart and McNamara, who swear undying devotion to the

civil rights cause, the first thing they do when they get to Washington is vote to elect the Southern Democratic enemies of the Negro people to the key Congressional posts, which are used to block civil rights and all other progressive legislation. Liberals like Governor Williams will make impassioned speeches about injustice to Negroes in the South, but no one has ever heard him utter a single word about the most Jim Crow city in the North -- right on his own doorstep, Dearborn, whose mayor boasts that no Negro can live there. So it would be putting it mildly to say that the Democratic Party's policy on civil rights is in accord with that of the ruling class, which always benefits from hatred and discord among the workers.

My final example is civil liberties. We are still suffering from the effects of the witch hunt launched to silence all opposition to the cold war. The record shows that the Democratic Party served the capitalist class just as zealously in this witch hunt as the Republicans. The Democrats passed and enforced the Smith Act to gag political dissent, Democratic presidents transformed the FBI into a political police force. The Democrats started the misnamed government "loyalty" program. A Democratic president initiated the "subversive" blacklist. Democrats spearheaded the passage of the Internal Security Act of 1950. Liberal Democrats took the lead in passing the Humphrey-Butler "Communist Control" Act of 1954. We tend to think of this as the era of McCarthyism, but the Democrats, liberal as well as conservative, were in there doing their fair share of gnawing away at the Bill of Rights. And not only in Washington, but in Lansing too. The Trucks Law of 1952 was the worst and most repressive law ever passed in Michigan. All the Democrats in the legislature voted for it. Williams, begged by the civil libertarians to veto this bill to turn Michigan into a police state, said he could see no reason not to sign it, and sign it he did. For the next four years he ignored all appeals that he call for its repeal. It would still be

on the books if it had been left up to him, rather than the U.S. Supreme Court, which finally struck it down.

Having given an analysis of the Democratic Party, for better or worse, I want to indicate now why it is wrong from just about every conceivable angle for progressives to work in it. I'll take up the labor movement first, the radical groups second.

Unions are created in the first place because there is a fundamental clash of interest between workers and capitalists. A necessary condition for the effective functioning of unions is that they be independent of the capitalists; as we all know, a company union, an organization dominated by the employers, does not and cannot defend the workers' interests. I believe it can be stated as a law — the more independent a union is of capitalists, of individual capitalists and of the capitalist class as a whole, the better able it is to defend the workers' interests. Or if you don't care for the word "law," let me put it this way: Independence of the labor movement is a first principle, recognized and expounded by the best union leaders like Debs and Haywood.

This has always been true, but it is especially true today, when the monopoly stage of capitalism expands the role of the state and gives all struggles, including labor struggles, an openly political character. What labor in our country needs above everything else is a party of its own, which can fight for the needs and aspirations of the workers on the political field as unions can on the economic field. (The present steel negotiations show how inseparable these two fields are becoming.)

But instead of having a party of its own, the labor movement is dependent, in the political sphere, on a party controlled by the capitalists and promoting the interests of the



capitalists. It is a tail to the Democratic kite, at one union leader put it.

This must be designated as a violation of the principle of independence on the basis of which the union movement was created.

It is not only wrong in principle, however. It is also harmful in practice, and the cause of most of the ills besetting the labor movement today.

It was reported not long ago that the unions spent more money on the last congressional election than the Democratic campaign committees did. What have they gotten in return? UAW secretary-treasurer Emil Mazey said about a month ago: "We won an election last November but until now we have not received a single thing from this victory." This is true after every election.

The present Congress, controlled by the Democrats the unions helped to elect, has refused to end the filibuster. It has refused to extend jobless compensation for a year. It has refused to enact a federal standard for jobless compensation. It is on the verge of passing the Kennedy-Erwin bill to further restrict the independence of the unions by subjecting them to government control, a bill which becomes worse and worse every time Congress takes it up. And at the recent conference on unemployment in Washington, all the AFL-CIO could get from the leaders of the Democratic Party was a promise to study the question.

No wonder Jack Crellin of the Detroit Times commented after the jobless conference that the AFL-CIO seems to be getting a "mighty poor return on its investment." And he added, ironically, "At least Jimmy Hoffa get 6 per cent on his."

Hoffa is not our idea of a model labor leader, any more than Reuther is. But sometimes they tell the truth too. I think Hoffa did

that in a recent interview with the Detroit Free Press. Asked to comment on the alliance between the UAW and the Michigan Democratic Party, he said: "The UAW has less power that way. If I got you, I don't have to worry about you. The Democrats control the UAW in Michigan. Reuther has got himself into a trap and doesn't know how to get out." Reuther knows how to get out all right, but except for that, I think Hoffa's statement comes close to the truth, which I would put this way: That, thanks to this alliance, the Democrats have much more influence in the labor movement than the labor movement has in the Democratic Party.

The Democrats can take the unions for granted, because they feel they have them in their pocket; because the unions, having sworn not to create their own party, have nowhere else to go. Who can deny this? Dixiecrats get more concessions from the Democrats than the union leaders do because they threaten to bolt and form their own party. The union leaders not only have become dependent on the Democratic Party, they have become its captives. And this is one of the reasons why the Democratic Party has been moving steadily to the right year after year. So labor's support of the Democrats is wrong in all respects -- from the standpoint of principle, from the pragmatic standpoint of results.

What the labor movement and its allies need is to make a clean break with both capitalist parties, and form an independent labor party dedicated to winning control of the government and putting into effect a program that will meet the needs of the majority of the people.

For radicals and socialists, the situation is even more clear-cut. Our goal -- the creation of a new society through working class political action -- requires that we help the labor movement to break away from capitalist parties and capitalist politics; and to expand the influence and organization of radical and revolutionary

groups and parties fit to provide leadership to the workers in a fight for a better society.

Neither of these objectives can be served by working in the Democratic Party. Again, it is wrong in principle and wrong in every other way that can be measured. The highways are littered with the political corpses of radicals and socialists who entered the Democratic Party with the idea of making it radical, and who ended up by becoming mere liberals or even conservatives themselves.

The main function of the radical movement today is educational and propagandistic, pending the time — not as distant as some radicals think — when it once again can lead the people in great actions and struggles. To educate means first of all to say what is, to tell the people the truth. What good is a radical, what right has he to any hearing, if he doesn't meet this minimum condition?

But you can't be in the Democratic Party and tell the truth to the people. The first thing demanded of you in the Democratic Party is that you support its candidates, that is, help spread the propaganda that the election of Democrats is in the interests of the people. If you do this, you have to lie, you have to cover up the fact that the Democratic Party stands for the cold war, more armaments, little or no help to the unemployed, racial oppression, restrictions on the Bill of Rights, retention of the Taft-Hartley Act, maintenance of the status quo generally.

In short, the condition for working in the Democratic Party is that you must abdicate the primary function of the radical. If everyone did it, it would mean the death of all organized radical opposition to capitalism.

The final test of a policy is in its results. The policy we are debating tonight is not a new one, and it has been tested for a

long time. The labor movement has been working in and supporting the Democratic Party for the last 25 years: Isn't it true, Brother Haessler, that the Democratic Party today stands to the right of where it stood 25 years ago, and not to the left? The main sections of the radical movement have been supporting the Democratic Party, directly or indirectly, with only a few lapses for over 20 years: Can you claim, Brother Haessler, that radical influence in the Democratic Party is greater than it was 20 years ago? Can you claim that radical influence in the country is generally greater today than it was in the days when the radical parties considered it their duty to oppose the Democratic Party at the polls?

Supporting the Democratic Party is at best an exercise in futility for radicals, and one of the causes contributing to their decline. At worst, it is a betrayal of anti-capitalist principles that are at the heart of radicalism, and without which it must decay and die.

It is also a repudiation of the whole past of American radicalism. If it's right to support the Democrats today, if it's wrong to oppose them at the polls and to work in every other way to expose their reactionary character, then everything the old socialist movement did in its best days was also wrong and should be renounced rather than pointed to as an inspiration for the future. If it's right to support the Democrats today, then Debs was wrong in helping to organize the Socialist Party, in running those magnificent election campaigns, in teaching that it is unprincipled for socialists to support capitalist candidates; then Debs was just a hopeless sectarian, whose example has little to offer us today. (Which, incidentally, is what William Z. Foster and the Communist Party now are saying.)

Speaking of Debs reminds me of the question that people sometimes ask: What happened to the old idealism of the socialist move-

ment, the self-sacrificing spirit of solidarity and militancy that the American radical movement used to know? What happened to it was that the leaders of the movement, lacking or losing confidence in the capacity of the workers to change society and govern themselves, began to find all kinds of pretexts and rationalizations for deserting the policies of class struggle and embracing the policies of class collaboration. One of the manifestations of this change was the change from the old principle that it's the duty of socialists to oppose capitalist party candidates, run independent candidates and use election campaigns to expose the nature of capitalism and present the truth about socialism -- a change from this tradition to arguments that independent campaigns achieve nothing, that you must not let yourself get "isolated," that you must adjust yourself to the politics of the labor bureaucrats rather than fight them.

You can't create idealism, you can't maintain militancy and devotion to the great goals of the socialist future through such maneuvers. Take the workers into the Democratic swamp of opportunism, horse trades and dirty machine politics, where any piece of filthy work is justified if it helps win the next election, and you can't expect anything but that it will sap the workers' militancy, devotion to principle and class-consciousness -- if they remain there and don't drop out of politics altogether demoralized.

The future lies with the youth -- the young people just beginning to recover from a decade of cold war conformism. They've heard enough lies to last them for a lifetime. What they need is the truth, simple and direct. Only if they get it will they respond with those reserves of militancy and bravery that are especially characteristic of the young, that seem to be the prerequisite of every genuine revolution, and that can revitalize American radicalism as an effective fighting force. You'll get nowhere telling the youth white lies or half truths about the Democrat-

ic Party. You'll be shirking your duty to them and to the future if you tell them to go work in the Democratic Party.

Therefore the policy dictated to progressives is to oppose the Democratic Party, not to work in it or get others to support it. Those of us who are workers should strive in our unions to bring about a break with capitalist politics and the formation of an independent labor party. Those of us who are radicals and socialists should do everything we can to fight the two-party system, utilize election campaigns to spread socialist ideas and influence, and run socialist slates for office, if possible along the general lines of the Independent-Socialist ticket in New York in 1958.

That ticket, bringing together independent radicals, former Progressive Party members and Socialist Workers Party members in a united socialist campaign against both capitalist parties, was an encouraging progressive alternative to the compromising, demoralizing, self-defeating policy of working in the Democratic Party. The Socialist Workers Party advocated similar united left-wing tickets here in Michigan in the 1957 and 1958 election campaigns. The other radical groups in the state rejected its proposals in those years. We hope they will respond differently to proposals for a united ticket of radicals, socialists and progressives in the 1960 campaign, nationally and locally. If they don't, we promise we will still try to act as socialists should, by placing a socialist ticket on the ballot in Michigan and running a campaign that will help promote independent working class political action by openly telling the truth about capitalism and socialism.

## *Rebuttal by Carl Haessler:*

Let me say first, that many of the things that Brother Breitman said about the Democratic Party as a whole are true enough. And I had no

thought of denying that when I presented the case. What I was arguing was effective political action as against propaganda action, and I notice that one of the most significant things that Brother Breitman said was that for some time to come radical third party action would have to be of a propagandistic nature.

The Democratic Party is regarded by my opponent as one of the few things in the world that doesn't change. Everything else is changing, even the Republican Party, some of the Republicans are liberal, vote in the Senate on the liberal side. But the Democratic Party does not change. It's a stinking mess of corruption and reaction. Just summarizing in three words what we've heard for the last 30 minutes. Now that is obviously an exaggeration. It's permissible in partisan debate, and I won't try to knock it down. I notice that nothing was said by Brother Breitman with regard to my opening point. Which was the capture of the Michigan Supreme Court by the labor-backed and labor-financed Democratic Party.

Certainly Governor Williams signed the Trucks Act. The Republican Supreme Court upheld the Trucks Act and then it went to the U.S. Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court knocked it out. Did one person go to jail in the meantime under the Trucks Act? Was one person fined in the meantime? Very effective debating, Brother Breitman; but let's have all the facts. And so we can take up other things that were mentioned.

Certainly in the U.S. government President Truman started the loyalty program for government employees. But why did he do it? I don't know if he should have done it even in view of the whole facts, but the reason he did it was because McCarthy and his gang, both Democrat and Republican in the Senate, were starting a witch hunt, and Truman, mistakenly or not, thought that this loyalty program was one way to stop it. It wasn't that Truman's heart was in the red-baiting campaign but you know McCarthy's heart was there,

and Truman, as well as those who advised him, thought that this was one way to put a brake on the witch hunt movement. Of course, people suffered, they would have suffered even more if this hadn't been put up. But it was not, as Brother Breitman says, one of the worst smells of the Democratic Party in Washington. It was an attempt to keep a bad thing in check.

So I think we would proceed more fruitfully in this matter if we came down to cases in our own state, where things are getting along pretty well. Of course you say that the Democrats rule labor in this state. Nobody thinks so except the speaker and a few of those who agreed with him beforehand. The whole complaint in this state, in the press, in private party councils of the Republicans and of the old-line Democrats themselves, is not that the Democrats have captured the UAW and its sister unions, but the other way around. Who is the national committeeman from Michigan? Is he a labor man, or a pro-labor man, or is he an old-line Democrat? Who got the biggest vote of all the candidates in the spring election for public office? Was it an old-line Democrat or was it Brother Woodcock, vice-president and crown prince of the UAW, a man who used to be on the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party? Those are the kind of Democrats that own the party in this state.

And my program to you is that there are other states emerging into a similar situation, where organized labor is strong enough, where it has the money to put up, which talks in political campaigns, as our splinter parties know only too well (they could talk a lot louder if they had a lot more money). Those are the things that are promising and those are the things that the youth of our country, if they are interested, organizationally, politically, and not just as a pure sect of propagandists, if they're interested in getting things done politically, helping to guide their course, that's the kind of direction that the youth, interested in organized



political action, should take.

Now I've heard, and I used to spout it myself, and I believed it for many, many years, that what Brother Breitman has proposed tonight is the true course. I no longer think so. We have to recognize conditions in this country, that it's the two-party system, very hard to overthrow, that you start working politically effectively by getting into that party, and you realize that the national party doesn't mean anything except once in four years. It's a coalition of state machines, and when you begin to get your hand in the state machine, you're getting to be one of the little levers, and then you and your friends reach out and get hold of bigger levers, and finally you control the whole thing. As I said a year ago, you get into that Democratic car, and when the time comes, you grab the wheel and then you run it. You run it the way you and your other labor members want it run; and then the Michigan car, the New Jersey car, and the Minnesota car, and the California car, and the Pennsylvania car, and the West Virginia car and all the others, then you get together, you'll have a national fleet of cars. Not run by old-line Democrats.

In fact, enlightened Northern Democrats have begun to realize that the party doesn't need the Dixiecrats in order to win nationally. They're telling them to go to hell. And the Dixiecrats aren't doing it. You watch 1960, the Dixiecrats know they can no longer run the Democratic Party but they know that by the seniority system, which Brother Breitman thinks is so terrible, the Dixiecrats can still hang on to certain committee chairmanships. They now have both the speaker of the House and the majority leader in the Senate. But what did those two men do just a few months ago? They formally severed their connection with the Dixiecrat caucus, the Southern group, and affiliated with the Western caucus. Both Speaker Rayburn and Senate majority

leader Johnson. Now Brother Breitman may think they did this with the fell intent of running the Western states. My opinion is that they climbed on a bandwagon. On a growing bandwagon. And in time, Rayburn, who is way up in his seventies, will retire on a fat pension, or he'll die. Other Southerners will die too, some will get defeated by younger men, the chairmanships will go around, and you take a freshman Senator like Hart, coming up to Washington and asking for his committee appointments, and he's apt to be in the Senate for a long time. I know he married a millionairess -- the daughter of a sweatshop manufacturer of the worst odor in Detroit, the late Mr. Briggs, who used to pay his women 10¢ an hour and cheat them on overtime. Well, Briggs isn't in control and I doubt whether Miss Briggs, now Mrs. Hart, controls Hart himself. I know that Hart has wrong things about him, I know that in the last campaign he bragged he was one of those who red-baited against the Communist Party. Of course, all sorts of people have red-baited against the Communist Party; Norman Thomas has done it as effectively as Walter Reuther has done it. But that's political opportunism and not conviction. Because one of the grievances that the Socialist Party in my opinion has against the reds, against the Communists, is that the Communists have made a going concern of a number of countries and the Socialists never have. But that's just family bickering, apart from the main course tonight: What should a progressive who is interested in organized political action do? Should he work in the Democratic Party? Yes, that's what I repeat for George's rebuttal.

## *Rebuttal by George Breitman:*

When Brother Haessler says that the Democratic Party can become a labor-dominated party, he puts me in the position of trying to prove a negative, which is a difficult thing to do. On the bus the other day I overheard two teenagers:

One asked if the other believed in ghosts. The second said, "No, there are no such things." The first said, "How can you say that when you can't prove it? Go ahead, prove that there are no ghosts." All the second could do was mutter that you can't prove the moon isn't made of green cheese either.

It's hard to prove a negative to the satisfaction of all. I've tried to show how the unions and many radicals have been working for a long time to move the Democratic Party to the left, and all that's happened is that it's moved to the right. I say it's your job to disprove that. Or to show why efforts to reform the Democratic Party will have any different results now than they had in the past. It's not enough to merely assert that the Democratic Party can be changed from an instrument of the capitalist class into an instrument of the working class — you have to demonstrate this possibility by current developments and trends, by logic, by the lessons of experience, which I've tried to use.

But Brother Haessler makes my job easier when he claims that the Democratic Party already has changed, and already has "for all practical purposes" been captured by labor in Michigan, among other states. This is a question of fact which all of you can test for yourselves. Let me cite a few of the many examples you will find showing that the labor movement, far from controlling the Democratic Party in this or any other state, is a captive of the Democratic Party; is a prisoner of the Williamses and the Staebblers; is the tail, not the dog.

Just four months ago the Michigan AFL-CIO decided to conduct a fight for a state law to pay unemployment compensation for the duration of unemployment. This was a big step forward for the labor movement. They showed they were serious when they got the Democratic minority leader in Lansing and other Democrats in the House to agree to sponsor and introduce the bill. Then Williams

stepped in. He didn't attack the bill directly, just said that it was different from what he favored, and he would have to study it. But that did it. The Democrats in Lansing backed away on the double. Not one of them would introduce the bill after that. The AFL-CIO helped to elect 67 Democrats now in Lansing, but not one of them will even introduce this bill. However, that's not the worst part -- the most miserable thing of all is that the AFL-CIO then dropped the proposal too -- its own proposal. They don't advocate in May what they said was necessary in January. Three days ago the AFL-CIO held a conference in Lansing on unemployment, and failed to even mention this bill that they said was necessary in January -- even mention it as one of their long-range objectives. Labor supplies the money and the votes to elect the Democrats, but the Democrats have a greater voice in determining labor's program than labor has in determining the Democrats'.

Another example of who's captured who: We in Michigan pay among the highest consumers taxes in the country. The Democratic platform of 1948, 1950, 1952, 1954, pledged opposition to additional consumers taxes. In January, 1955, the Republicans introduced a road construction program involving an increase of 2¢ a gallon in the consumers tax paid on gasoline. The CIO denounced this plan. So did Williams. He called it a "political plunderbund." and said "it almost made me gag." Almost -- but not quite. Because less than a month later, he accepted a so-called compromise in which the added consumers tax was set at 1½¢ rather than 2¢. The CIO then dropped its opposition to added consumers taxes. And its members in the legislature voted for the increase. Of course if a Republican Governor had violated his platform in such a fashion, the CIO would have denounced him from hell to breakfast as a man whose promises were worthless, whose platform wasn't worth the paper it was printed on. But that's not the point I'm trying to make now. The point is, this is another example of how the labor movement's own

program becomes conservatized as a result of its alliance with the Democrats; another example showing who is the master in this alliance. You are urged to be practical, but I really can't think of anything more utopian than the idea of trying to capture the Democratic Party away from its bosses. It's not a democratic organization controlled by its members. It is a highly bureaucratic structure dominated from the top. You can't take it away from its bosses. If you did in this or that isolated case, you'd either be expelled, or the anti-labor elements would walk out and get the recognition of the national party. And you would end up having "captured" only yourselves.

The second thing to understand about this is that the union leaders don't want to capture the Democratic Party. They're as much against capturing the Democratic Party as they are against forming a labor party, because they don't want labor to have its own party, no matter how it originates. Until 1952, the CIO delegates at the Michigan State Democratic Convention used to meet in a caucus to discuss what they, the CIO delegates, were going to do. But at the spring convention in 1952, some of them talked incautiously about "taking over." Well, they were quickly squelched by Gus Scholle, who told them, "You won't capture anyone but yourselves." Since 1952, the labor delegates at the Democratic convention no longer even meet as a caucus, as a separate group. They have less intention of "taking over" than ever before. My point here is, you'll have just as big a fight on your hands trying to get the unions to capture the Democratic Party as you will in trying to get them to decide to form a labor party. The difference is; when you win the labor movement to a labor party, you'll have something, while if you finally succeed in getting the unions to try to take over the Democratic Party, you'll have accomplished little, because the Democratic Party won't let itself be captured. From a purely practical standpoint, which has been invoked here,

it is far more realistic to keep fighting inside the unions for a labor party than to try to make the unions try to capture the Democratic Party.

Brother Haessler speaks about great accomplishments from labor infiltration of the Democratic Party in Michigan. He spoke on it at some length, but in the end he had only one concrete example of an accomplishment, and that was the decision of the Michigan Supreme Court on unemployment compensation. But this decision is not really as remarkable as he says. All it provides is that under certain conditions, workers laid off as a result of a strike in other states shall be eligible for unemployment compensation. But according to Williams and the UAW, around 35 other states in the country already have provisions similar to that. And nobody would seriously claim that their having such provisions is the result of the Democratic Party or courts being controlled by the labor movement in those states.

Brother Haessler asks if this could have been done through any other force than the Democratic Party; if it could be done by the Socialist Workers Party or any of the other small radical groups at the present time. Obviously the answer is no. They are not in a position now to get a majority of the state Supreme Court. But it doesn't follow that labor therefore is forced to rely on the Democratic Party. It can get concessions of this modest caliber by exerting mass pressure on both capitalist parties, without supporting either. And it can get much bigger concessions by forming its own party to fight both old parties. The alternative should not be restricted to the small radical parties of today or the Democratic Party of today; the choice for progressives is also between the Democratic Party of today and the labor party that the union movement is now capable of building.

Brother Haessler points to the difficulties of building a labor party. I think

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do overstates them. The labor movement in the United States is big enough to build its own party; it is bigger than the labor movement in other countries that have a labor party. It can do it if it wants to. In its very first election, a labor party would sweep the big cities in the United States. Here in Detroit it could elect five or six Labor Congressmen to replace the Democrats. It could do this in all the other big cities too. From the very beginning it could have in Congress a large bloc of Congressmen who would fight for the things labor wants, and which it doesn't have there now. From the start it would emerge as the second party, rather than a third party, because the Democratic Party minus the labor movement will amount to very little. What's lacking for this is not personnel, what's lacking is not the people with the experience to run such a party, or to be its candidates, or to get it on the ballot, or to do its precinct work. What's lacking is the will, which is paralyzed by the opposition of the top union leaders. The job of progressives in the labor movement is to fight to crystallize that will by opposing the political policies of the leadership, not to support and aid them.

I might say if we're going to mention "all the facts" that Justice George Edwards, who is presented here as something of a hero because he spent 30 days in jail as a union organizer in 1937, also has another achievement in his record -- namely that in 1949, as president of the Detroit City Council, he was the one who introduced and pushed for the passage of the reactionary City Loyalty Investigating Committee. And it is Edwards among others who is pointed to as one of the bulwarks of liberalism on the Supreme Court. It is like the attempt here to defend the Democrats pushing through witch hunt measures on the ground that they were trying to prevent the Republicans from pushing through worse witch hunt measures, which seems to me to be carrying the argument of the "lesser evil" to the point of absurdity.



I was interested by Brother Haessler's advice to Reuther to abandon the Socialist Party, and avoid those "entangling little alliances." Reuther was to some extent perhaps persuaded by him; at any rate we know he left the Socialist Party for substantially such reasons. The trouble is that he got engaged instead in one big alliance, with the Democratic Party, and it's that in which the labor movement is badly entangled and hamstrung.

For progressives to spend their time and effort working in the Democratic Party is neither progressive nor practical. This policy does not result in teaching workers that they cannot trust capitalist politicians and parties. Instead, it results in strengthening illusions that the Democratic Party is a lesser evil, and that they can solve their problems through that party rather than needing a new party. It does not educate the workers to act along the lines of class struggle in politics. On the contrary, it encourages and justifies the continuation of class collaboration in politics. You cannot serve the cause of socialism and progress by telling the workers that the Democrats are worthy of support despite their pro-capitalist, pro-war, pro-witch hunt, pro-Jim Crow program. Therefore, we appeal to Carl Haessler and all other progressives who favor spending their considerable talents in the Democratic Party to reconsider.

The world tide is now against capitalism. Workers have ended it in many parts of the world. In the United States too, incurable sicknesses are coming to the fore — growing discontent with foreign policy, a new permanent army of unemployed, a deepening demand for integration, an intense restlessness and instability. New opportunities are about to open up for radicals. Let us try to work together to meet them. We still have differences among ourselves. Without denying them or forgetting them, let us work together in those areas where we see eye to eye — in our political opposition to war, depression, racial oppression, infringements of civil liberties. Let us get

together on these issues, and do in 1960 what the progressives and socialists did in New York last year: Let us put in the field a united Independent-Socialist ticket that will challenge both capitalist parties and educate all the people that it can reach to understand the necessity for a new party and a new society.

## *Final Rebuttal* by Carl Haessler:

I have a few minutes in what you might call re-rebuttal. I haven't anything to say against Brother Breitman's peroration. I think the ideals expressed are noble; are ideals that I agree with. I further have nothing to say against his appeals for certain people to devote themselves to the organizing of an independent labor party. If they wish to, let them do it. And let me say further that I myself am not enough interested in political organization work to work in the Democratic Party. What I've been presenting is a practical program for those who are politically, organizationally interested. If you want to work and achieve practical political results in this state and a number of other states, do it through the Democratic Party. Don't waste your time trying to achieve practical results in these non-existent or barely existent third parties of all sorts. That's all I was proposing.

To come down to a few trivial points, I didn't parade George Edwards as a hero, he's not one of my heroes. I was simply showing the course of evolution by labor control of the Democratic Party in this state. Here was a jailbird, in jail for the contempt of the courts in our state. He is now sitting on the topmost court in the state, and bawling out lower judges for not acting in a progressive manner.