

# How the American Communists are Conducting Their Election Campaign

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**T**HIS year will see the American Communists participating in a parliamentary campaign more intensively and on a greater scale than in any previous year. For a number of months the Workers' (Communist) Party has been engaged in direct preparations for putting the Party on the ballot in its own name in as many of the 48 states as possible. Leaflets and pamphlets have been issued. Election conventions have already been held in over 20 states. A highly successful national nominating convention was held at the close of May for the adoption of an election platform and the selection of comrades W. Z. Foster and Ben Gitlow as the presidential standard-bearers of our Party in the November elections. Hundreds of Communist mass meetings are being arranged throughout the country. Scores of thousands of copies of the election platform are being distributed.

Organisers are working in new industrial centres where the Party organisation is weak or non-existent. For the first time in the history of the Party an organised, intensive effort is being made to pierce the "Solid South"—the most reactionary tier of states in the country, notorious for their disfranchising and severe oppression and lynching of the negro masses. Increased attention is being paid to the exploited farmers, the negro masses, the youth and working women. The entire election campaign has as its keynote the class struggle, and is based on such activities of the Party as the great miners' strike, the textile workers' fight and the long-drawn-out struggle of the needle trades workers.

## Setting up the Election Machinery

Our Party was born as a result of the break-up of the old Socialist Party in 1919. Through this split it inherited a wholesome opposition to parliamentary cretinism, to the miserable opportunism of the old Socialist Party parliamentary politicians. But in this wholesome reaction, there was also carried over a dangerous syndicalist opposition to participation in parliamentary activities.

Thus in the 1920 presidential elections, our Party's national slogan was "Boycott the Elections." In 1924 we had great difficulty in mobilising our Party for active participation in the election campaign. We have not yet completely shaken off these syndicalist prejudices. An essential part of the present election campaign of our Party has been to elevate the ideological level of the membership so as to give them an increasing understanding of Leninist, revolutionary, Communist participation in the election campaigns.

Our Party districts are organised along the line of industrial sections. We have one district, for instance, covering the Pittsburg coal and steel territory known as the Western Pennsylvania District. We have another district consisting of the metropolitan area of New York City and neighbouring New Jersey industrial cities in

which are found such industries as textile, oil refining and metal products. We have other districts like the Kansas districts which include a number of states equivalent to an area of five or six of the European countries. States like New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, are included in several districts while districts like the agricultural, the Seattle, the Kansas, the Minneapolis and the South, consist of several states. But for the election campaign, the individual state is the unit. It is therefore necessary for our Party to adjust its organisation and set up special election machinery.

Besides, there are innumerable difficulties set up by the much-vaunted American bourgeois democracy to make it almost impossible for a revolutionary proletarian party like our own to participate effectively in parliamentary elections. Each of the forty-eight states has its own set of election laws limiting the ways and means of parties getting on the ballot. The slightest technical error can be used to deny the Communist Party the right to be on the ballot. In 1924 the Communist Party was on the ballot in only fifteen states.

The aim of these election laws is to prevent the organisation of new parties and perpetuate the so-called two-party system—Republican and Democratic. Comrade Lenin has thus characterised the two-party system: "This so-called 'two-party system' reigning in America . . . has been one of the most powerful methods of preventing the foundation of an independent Labour, that is, a genuine Socialist Party."

In a number of industrial states where the Party has the best prospects, these legal restrictions are the worst. For example, in Ohio, our Party must secure a petition for placing it on the ballot signed by about 25,000 citizens, before it can put up its candidates. In New York, an even larger number of signatures is required. In California, a minimum of 30,000 signatures must be secured in order to place the Party on the ballot. These endorsements of the Party's being on the ballot by citizens are not valid unless they are from all sections of a particular state. A minimum number of signatures is required from each county of the state. It often occurs that in a number of rural counties our Party organisation is either very weak or non-existent. If one ineligible person signs a petition, then the whole list is challenged and our Party is denied the right to appear on the ballot. Then in such states as Oklahoma and other Southern states, the Secretary of State who is in charge of such work often simply refuses to recognise the Communist Party's right to appear on the ballot and does not even consider petitions when presented.

## Mobilising the Party

Mobilisation of the membership for participation in the election campaign began rather early this year. This was occasioned by the following facts. First of all, we have a splendid opportunity, due to the economic

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depression and the rising readiness of the masses for struggle against the capitalist offensive, to utilise the election campaign for Communist propaganda and mobilisation of the working masses for struggle. Then, there is the need to overcome the lingering indifference and even hostility in our ranks towards Party participation in parliamentary campaigns. Third, there are the great barriers put up by American "democracy" against Communist participation in election campaigns.

The presidential election takes place on November 6th. Simultaneously, there are elections for the United States Senate and highest state offices in a number of states. In the February Plenum of the Central Committee of our Party it was made clear to the Party that the prospects for a National Labour Party or even a United Labour Ticket in 1928 were exceedingly slight. Great emphasis was placed on the need for mobilising the Party resources to get on the ballot. Various political letters were sent to the units to counteract the indifference and hostility still pervading the attitude of certain sections of our Party towards Communist participation in election campaigns, as well as to warn against opportunist errors. As early as February 29, the Political Committee instructed all districts to prepare for putting petitions into the field for Foster and Gitlow. Immediately, special machinery was set up to help the districts overcome the technical obstacles for the Party's getting on the ballot. On March 19 all districts were instructed to put full Workers' Party tickets into the field. A National Election Campaign Committee was elected and similar committees were elected on a district scale.

On March 28th, the Political Committee appointed additional field organisers for the election campaign and announced its decision to propose comrades Foster and Gitlow who were our standard-bearers in 1924. Special organisers were sent into the south and south-west. Our mobilisation for the election campaign began with the preparations of the Party itself, then, the mobilisation of sympathetic masses and their organisations. These preparations were ideological and organisational. The Party units were given material preparing them for the issues and various phases of the election campaign.

**Placing the Party on the Ballot**

We have seen the numerous difficulties placed in the way of our Party's getting on the ballot in the presidential elections. This year there is a likelihood that we will be on the ballot in at least thirty states or double the number of states we were on in 1924. Already our candidates are on the ballot in such states as Michigan, Delaware, Oklahoma, Georgia, Virginia and West Virginia. In none of these states did we have a ticket in the 1924 elections.

Our Party is utilising the campaign to get on the ballot as an opportunity to spread *Communist propaganda*, to bring the *Communist programme* before greater masses, and to introduce our Party to thousands of workers hitherto unreached. House-to-house canvass, factory and factory-gate agitation, open-air meetings, canvassing workers' fraternal and educational organisations, drives in the trade unions, are among the ways

employed by our Party organisers for securing the sufficient legal requirements prerequisite to our being on the ballot. The entire membership is being drawn into this campaign. This drive also serves to bring life to some of our lagging nuclei.

The campaign to get the Party on the ballot is an integral part of the campaign we are now waging to increase the Party's membership and vitalise its units. Then, in our efforts to put the Party on the ballot in the south we are establishing new contacts, developing our work particularly amongst the negro masses. This is very significant for the entire working class because *there is practically no labour movement in the south*, and even the few weak conservative trade unions that exist there lead a precarious semi-legal existence in many instances.

Of course, the campaign for securing signatures to get on the ballot is fraught with certain serious dangers that have to be faced in the effort to overcome all the difficulties set up by the American bourgeoisie. Some comrades may drift into dangerous opportunistic errors. For instance, an example of such gross errors is to be found in a circular prepared by a technical worker in our election campaign giving suggestions for securing signatures. These suggestions were completely disregarded, and were in utter violation of the basic policy of the Party that the signature campaign must be used for developing Communist propaganda and agitation, and for winning new adherents to the Party. This document reflected a crass reformist concept of parliamentary activity. The author of this document had no authority to draw it up. Before distribution of these suggestions got well under way it was immediately prohibited from circulation by the secretary of the Party. This circular containing the silliest non-Communist suggestions aiming to get signatures to place the Party on the ballot through "tricks" instead of through Communist propaganda, was never the policy of our Party or any section of it, and was prepared by an office clerk without permission and in violation of instructions and decisions of the Political Committee of the Party. It was drawn up before the Election Campaign Committee had been organised.

Detailed official instructions were sent on several occasions in the name of the Political Committee to the Party units giving the correct Communist line of approach in securing such signatures. Subsequently the Political Committee severely condemned the author and contents of these non-Communist suggestions, and branded them as entirely against the Party policy in election campaigns, as foreign to Communism, and decided once more to send additional instructions to all Party units and prepare articles for the Party press to make impossible the recurrence of such an incident in the campaign to get on the ballot.

**Character and Aims of Our Campaign**

The declaration sent by the Political Committee to the Party dealing with the preparations for the National Nominating Convention, characterises the procedure and objective of our participation in the election campaign as follows:

"The Party's election campaign will be based upon all the other campaigns that the Party is

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conducting at the present moment, and organically tied up with the struggles of the working class . . . the mining campaign, unemployment, organising the unorganised, struggle against imperialist war—Nicaragua, China, Defence of the Soviet Union, textile and needle trades' struggle. . . . The keynote to be struck by our Party throughout the campaign must be the class struggle . . . in connection with the dropping of this slogan by the Socialist Party at its last Convention. . . .

"The election campaign must present our Party as the champion of all sections of the working class, strikers, unorganised workers, negroes, youth, women, children, colonial masses. *Our Party must appear in the election campaign as the single revolutionary working-class force, as the sole fighting force against the reactionary trade union bureaucracy, as the organiser of the unorganised, as the deadly enemy of the Socialist Party.*

"*The campaign should not restrict itself to our immediate demands, but we should stress all our final aims before the working class. We should raise issues of a workers' and farmers' government, the overthrow of capitalism, the problems of a Communist society. We have to throw all forces of the Party into the campaign, and at the same time have to guard ourselves against all kinds of parliamentary illusions. To gain seats in the various legislative bodies is very important for our Party, because we can utilise them as mass tribunals to reach out for the workers, but we should not forget that our basic aim in this campaign is the mobilisation of the broadest possible masses.*"

At the National Nominating Convention a resolution was adopted on building the Party during the election campaign, reading in part as follows :

"The presidential campaign gives the Workers' (Communist) Party *an excellent opportunity to reach the broad sections of the American working class with the slogans and programme of Communism.* . . . No campaign meeting should be allowed to go by without making a strong appeal to the workers present to join the Party. Every copy of our campaign literature, every Party publication, must contain as a part of its general contents a similar appeal to non-Party workers. . . .

"It must be systematically emphasised that the election campaign is but one phase of the class struggle which must be prosecuted all the year round, and that for this purpose the building and strengthening of the Workers' (Communist) Party is the main guarantee for a revolutionary fight against American imperialism. . . .

"Particularly, efforts must be made to enlist into the Party factory workers so that out of the election campaign a broad network of Communist factory nuclei shall have been established in the industrial centres. Similarly, energetic steps must be taken to draw into the Party the native

American workers and exploited farmers and negroes."

**State and National Nominating Conventions**

In order to mobilise more effectively the Party and greater non-Party masses, as well as in some instances to meet certain technical legal requirements, in order to dramatise before the American workers the plan of the Party to participate effectively in the presidential election campaign, there were organised a number of state conventions and a national convention for the purpose of adopting the Communist election platform and selecting standard-bearers. Already more than 20 states, among these such southern states as Virginia and Georgia, have held state nominating conventions. The National Nominating Convention took place at the end of May. In the call issued by the Central Committee for the holding of these conventions we find the following keynote struck :

"In the presidential campaign of this year the class-conscious workers must mobilise the working masses and unify all the struggles against the exploiters. . . . *The Workers' (Communist) Party is the only Party of working-class struggle in the United States. Our Party is a Party of revolutionary class struggle. We are not only vigorous participants but energetic leaders in all the struggles of our working class. The Central Executive Committee is calling this National Nominating Convention in order to mobilise more effectively our Party's resources for participation in the coming presidential elections with a view towards utilising this election campaign for arousing and organising effective resistance by the working class to the capitalist offensive.*"

The National Nominating Convention was called for the purpose of adopting an election platform, nominating presidential candidates and electing a National Campaign Committee. The entire Party was mobilised for this convention.

Delegates from factories, mines, mills, from organisations of the negro masses, from societies of the oppressed colonial and semi-colonial masses of Latin America, from working-class women's organisations and youth organisations, striking miners, textile workers and needle workers, were to be found in large numbers in all the state nominating conventions, and particularly in the National Nominating Convention.

The number of delegates participating in the convention exceeded all expectations. There were 296 delegates from 39 states and the district of Columbia. There were about 150 fraternal delegates, mostly non-Party workers, from trade unions, co-operatives, youth and working women's organisations, unemployment councils, negro organisations, anti-imperialist societies, farmers' organisations and Councils for the Protection of Foreign-born Workers. The fraternal delegates especially were elected at mass meetings of workers. Amongst the regular delegates there were at least 25 negro workers. Amongst the fraternal delegates there were representatives from Nicaragua, Chile, Mexico, Haiti and Canada.

Never before was there so much enthusiasm manifested at a gathering of Communists in the United States as at the National Nominating Convention. The bour-

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geois press was compelled to admit that it was the biggest and most enthusiastic gathering of this kind that they have yet seen. Delegates came all the way from the Pacific Coast to New York by "skipping freight"—"riding the rod," as we say in the United States—that is, by hiding in trains, because of the high railroad fare. Some came by autobuses, others "hiked," still others organised special tours by automobile, piling in a number of workers into one old, second-hand cheap car, secured at an insignificant price, sufficient for making a trip and return, in order to avoid the heavy cost of railroad fare.

The National Nominating Convention was significant in five main respects:

*First.*—There were a large number of delegates who are native Americans. The American bourgeoisie have been pounding away for some time on the fact that our Party has to date largely attracted foreign-born workers. The latter are the ones found primarily in the basic heavy industries.

*Second.*—In this convention there were delegates who had won the confidence of the masses through years of struggle in the early anarchist movement, syndicalist movement, and the old socialist movement, as well as in the trade union movement. This convention presented our Party as the inheritor of the best and revolutionary traditions of all these movements.

*Third.*—The Convention clearly established the fact that our Party was the sole champion of the negroes, the colonial masses, the workers battling against the mine-owners, the exploited farming masses, the working-class women and youth. The large number of negro delegates participating in the work and leadership of the Convention was symbolic of the determination of the Party to break through and enter the "Solid South," and very clearly distinguish our Party from the parties of the big and small bourgeoisie—the Republican, Democratic and Socialist Parties—in which the negroes were either segregated or given a back seat.

*Fourth.*—The Nominating Convention brought into bold relief the fact that our Party is now national in scope. Our Party has been called by the reactionary trade union bureaucracy and other capitalist organs an "eastern" party. At the Convention there were represented delegates from Maine to California, and from Texas to Vermont. Every section of the country was represented. Delegations of striking miners and textile workers from New England and from the Pennsylvania-Ohio and West Virginia coalfields played a conspicuous role in the Convention.

*Finally.*—The Convention emphasised to the American workers the fact that our Party is an international Party, a section of the Communist International. The greetings from the Communist International evoked tremendous enthusiasm. The election victories of the Communist Parties of Germany, France and Poland were of striking and basic importance for us in securing the effective mobilisation of our Party members and sympathetic non-Party masses for the election campaign. The Convention denounced the criminal Shakhty conspirators against the Soviet Union then on trial in Moscow. Pledges of revolutionary proletarian solidarity were made

to the Communist Parties of Great Britain, Germany, Soviet Union, France, Poland, etc.

The Convention selected comrades Foster and Gitlow as the presidential standard-bearers in the election campaign and adopted the Party election platform.

**Our Election Platform**

The election platform adopted by the Convention is the most complete presentation of Communist analysis and indictment of capitalism as well as statement of the position of the Party towards the basic questions confronting the working class that we have got out to date. American imperialism is presented in its true light. The striking gap between the wealth of the bourgeoisie and the poverty of large sections of the working class and exploited farmers is brought into clear contrast. The unemployment crisis is analysed from a Marxist viewpoint, and a programme for immediate action is proposed. The parties of the big and small business interests—Republican, Democratic and Socialist—are put before the masses in their true light.

A programme to meet the offensive of the capitalists is outlined in detail. Special attention is paid to the heroic struggle of the miners. Particular emphasis is laid on the need for mobilising the masses to paralyse the aggressive imperialist manoeuvres of Wall Street against the central and South American countries, China and the Soviet Union. The Party pledges itself to do everything in its power to turn the next imperialist war into a civil war, and raises the slogan: "Not a man, not a gun, not a cent for the imperialist army and navy." The Party called upon the American marines to go over to the side of the revolution in Nicaragua and China. The Party demands complete and immediate independence for all American colonies and semi-colonies. It demands immediate recognition of the Soviet Union and establishment of direct connections between the American and Russian working class.

The veil is stripped from the hypocritical capitalist democracy serving as the most cunning, powerful, ruthless strike-breaking agency in the world—the strike-breaking United States Government. The Party makes clear its position as an advocate of the building of a national mass Labour Party, but at the same time emphasises that it is "a dangerous illusion to think that the workers can assume power by electing more and more members to Congress or executive officials." Our Party demands a Labour Party "because it considers this the first decisive step towards independent political action by the working class, the first step of the workers to break away from the parties of the bosses. At the same time the Communist Party considers it its duty to tell the workers frankly that a Labour Party has its limitations, and that it will not be able to lead the workers in their final struggle for their emancipation. Only a Communist Party can do that."

The Communist position towards tariff and taxation is made clear in the platform. The plight of the exploited farming masses is brought home very effectively. Particular stress is laid on the oppression of the negroes. The Party demands the abolition of race discrimination and stands for full racial, social and political equality. The platform demands:

"Abolition of all laws which disfranchise the negroes on line of colour. Abolition of all laws

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forbidding inter-marriage between persons of different races. Abolition of all 'Jim Crow' laws. Immediate removal of all restrictions in all trade unions against the membership of negro workers. Equal opportunity for employment, wages, hours, working conditions for negro and white workers."

The platform further draws the attention of the workers to the need for solidarity of all working men, native as well as foreign born, in order to resist the attacks on the foreign-born workers, which attacks are only part of the general offensive against the whole working class. The status of working women and working youth, and an immediate programme to meet these conditions, are outlined in the platform.

In discussing the prohibition question, the platform brands alcoholism as "one of the most terrible social diseases of capitalist society." It declares further that "only the overthrow of capitalism will sweep away the despicable boot-legging industry and the equally despicable, corrupt, hypocritical prohibition enforcement." The platform then declares:

"The Workers' (Communist) Party favours:

- (1) the repeal of the Volstead and the 18th Amendment;
- (2) dissolution of the Federal, and State prohibition enforcement apparatus;
- (3) energetic propaganda against alcoholism as one of the most malignant social diseases under capitalism."

Our summing up slogan is "Forward to a Workers'

and Farmers' Government." We emphasise that a workers' and farmers' government in the United States will "free all American colonies immediately, will grant the right of full self-determination to all Latin-American peoples, will realise social equality for negroes, will disarm the master class, and will arm the working masses, will expropriate all large-scale industries, railroads, power plants, meat-packing plants . . . will nationalise all large land estates, and will hand them over to the mortgaged and tenant farmers and agricultural workers, will nationalise all banks and commercial interests."

The whole spirit and purpose of the Party election campaign is summed up in the conclusion of the platform, which calls upon the working masses "to go forward by means of relentless class struggle," and emphasises that "*the Workers' (Communist) Party is the Party of the class struggle. It is the deadly enemy of capitalist society. It fights for the complete unity of the working class, for the united struggle of native-born, foreign and negro workers against the common enemy—trusting capital.*"

We have a good start in our election campaign. The coming months will see our activities intensified. The entire Party is being drawn into the fight. The outlook is, that because of the energetic activities of our Party in the big struggles of the workers like the miners and textile strikes and the needle trade, that our American Section of the Communist International will receive this year many times greater support in the election campaign than ever before.