

THE STRANGE CASE OF CONGRESSMAN MARCANTONIO

By BERTRAM D. WOLFE

The Daily Worker of November 14th carries a question from a bewildered worker on the case of Congressman Marcantonio. He writes: "Along with many others I have been wondering at the Daily Worker's attitude toward Congressman Marcantonio. Every activity of Marcantonio printed in the Daily Worker has been of credit to him. However, I have failed to see one line of condemnation of Marcantonio. How are we to regard him?—R. H."

The answer of the editor of the paper to Comrade R. H. is a model of how not to spread political enlightenment. The editor begins by telling R. H. to judge the Congressman "not only by his political party." This it converts into judging him not at all by his political party but "by his position on basic social questions—war, fascism, the democratic rights of the masses, etc." But the most basic social question on which to judge a public official, a politician, is precisely his political party.

NON-PARTISAN ACTION JUSTIFIED

The Daily Worker endorses Marcantonio as "a good fighter for the rights of the masses." What are the masses to conclude? That non-partisan political action is possible? That one can be a "good fighter for the masses" and remain in the boss parties? Then Upton Sinclair is right. Why not support the "progressives" and "liberals" in the old parties? They have the machine, they have the votes, they have a better chance of election. Why bother with Communist Parties? Why throw away your vote? What happens to the compass of class politics if the Daily is to peddle such classless, non-partisan doctrine?

The Daily editor continues with a glowing account of Marcantonio's record. It declares that "so long as he maintains his excellent record, he will always have

the warm esteem (emphasis mine—BDW) not only of the Daily Worker, but of hundreds of thousands of liberty-loving American people."

Of course, we do not blame the Daily for printing his record. It used to try to fight capitalist liberal politicians and demagogues by lying about them. It is the duty of a workers' paper to tell the truth: it cannot convince, it cannot educate its readers otherwise. So it was correct for the Daily to print news of Marcantonio's speeches and motions on the bonus, the Lundeen Bill, and his actions as a lawyer. But it should have coupled this news with a warning to its readers that "liberal" Congressmen whether sincere or not, are objectively dangerous since they sow illusions about the capitalist parties and their nature, and prevent the masses from separating from the boss parties and developing the first elements of political class consciousness. For this reason, the LaFollettes, Norrises, LaGuardias and Marcantonios are politically dangerous. True, the working class must work with them to some extent and seek to use them (politically speaking) for its purposes, but in every such cooperation there is the question of who uses whom, and the Party must take care that these middle-class reformers, loyal to capitalism, do not use it instead, for their political purposes.

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES

Certainly, this question from a wondering worker gave a golden opportunity to the Daily to explain the issues involved, to correct misapprehensions it may have sown, to explain some elementary first principles. These are:

1. Political parties are not just groups of "people". They are fighting organi-

zations, political organizations of one or another class. The need of the working class is not to choose "good men" from one or the other boss party. The need of the working class is to form and develop a party of their own.

2. The leaders of a boss party depend upon that party. They serve it. Their nominations depend upon their ability to play the game. In place of endorsing Marcantonio's record the Party ought to show its real meaning by the simple device of demanding that he break with the Republican party. If he is so "practical" that he needs must wait till the labor party is able to elect him before he breaks with the party of Hoover and Mellon, what is to prevent him from jumping back to the Republican Party in a bad year for labor votes? A break with the boss parties is the first test of sincerity of a "friend of the masses". Otherwise their "good record" however good in a reformist, short-run, each-measure-considered-in-isolation sense, is dangerous and bad in a long-run sense. They sow illusions as to the parties these men endorse, serve and represent.

3. Doubly suspect as to sincerity, and doubly dangerous if really sincere, are those liberal politicians who stay in the capitalist parties knowing their class character and corruption. Worse than the corruption of their parties is their support of capitalism, their pretense that it can really be patched up and reformed today when it has corruption and decay at the very heart of it.

4. But, says the Daily Worker: "Progressive people exist in both Republican and Democratic parties. The coming Farmer-Labor Party will be built in the main from people who today are in the two old parties."

This, of course, is true. But Marcan-

tonio is not a "progressive person". He is a leader, a congressman. Of course, we must win the masses away who today support the Democratic and Republican parties. But heaven help us, if their leaders, sensing a swing to a farmer-labor party, come along with them and we are not able to explain their role.

But, says the Daily: "Marcantonio is for an all-inclusive Farmer-Labor party." So will many other old-party politician be when he sees in his district or state a growing swing of sentiment, and votes, in that direction. In the past it has been the curse of every Farmer-Labor and "Peoples" Party, (to use the Daily Worker's classless terminology), that it was invaded, swamped, headed and beheaded, often with the best intentions in the world, by middle-class reformers, by liberal old-party politicians; and this was a main cause of the disintegration of every workingman's and even every petty bourgeois "third party" in the history of the United States. Is that not the chief lesson of the workingmen's parties of the 1820's and '30's? of the National Labor Union? of the Greenback Labor Party? of the Peoples Party? of the Farmer-Labor Party of the early 20's of the present century? Why should the Daily Worker aid in preparing another such debacle?

LEADERSHIP TO COME FROM THE RANKS

The leadership and control of a healthy farmer-labor party will have to come from the ranks, from the organized workers and farmers, and not from benevolent and misguided (when sincere) or time-serving and misleading (when insincere) but in either case dangerous, old-party politicians and middle-class reformers.

It is a disgrace that I should have to write these ABC's to the editors of the only revolutionary Daily. But yesterday, the Daily was exposing every one, misrepresenting every one, denouncing every one. The Socialists were "Social Fascists", the Left Socialists were "Left Social Fascists". The A. F. of L. members and officials were "company unionists". A united front between labor organizations was a "plot against the working class." If you wanted to work with the Party you had to follow it "from below." Today the Party abandons everything it did yesterday. Unwilling to discuss what was wrong, it does the opposite of everything it did yesterday. Abandons what was right along with what was wrong. Thus the withered trunk of sectarianism now sprouts the poisonous fungus of opportunism and the party substitutes "people" for classes, builds the reputations of the Governor Curleys' (see Daily Worker of August 15, 1935) and Congressman Marcantonio's (see any day's Daily), praises the Knickerbocker Democrats (September 25, 1935), withdraws party candidates in favor of Democrats and Republicans (Paterson, Red Hook, Washington, N. J.) and threatens to lose that without which the working class is like a rudderless hulk, without compass or sextant, riding an angry sea, for the ship of communism thru the stormy sea of politics can not depend solely upon marvellous helmsman like Dimitroff and commanders like Stalin and cabin boys like Browder, but helmsman and captains and cabin boys will lose their ship on the rocks if they do not keep their class bearings at every stage of the journey.

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ADVENTURES IN OPPORTUNISM
II. The Specter G-Man or How Daniel Webster Became a Communist.