

# INTERNAL BULLETIN

357

VOL. VI; No. 7

October, 1944

Issued by  
SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY  
116 University Place  
New York 3, N. Y.

152

## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
On the Presidential Election Campaign, by M. Morrison . . .	1
Letter from Bayonne on the elections . . . . .	6
Our Tactic in the 1944 Presidential Election, By Jack O'Connell. . . . .	6
Why the Political Committee Rejected the Proposal to Give Critical Support to the SP in the Presiden- tial Elections, By John G. Wright . . . . .	10
Correspondence on Pardon Applications. . . . .	16
Reply to Comrade Margaret Steward from M. Morrison . . . .	28
Reply to Morris Stein from M. Morrison . . . . .	29
On the Functioning of the National Committee, By Lydia Bennett . . . . .	33

ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

By M. Morrison

August 2, 1944

What course should we follow in the coming presidential election campaign? Since there will be no Labor Party candidate, the situation would be ideal for running a candidate of our own -- especially in view of the imprisonment of the candidate and other members of the party. The regrettable fact remains, however, that we cannot get on the ballot and this eliminates the possibility of conducting a campaign for our own candidate. I consider a write-in campaign, under present circumstances, the equivalent of no campaign. Actually there is only one course open to us, if we want to participate actively in the coming election campaign -- and that is to offer critical support to the Socialist Party. I am assuming that its candidate will be on the ballot in quite a few states.

We are, in effect, confronted by a choice of non-participation in the campaign or critical support to the S.P. The simplest and easiest solution is to abstain, but for a serious political party, only the most exceptional circumstances would justify abstention in a presidential campaign. I can see no such circumstances at present. In an election where three parties appear on the ballot -- two openly capitalist and one running under the label of socialism (I am disregarding the Socialist Labor Party), the proper course for us to follow, where we are unable to get our candidate on the ballot, is to give critical support to the S.P. Especially is this true at present when a large number of workers has become disillusioned with Roosevelt. We must take advantage of their disillusionment and attempt to turn their attention to the idea of socialism. In general workers do not like to abstain from voting and we should not encourage them to do so. On the contrary we must encourage them to vote in such a way as to turn the movement of the workers in our general direction. In giving critical support to the S.P. we are, in essence, asking the workers to vote against capitalism and for the idea of socialism. We tell them plainly that it is the best means available, at the present moment, of showing their hostility to capitalism and their acceptance of the idea of socialism.

We must, of course, conduct our campaign on our own platform wherein we make all the necessary explanations and criticisms of the S.P. and its candidate. Thinking workers will find this course more understandable and more serious than one which tells them not to vote or which offers them no advice at all about voting. Should the discussion be favorable to critical support of the S.P. (or for that matter, in any case) our platform should deal mainly with the following three points:

- (1) Post-war problem -- presenting our solution to guarantee jobs to all workers and returned soldiers.
- (2) No interference with the right of the European masses to determine their own fate.
- (3) Labor party.

The last question is not exactly proper in a platform during a presidential campaign but we need not be formal about this matter. We are anxious to educate workers to realize the necessity of a Labor party and a presidential election affords us an opportunity to do so.

\* \* \*

September 17, 1944

I am informed that the P.C. has sent out a letter stating our policy in the coming election campaign. If my information as to the contents of the letter is correct then, basing my judgment on the letter alone, I would say that there is no evidence whatever that the P.C., in arriving at its conclusion, followed the Marxist method.

The motion, presented by Morrison, to give critical support to the Socialist Party, had the following as its motivation: (I am assuming that the letter sent by the P.C. did not contain the motivation. That was wrong because the membership is entitled to know the basis of a "suggestion" or a motion. Naturally, the motivation was not fully developed, but it was enough to give the members something to discuss. In this particular instance the P.C. should have sent the motivation in the letter.)

Morrison starts from the proposition that a Marxist party abstains only under the most exceptional circumstances. I am not now considering a conscious boycott, but simply abstaining from participation. A revolutionary party is in duty bound to find some way, if it possibly can, to participate in the most active way in every important election campaign. If only capitalist parties are on the ballot we are compelled to abstain and we then tell the workers openly not to vote. There is nothing else we can do. But if there is any possibility to participate we must do so. A party that abstains because all the conditions are not favorable, a party that says nothing because it cannot say everything, does not follow the tradition of Bolshevism.

It may be argued that we are not abstaining since we intend to conduct a campaign around the Labor party issue. Let us not split hairs. It is abstaining if, in an election campaign, we do not run our own candidate and we do not tell the workers to vote for any other candidate.

The question can be put very simply: we offer our propoganda to the workers. A serious worker asks: whom shall I vote for now, since there is not as yet any Labor party? The answer must be: do not vote. This is abstentionism and nothing else.

Let us consider all the circumstances to see whether abstentionism must be followed in the coming campaign because there is no other way out. There is no Labor party conducting a campaign. We cannot run our own candidate. Because of the fact that our candidate would be in prison together with 17 others, that would be the indicated course (if we could get on the ballot). A write-in campaign is possible. But, under present circumstances, a write-in campaign is

equivalent to no campaign.

There are three parties that will appear on the ballot -- two openly capitalist and one running under the label of socialism (I am excluding the S.L.P.) Immediately the course should suggest itself of giving critical support to the S.P. and thus avoid abstaining. In general, when a party designating itself as socialist and believed by many workers to be socialist is on the ballot against capitalist parties it would be our proper course to give the socialist party critical support where we ourselves cannot get on the ballot. Very important factors should prevent us from following such a course, to avoid abstaining.

Let us further consider the present situation to determine whether there are any factors in favor of giving critical support to the S.P. All the evidence points to a great deal of dissatisfaction with the present administration, among the workers. We do not know exactly how deep it is and whether it will take the form of abstaining from voting or a turn to the Republican party. We do not know whether the dissatisfied worker will vote for Roosevelt as the lesser evil. This is the most probable course he will take.

What is our task under the circumstances? It is to take advantage of the dissatisfaction of a great many workers and help them take a course away from the capitalist parties, a course leading towards socialism.

Generally speaking, the workers want to vote and, unless we have no alternative, we should encourage them to do so and participate actively in the elections. In an election campaign where we do not have our own candidate and where there is a candidate of a party that in the eyes of many workers stands for socialism, by all means, encourage the dissatisfied worker to vote against the capitalist parties. Tell a worker not to vote and in all likelihood he will vote for what he considers to be the lesser evil. Tell him to vote against capitalism by voting for a party that calls itself socialist, with all the necessary explanations, and the likelihood is that you will indicate to the dissatisfied and serious worker a course that appears reasonable to him, a course that he will follow in preference to abstaining, a course that will aid him in following a direction leading to our party. It should seem quite obvious that the question "What course in the coming election campaign advances most the interests of the working masses and of our party -- abstention or critical support to the S.P.?" is not at all difficult to answer, if one takes all existing factors into consideration. To give critical support to the S.P. is demanded by the existing situation.

It goes without saying that giving critical support to the S.P. still means centering our campaign around our own platform. In the coming campaign the situation calls for a platform centering around the transitional demand of taking over the big industries and operating them under workers' control. Critical support means that we make all the necessary explanations and criticisms of the S.P. and its candidate. But instead of ending up by saying don't vote, we conclude by telling them to vote for the Socialist Party as a protest against the capitalist parties and as an indication to fight for socialism.

What is the approach of the P.C. to the whole question, at least, as indicated by the letter? Does it give an analysis of all the factors and indicate those factors? Does it ask the general question; which course -- abstention or critical support -- will further our general aims, under prevailing conditions? No! It simply lays down two general principles either of which would justify critical support to the S.P. The reasoning is not that of a Marxist, but of one who limits himself to a syllogism. It states a major premise; to justify critical support of a party, it must be a mass party, or it must take our position on the war; the minor premise is that the S.P. is not a mass party nor does it take our position on the war; the conclusion; no critical support. The whole approach to the question tends to show that very frequently those who shout loudest about Hegelian dialectics do not know how to use the Marxist dialectic method.

What the P.C. does is to isolate two factors -- very important ones, to be sure, and disregards all other factors. What it does is to mention those conditions which, if they existed, would make our problem very easy of solution.

Some months before he was assassinated, Trotsky proposed that we give critical support to the Stalinist party in the 1940 elections. He argued mainly, if I recollect correctly, that the Stalinist party took a position that the war at that time was an imperialist war and supporting the Stalinists on that basis would enable us to make close contact with the rank-and-file Stalinists. Trotsky had a specific purpose -- to get closer to the rank-and-file of the Stalinist party. The war attitude of the Stalinists was the opportunity to be utilized.

The P.C. rejected Trotsky's proposal. I had just completed the draft of an article supporting the proposal when the news of the murderous attack came and made it impossible for me to attend the party conference at which it was decided not to support the Stalinists.

If my memory serves me correctly, the reason for rejecting Trotsky's proposal was that it would create a rift between us and the progressive unionists with whom we had contact -- a reason bordering very close to opportunism. The important point is that when it came to rejecting critical support, the P.C. did not hesitate to find a factor other than the position of the Stalinists on the war. I admit that logically it can be said that naming a condition without which we can give critical support does not mean that if the condition existed we must give critical support. I mention the 1940 incident to show that there seems to be no hesitation to find reasons for abstaining.

Our tactics in every important election must be based on the factors that exist in that particular campaign. When in 1940 Trotsky advised critical support of the C.P. it was because he saw the possibility of achieving a certain objective under the conditions then prevailing. In the present election campaign we must ask ourselves; is there an objective favorable to us which can be achieved under prevailing circumstances by giving critical support to the S.P.? To answer that question Marxists must analyze all the factors and not formulate some general principle and determine our attitude exclusively on the basis of that general principle. I have indicated above