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The Struggle for a Mass Labor Party in the U.S.

By William Z. Foster

The American working class is notoriously weak politically. It has no mass political party, and its conservative leaders, many of them wealthy, are open advocates of the capitalist system. The trade unions are potentially very strong, however, counting all told some 18 million members. Traditionally, the unions have acted, and still do, as a sort of skeleton political organization of the workers. Consequently, there is very little real working-class political activity, and the workers have extremely few representatives in the national, state, and local governmental bodies. There are five radical parties in the country—Socialist Labor Party (dogmatic sectarian); the Socialist Party; the Trotskyites; the Independent-Socialist Party (a new attempt at a general socialist party); and the Communist Party. But they are all numerically weak; jointly, at most, they hardly reach 15,000 members. Thus, the Socialist Party, which attains a mass size in many countries, is only a tiny sect of not over 1200 members in the United

States. The Communist Party, which for many years was larger, several times over, than all the other Left parties put together, has lately been through a very severe crisis, with intense persecution from the government and a malignant development of revisionism; and yet it still has more than double the members of all the other Left parties combined. There are no doubt thousands of additional persons who consider themselves as Socialists or Communists, but do not have organizational ties at the present time. It is also true that the membership figures are not an accurate yardstick of the influence of the socialists and communists today—or in the past.

Monopoly capital rules the United States politically through the so-called two-party system. This system is made up of the Republican and Democratic parties, typical capitalist parties, both of which, although in somewhat different ways, are controlled by big capital. Their policies are very much alike. Historically, they have largely alternated in head-

ing the government. At present, the Republicans have been in office since 1952; and before that, for 20 years, the Democrat Roosevelt-Truman administrations were in power. The Republican Party is the favorite of the big bourgeoisie, but they also support and control the Democratic Party. The Democrats, for example, led the government during the two world wars, and also during the Korean War, and they have been generally depended upon to advance the imperialist program of big business. These parties pretend to represent the whole people and to stand above the class struggle.

In the November, 1958 national elections the Democrats won a striking victory. Their total membership in the Senate and the House jumped up from 284 to 347. The working class, as usual, voted almost exclusively for the two capitalist parties, principally the Democratic. The Democrats polled the votes of some 25 million workers, Negroes, small farmers, and other normally people's-front elements; whereas, the combined vote of the four Left-independent parties did not exceed 100,000 votes—the Communist Party, under government ban, was not on the ballot. The election vote was enormously one-sided with regard to the two-party system, and it graphically illustrates how serious a problem that system presents. It is the purpose of this article to indicate how the capitalist two-party system has grown, the struggle that has

been waged by the masses against it, and what ought to be done to it now in order to win the long fight for a mass independent workers' political party.

THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

The Republican Party was formed in 1854. Abraham Lincoln, its leader in the Civil War, heading a popular coalition, abolished Negro chattel slavery, broke the power of the Southern plantation owners, and carried through the second bourgeois revolution. Shortly after the war, however, the popular coalition feature largely disappeared, the workers especially going to the Democratic Party, and the militant capitalists taking full charge of the Republican Party with control of the entire United States.

At the present time, the Republican Party, a typical party of monopoly capital, is built upon, and primarily draws its financial, voting, and other strength, from the following forces: the chief owners and management of industry, the banks, public utilities, and the vast railroad systems; the richer farmers; the numerous upper middle class; the bulk of the leading strata of the huge army, navy and air force; the upper sections of the Protestant clergy; almost all the leading forces in the newspaper, radio, motion picture, television, and general publishing business; the top cadres of the universities and other higher insti-

tutions of learning; also affiliated with the Republican Party is a sizeable minority of the more conservative trade-union leaders, and a large body of the more backward workers. The Party has a relatively weak following in the South, which is strongly Democratic. The Democratic Party was formed in 1800, by Thomas Jefferson. Originally mostly a party of small farmers, backwoodsmen, and workers, it fell under the control, through the years, of the Southern slave-holding interests. It was their party during the Civil War. It survived this terrific defeat, however, and eventually came to play a decisive national role again. Nevertheless, it was not until 25 years after the Civil War began that it was again able to elect a President of the United States.

Today, of the two major parties, the Democratic Party has much the fewer of the large capitalists. Its strength, first, is in the South, where ever since the Civil War period, it has tightly controlled a dozen states, the Solid South—the most reactionary part of the United States; this party also has the support (generally unofficial) of the large bulk of the labor movement, both leaders and rank-and-file; the great majority of the Negro people, most of whose voters are in the North; it has the (unofficial) support of the Catholic Church; a heavy backing generally of such large immigrant groups as the Irish, Poles, Italians, and Spanish-speaking peoples —

Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, etc.; it also controls the bulk of the Jewish population, which is mostly situated in the strongly strategic State of New York; it has always had a strong following among the poorer farmers; it controls the bulk of the big cities and heavy industrial centers—New York, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Boston, San Francisco, etc. Both parties have strong support among women, but it is questionable which is the greater. In recent years, generally, the Democratic Party has a considerably larger membership on the state voter registration rolls than the Republican, so the latter has to depend upon its strong control of the press and other means of communications to swing the masses in the elections. The Republican Party is the minority party in the two-party system, but it has much the larger financial support.

Then there are the "independent voters," who number many millions. They alternate between the parties, being swayed by the various issues and candidates. These voters decide most elections. American elections are chiefly struggles between the two parties to win these strategic votes. Great numbers of voters, dissuaded by the similarity of the two parties, do not vote at all—in the presidential election of 1952, for example, only 51% of the available votes were cast.

The two parties are animated with the spirit and interest of American

imperialism; and both, when they are in power, carry out its policies. This is strikingly manifest since the World War II period. Especially in foreign policy, the difference between the two parties is negligible. The Democrats, Truman and Acheson, carried out at least as reactionary a cold-war policy as the Republicans, Eisenhower and Dulles are now doing. The leadership of the many groups making up the Democratic Party is so generally in favor of the world-conquest line of big business, that it has historically made but little difference to big capital which of the parties is in power. For example, many leaders of the AFL-CIO, who have great influence in the Democratic Party, are notorious imperialistic saber-rattlers, and are not a whit behind the biggest capitalists in demanding larger armaments and more war-like policies by the government. Indeed, during the recent visit to the United States of Vice-Premier Mikoyan of the Soviet Union, the big labor leaders boycotted the visitor, with insults, whereas the capitalists generally met freely with him. Dulles heartily congratulated the labor men for their reactionary spirit. Notwithstanding the similarity in policy of the two parties, the class composition of the Democratic Party is much more proletarian, progressive, and peace-loving than the Republican Party. The autocratic leaders of both parties do not reflect the interests or ideas of the American masses.

Although on foreign policy the attitudes of the two parties are almost identical (their quibbles on the question being mostly around the matter of which party could carry out the imperialistic policies the better or cheaper), there are, however, some differences between their lines on domestic policies. As a rule, the Democratic Party takes a somewhat more liberal, or more pro-labor, position on various questions. This is particularly the case since the time of the Roosevelt Administration, 1933-1945. It will be recalled that President Roosevelt, a Democrat, pressed by the masses, liberalized many aspects of American life and policy. A typical example of the relatively more liberal attitude of the Democratic Party was to be seen during the recent national elections. At this time, the Republicans strongly advocated the so-called "right-to-work" laws (which are really right-to-scab laws), whereas the Democratic Party (under heavy labor pressure) took a sharply negative attitude towards these laws. The voters agreed with the Democrats. This issue was one of the main reasons why the Republicans were so badly defeated. This liberal-labor shade of the Democrats is to be found in various domestic questions. During the past generation the Democrats have written the vast bulk of such liberal and labor laws as were adopted in the United States. These laws were grossly inadequate, however, and in no way met the real

needs of the workers. In times of crisis, when the employers, compelled to do so by the workers, have had to make some concessions, they have almost always done this through the Democratic Party.

The comparatively more liberal-labor attitude of the Democratic party, which is, however, thin, is the basic reason why the workers, over the years, have tended to support that party. They consider its policies more liberal and more beneficial to their general class interests than are those of the Republican Party. This is the real basis of the two-party system among the masses. On the other hand, often the parties take very similar positions even on labor matters; for example, when the infamous Taft-Hartley bill was passed a decade ago, severely affecting labor, large numbers of Democrats as well as Republicans in Congress voted for it, even though President Truman vetoed it. In the present Congress, there are two bills being considered that vitally affect the inner life of the trade unions, one presented by the Eisenhower administration, and the other by Senator Kennedy, a Democrat. Organized labor (but not the Left wing) is supporting the Kennedy Bill; nevertheless, so similar are the two bills, that about the only criticism the "progressive" union leader, Walter Reuther, had to make of the Republican bill was that it was slovenly written.

Although advocates of a third

party often denounce the two major parties as "tweedle-dee and tweedle-dum" and point to many common points in their programs, yet such an easy characterization does not accurately describe the record or the composition of the two parties. Masses of workers do not accept such an easy formula. Since the Roosevelt administration especially, they consider the Democratic Party as their party. Spokesmen for both parties speak of their respective parties as being coalition parties. On many issues the differences within each party are as wide as between the two parties. The American proletariat, however, which has no socialist ideology, has tended to accept the small concessions won through the Democratic Party as a reason for participating in the two-party system; that is one of the big penalties it pays for endorsing the capitalist system.

The Republican Party habitually makes strenuous efforts to appear, in its propaganda at least, as the defender of the interests of the working class, poor farmers, Negroes, etc.; but without much success, these masses generally giving their support to the Democrats. Both parties, however, have strong "Left" wings, which seek to lend a liberal-labor coloration, of the weak American variety, to the general election agitations. In making their participation in the old parties more effective, the trade unions and their allies build up elaborate educational and

general working organizations. In this respect, the AFL-CIO has had, for many years past, COPE and PAC, which are to be found in nearly all the major centers.

Particularly since the end of World War II, an important factor in the working of the two-party system is the strong pressure of the international socialist and democratic forces against various outrageous employer features of the American class struggle. The employers must take cognizance of this pressure because American imperialism, striving to win world domination, must make strong democratic pretenses in all countries, and consequently it must pay attention to the protests of peoples abroad against certain barbarous policies of American imperialism at home. This pressure has become very sharp, and it has had many good effects in the United States. Thus, for example, when in the early 1950's the United States was deeply plagued with "McCarthyism," and it appeared about to go fascist, criticism and protests poured in from all over the world, not only from the socialist countries but also from liberal and labor forces in the capitalist countries, allies or potential allies of the United States. This pressure was decisively important, helping in the defeat that was eventually administered to the McCarthyites. Similar restrictive effects have been exercised upon the Ku Klux Klan and like organizations.

But the most outstanding effects of the foreign democratic pressure has been in combatting the terrible abuses of the Negro people under the Jim-Crow system. If barbarous mob lynching of Negroes has not lately been practiced as often as before in the United States, the principal reason therefore has been the protests of civilized people throughout the world. American capitalism could not make any democratic pretenses in the world while openly perpetrating these barbarities. The same has been true of many other gross discriminations of the Jim-Crow system—in jobs, on trains, in schools, in dwellings, in buses, etc. The United States rulers do not want to abolish these profitable outrages outright, but they simply cannot face the indignation of the peoples of the world unless they find some way to take off their rough edges, and make them not so obvious. This is a basic reason why the Supreme Court has declared that the public schools must be open to Negroes as well as to whites. The foreign influence argument is constantly made both by Republicans and Democrats.

HISTORICAL EFFORTS TO BREAK AWAY FROM THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

Throughout the past two generations, or more, the advanced section of the workers and their political allies (Negroes, farmers, low-

er middle class, etc.) have made very many efforts to free themselves from the imperialist shackles of the two-party system. They have condemned it ceaselessly and waged endless war against it. They have generally recognized the supreme disadvantage for workers of trying to function politically under the domination of the monopolists in the two-party system. This has meant that the amount of their political achievements has been telescoped, their ideology distorted, and their organization (economic as well as political) stunted. These "third-party" movements were fought for under slogans of sweeping economic reforms, of broad programs of nationalization of industry, of monetary reform, of world peace, and of socialism. From its inception as a practical force, about 75 years ago, the American Left has always realized, as one of its first requirements, the necessity for independent working-class political action, free from bourgeois control, and it has waged innumerable battles to this general end. The Left, however, usually under-estimated the strong hold of the two-party system upon the masses. The fight against the two-party system has been one of the major aspects of the people's fight against monopoly domination.

The employers, mostly the monopolists, have fought stubbornly, and on the whole successfully, to preserve their two-party system. If the most conscious workers saw its

disadvantages, the employers, by the same token, recognized its advantages for themselves. They used many weapons in its defense; they placed legal obstacles against establishing third parties; they cut down the political representatives of such bodies; their gangsters failed to count third-party votes; they kept up an enormous propaganda against such parties in the press; and such political concessions as they had to make (usually won by the militancy of the Left) they passed out by way of the old parties, which tended to strengthen their hold on the workers. This latter fact cannot be ignored, when it is realized that during the course of its long historic struggle the workers have cut their weekly working hours from about 60 to some 40; built the trade unions from 50,000 members to about 18 millions; established the social security system, however inadequate; adopted many reforms of the terrible conditions of the Negro people under the Jim-Crow system; etc. Although won by the toiling masses, the credit for these reforms, in a legislative sense, went primarily to the old parties, especially the Democratic. Above all, the monopolists prize the two-party system as a major means for stifling the ever-recurring class conscious spirit of the workers.

The greatest aid to the monopolists, however, in maintaining the two-party system, has been the help of the conservative trade-union lead-

ers. Ever since the Gompers group formed the American Federation of Labor, in 1881, they have unswervingly followed essentially the political policy of "reward your friends and punish your enemies" in the two-party system. They have been the bitterest foes of every real attempt to establish independent working-class political action, down to this very day. Frank advocates of capitalism as the best system for the workers, they have ridden the wave of advancing American imperialism. The employers, in numerous ways, have always reciprocated for the loyal support of these leaders of the two-party system, and have fought with them against the Left to block working-class political action. For many years, having only a small labor movement, principally of skilled workers, these conservatives argued that organized labor, a minority, could never be elected with a party of its own. This untrue argument they have continued down to the present day, when, with the enormous growth and unification of the labor movement and the extension of its political allies, the situation is basically different than it was under Gompers. Today, the allied classes included under the slogan of the labor party represent a big majority of the American people.

During the long struggle against the two-party system, the workers built innumerable organizations, on a local scale, and national scale, to

work in the old parties. These ranged from general educational organizations to skeleton political parties. As we have seen earlier, they have generally failed to develop into parties. The big new-party efforts at independent political action have always taken place during periods of sharp class struggle, during or after economic crisis, or times of acute political struggle, when the two-party system failed the workers and it was imperative for them to embark upon vigorous mass action on their own.

From the earliest days, the organized workers tried to build a class political party; in 1828, 1866, and 1876, for example. But the first big attempt in this direction was the Populist movement of the 1880's-1890's. The People's Party was organized in 1892; it was composed principally of poor farmers of the Mid-West and South, including large numbers of Negroes. Many workers and some trade unionists participated, but the AFL leadership was against it. The party had an extensive program of monetary reform and government ownership, especially of the railroads and telegraph. It polled its biggest vote—1,523,979—in 1894, in the midst of a severe economic crisis; it elected many candidates, and passed various state agrarian reform laws. The People's Party died in the election of 1896, when it was steered back into the Democratic Party by William Jennings Bryan.

The second great attempt to break from the two-party system was made by the Socialist Party, organized in 1900. It strived to build an independent party, separate from the old parties. It reached its height of development in the intense class struggle period of 1912-20. At this time, it had over 100,000 members, polled more than 900,000 votes for Debs, had two members in Congress, and held a large number of lesser positions. The Socialist Party was very strong in the trade unions, in 1912 polling one-third of the AFL convention delegates. It shrivelled to a sect after 1920, mostly because of its wrong policies in the war and towards the Russian Revolution. These errors, and others, caused it to lose its powerful Left-wing in a devastating split. In order to defeat the Socialist Party, as Lenin pointed out, a big diversion was organized in the Republican Party, which threatened to affect the two-party system from the Right. Theodore Roosevelt, who represented the United States Steel interests, organized the Progressive Party (Bull Moose), which polled 27 per cent of the total vote, carried several states, and caused the defeat of the Republican Party in the 1912 elections. The highly demagogic Progressive Party died, however, never putting up another national candidate after 1912. The 1912 election was won by the Democrat, Woodrow Wilson, with his system of reforms entitled "The New Free-

dom."

The greatest attack ever made upon the two-party system took place in the 1919-24 period. It was a political expression of the life and death struggle of the American labor movement after World War I. It took the form of the independent candidacy of Philip M. La Follette for President of the United States in 1924. The movement was endorsed generally by labor and farm organizations. For the first time in its history the AFL, under the heavy mass pressure, had to support an independent national ticket. The labor leaders made it clear, however, that by this action they were not implying that they favored a third party. The La Follette ticket polled 4,826,000 votes, some 17 per cent of the total cast. Undoubtedly, it was robbed of many votes by political chicanery. La Follette's program was largely defensive of the toilers' organizations and it had mostly a trade-union character. As soon as the election was over, the AFL leaders, in firm control, skillfully steered the whole movement back into the Democratic Party, where it was quickly dissolved. The Communist Party played a very important part in this great struggle, fighting resolutely for the establishment of a mass labor party.

In the latter 1930's, the workers also made a strong attempt to establish a mass independent party, as usual a labor party, made up of workers, Negroes, and farmers. This

was the Roosevelt period. President Roosevelt favored the formation of trade unions, but he gave no support to the building of a labor party, which would be a rival to the Democratic Party, of which he was the head. The AFL leaders, as usual, were like flint against it, and the heads of the newly formed Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO) were only half-hearted for it. The workers, who were extremely militant in these years, brought several million new members into the trade unions; they organized the trustified basic industries, and they formed the CIO. In a political sense, however, their principal achievements were limited to the foundation of an informal political educational organization with Labor's Non-Partisan League in the early years of CIO, which was continued by the United Mine Workers of America. Then the CIO established their Political Action Committee, which was similar to the Labor League for Political Education of the AFL; both of these were later combined, with the merger of the AFL-CIO, into the present Committee for Political Education (COPE) of the united AFL-CIO.

With effective leadership, the workers would readily have founded a great labor party. The only state where they actually succeeded in building a strong party was New York, where the American Labor Party was organized. This body lasted several years, and it polled

up to half a million votes. The Communist Party, fighting generally for a labor party, took a very active part in these developments, and was especially influential in the establishment of the Labor Party in New York State. Altogether, the Roosevelt period, with its many reforms, was one in which the two-party system made heavy inroads into the loyalties of the working class, capitalizing on the fighting spirit of the workers. An important split-off of the New York Labor Party is the Liberal Party. It is based principally upon the trade unions and liberals, and it also contains the main forces of the Socialist Party. The Liberal Party continues to get upwards of 250,000 votes, and puts up tickets on a statewide scale.

The latest mass attempt to set up an independent labor party was the formation of the Progressive Party in 1948. This party made peace its central platform, and it was an out-growth of the attempt of the American government to establish world domination by military aggression. The Communist Party actively supported its formation. The leaders of both the AFL and the CIO, however, were violently opposed to it. Consequently, it received but little organized trade-union support. It nominated Henry A. Wallace for President, and polled 1,158,000 votes. After that election, the Progressive Party declined, but carried through the 1952 election campaign, when Vincent Hallinan

was the candidate in the presidential race. It soon after dissolved in most states, but continued in New York for a short while. President Truman, of the Democratic Party, adopting an extensive program of reform, successfully combatted the Progressive Party, as well as the States Rights Party (the Dixiecrat split in the South, which cost him five states); and he won the election. The Dixiecrats have since mainly returned to the Democratic Party.

The foregoing were the most important (but not the only) blows struck by the workers and their friends against the two-party system. Although these many independent movements were responsible for numerous reform laws being passed, they never succeeded in their objective of founding a mass party of labor and its allies. Most of the struggles in question were carried through essentially upon a people's front basis. For many years, the workers, farmers, and other democratic elements have tended to cooperate together politically—consequently, in 1935, the Communist International said that the labor party was the specific form of the people's front in the United States. Most of the above mass attempts at founding a great independent party, as we have seen, took place in periods of sharp class struggle, when the working class was on the march. We have indicated the general outlines of their program, their po-

litical results, and why they dissolved. The opening paragraphs of this article, describing the present political situation in the United States, give at least an indication of how strongly the two-party system is entrenched, and how weak, in actual existence, is the mass independent political organization of the working class.

THE TIDE BEGINS TO TURN

For many years, the monopolists have kept much of the political discontent and strength of the American working class locked within the two-party system. This condition is now evidently drawing to a close, although there are no prospects now for a third party in 1960. There is a gradual ripening of the workers for sharp political struggles, which could eventually break the two-party system. After many years of relatively full employment, there are now almost 5,000,000 unemployed, and the workers are in no mood to tolerate such conditions, which, under the influence of the economic crisis and automation, will grow worse. The workers are also alarmed and aroused at inflation, and are striving to fight against it. They are deeply stirred, too, at the growing attacks upon the trade unions. The Negro people, the most militant section of the American toiling masses, are enraged at the stubborn resistance of the reactionaries against the most

elementary reforms of the Jim-Crow system. The class collaboration, which the employers cultivated as part of their world conquest program—they had to have a docile working class—is now giving place to sharper anti-working class policies. The frustration of American imperialism and its world domination ambitions, is also tending to render more acute the general crisis of capitalism and the class struggle in the United States. World socialist pressure on American imperialism also affects this class struggle. All this is awakening a new militancy among the masses. This is why the Republicans were so heavily defeated in last fall's national elections; Eisenhower's prestige is tumbling, and it is generally expected that the 1960 presidential election will be a still sharper struggle. This growing militancy of the workers can well result in important steps forward towards the eventual formation of a labor party.

The deepening of the general crisis of the capitalist system, is presenting many problems to the workers, which they cannot possibly find answers for under the traditional two-party system. They will be compelled to move towards more militant forms of economic and political action. This will enable them to throw their real mass strength into the struggle, which they cannot do as long as they are tied politically under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. Besides the rising mili-

tancy of the workers, another factor of great importance is the increased interest and activity of the Left wing in doing political work inside of the two capitalist parties. From time immemorial, the bulk of the Left forces have demurred at working inside these parties. A reason for this is that under capitalist control the latter have furnished a fruitful route for labor betrayers to the capitalist fleshpots, at the expense of the working class.

Now, however, adopting protective measures against these deadly dangers, the workers are fast becoming convinced that they must put up a real fight in the old parties as the first step to more extensive independent political action. The Communist Party worked for many years, with a high degree of success, within the two-party system, together with the progressives in the labor movement as their allies. But due to splits in the labor movement, government persecution, and the inroads of revisionism, this work within the old parties has largely declined in recent years. The Communist Party, however, is now greatly widening its activities in this general direction, upon a much broader scale than ever. The Party must be prepared to work resolutely within the old parties, and to avoid needless and premature splits.

At the present stage, the work in the old parties consists of the systematic organization of the program and organic strength of la-

bor in the Democratic (and Republican) Party. There must be a clear mass presentation of labor's demands to the American people, which is not now being done. There must be an intensification of labor's participation in the old parties, the Democratic Party especially. The workers must needs fight for labor and Negro representation on the election slates of the Democratic Party, notably in the primaries. Nowadays, with little opposition from the labor movement, the reactionaries monopolize the election slates. Organizing themselves far better than ever before, the workers need to mobilize their forces to support labor and progressive candidates, and defeat reactionaries. The workers must everywhere take a leading part in organizing this political work. This same principle applies to other labor party forces—Negroes, poor farmers, etc. The workers and their allies must, in short, build the skeleton of the labor party primarily within the ranks of the Democratic Party. Of course, something of all this has been done over the years by the conservative leadership of the trade unions. But in the usual manner of conservatives, they have achieved only a tiny fragment of the possible. Especially they did not want to disturb the leadership of the Democratic Party, and they did not do so. The general results we see, in the entrenched status of the two-party system today. It will be an altogether differ-

ent matter when labor, working everywhere with its progressive allies, takes up the work of actually laying foundations for the labor party inside the old parties.

The slogan for a labor party must be constantly brought forward in all work in the old parties and especially in the trade union and independent forms within the Democratic Party. This must not be done in such a manner as to create premature splits or to isolate progressives in the elections. This is so for a number of basic reasons. First: this slogan is the best and most familiar popularization of the Communist Party's main political line for a "people's anti-monopoly coalition," and it has been at the core of every fight of the workers for independent political action for generations past. Second: it is indispensable for the workers to look forward to the eventual formation of a labor party, as the most practical form of a party to fight for the immediate demands of themselves and their allies under American conditions. Third: the labor party slogan, energetically advocated, is a powerful means for combatting current illusions to the effect that the Democratic Party can or will serve for a labor party, or that the workers can "capture" this party and transform it, as such, into a labor party. Undoubtedly, the organized workers can win important influence in sections of the Democratic Party in the heavily industrial and certain agricultural states, as they

have done repeatedly, but it is idle to think that they can "capture" the party, as a whole, saturated as it is from one end to the other with reactionary forces.

The center of labor's political activities today should be around key issues, especially on the necessity of ousting the Dixiecrats from the Democratic Party, and of taking up the struggle for a real Civil Rights program for full and immediate integration of the Negro people into every phase of American life; for a mass campaign to register 5 million Negro voters before 1960 in the South, for their right to vote, to hold office and participate fully in the 1960 campaign. Other key issues at the center of our work are around the rights of labor, the economic questions, unemployment, civil liberties, and peace. Attention to political programs in the old parties, to platform and to candidates, is fundamental.

History teaches the elementary lesson that when the workers and the Negro people, eventually brought to a fighting mood by their urgent grievances, seek to enlist the Democratic Party in a serious struggle on behalf of their interests, they face a blank wall of resistance from the controllers of the party, both bourgeois and labor. This will compel them to launch their own party at an appropriate time. George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO, periodically threatens the employers in general, that if they don't concede

this or that demand, the workers may establish a labor party; but this vague threat is as far as he has ever gone with it up to now. Even now, the Southern Dixiecrats, in their efforts to defeat the Negro people's fight against segregation, are doing their utmost to paralyze the Democratic Party, by splitting it, by sabotaging it in the elections, and by stifling its program. One can easily imagine the desperate resistance of the capitalist reactionaries, who cluster up the party everywhere, once the workers and their allies in the Democratic Party, well organized and militant, set out to accomplish their ever more urgent demands. A failure to persist with the propaganda of the labor party in the Democratic Party would be a paralyzing error, one which would, in fact does, play into the hands of revisionists and other tools of the employers.

Now we come to the vital question of the independent role of the Communist Party in the class struggle, particularly with regard to the labor party. There are those who fear that to work earnestly in the old parties would injure the Communist Party, and sink it in opportunism. But this is an error. Properly carried out, this work should greatly strengthen the Party, both organizationally and ideologically. The main thing to prevent opportunism in the Party's electoral work is to keep the labor party slogan to the fore, and also not to

forget an active propagation of socialism, although in its initial stages the labor party may not endorse socialism. The Communist Party has innumerable other class struggle issues besides the labor party, and it serves a vanguard role in each of them. Even though there were a labor party in existence, the Communist Party would still have an increasingly powerful electoral role to play with its own tickets, much as the British Communist Party has in relation to the Labor Party in that country. Our Party would especially have many important tasks to advance outside of the old capitalist parties. For example, it would have to propagate the labor party issue throughout the length and breadth of the trade-union movement, and this would be a world of work in itself. In its general labor party work, the Communist Party would seek to win the cooperation of other Left parties, in spite of their sectarianism and opportunism, for a joint fight to establish the labor party along the lines advocated herein. Generally, however, these parties do not agree to working in the old parties, but insist on isolating themselves from the broad masses of the workers by putting up separate general tickets indiscriminately, as in the case of the ISP during the recent election.

We must not forget the enormous role of the Communist Party, independently in building the labor party and helping it to function electorally.

The Party must put up independent candidates, jointly or alone, against those especially worthless elements on the Democratic or Republican tickets, and to bring forward its own program before the people. A fine example of Communist Party electoral work, which embodied many of the constructive points brought out above, was seen in the campaign led by Benjamin J. Davis in Harlem in last November's general elections. The Communist Party would seek to win the votes of radical workers who do not support the old parties, or workers who, in the course of the struggle, have broken off from them. Undoubtedly, in the building of the labor party in the United States, there will be many of such independent groups or parties developed. We must remember, however, that in this work we are not out to build another splinter party, which would only harm the movement; the labor party is aimed at winning a majority of the American people, and the working strategy must bear this fact in mind.

Our Party must especially unify the work outside with that on the inside of the old parties in the building of the labor party. Today, there is no unity whatever in this respect. The Left parties usually put up general tickets without regard to work or activities in the old parties. All independent tickets, however, whether of one party or more, must be placed in harmony with the strategy that is being followed by

labor in the Democratic Party elections. It must not be forgotten that the independent parties have waged almost a century of struggle for the establishment of a mass party of labor. Above all, it must also not be lost sight of that the building of the Communist Party is fundamental to the carrying out of every task in the class struggle, including the building of the labor party.

The long-continued two-party system has been a serious handicap to the development of the American labor movement. The numerous breakaway movements, described above, are eloquent proof that over

the years the workers have tried to free themselves of this pernicious system of employer control. It is conclusive proof that the leaders of the unions and other labor party groupings, who are such devotees of the two-party system, are very far from being faithful representatives of their rank and file. The creation of a strong labor party, which will eventually develop, will be of major importance, not only to the American working class, but to the labor movement of the world. Especially it will release new and powerful peace forces in the heartland of the war danger.