
The Workers Party and the Labor Party.

by C.E. Ruthenberg

An article distributed in the bulletin of the Workers Party of America Press Service to the WPA press, District Organizers, and Language Bureaus, issue of Nov. 27, 1922.
Copy in Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 147, ll. 198-199.

The question has arisen in the Party whether the organization of a labor party means that the Workers Party becomes unnecessary and is to be liquidated.

It is of the greatest importance that every Party member and the workers generally be given a clear and definite answer to this question. In order to make such an answer it is necessary to examine the reasons why the Party has adopted the policy of supporting the organization of a labor party and of endeavoring to become part of the labor party.

Fundamentally the Party policy is based upon a study of the economic and political developments in this country. It is the conclusion of the Central Executive Committee of the Party that centralization of the state power in the Federal government, the open use of that power against the workers in every strike of any magnitude, the levelling process in the ranks of the workers which has made their status more nearly alike, the limitation on immigration which is developing a more homogeneous working class, are factors which compel and make possible the organization of a labor party in the United States. As Communists, whose policies are based upon the economic and political realities of a given situation, we cannot oppose a development which the facts of the life of the workers themselves are bringing.

Even if opposition were not futile in the face of the facts which are bringing the labor party, it would not be desirable. The establishment of a

labor party representative of the trade union movement of this country and having the support of millions of organized workers would be the greatest stride forward in the history of the American working class.

Since opposition to the movement for a labor party would be futile because of the economic forces behind it — an anti-Communist policy — and because it would mean fighting an advance by the working masses, the question which must be answered is, what is the best policy to pursue in order that the labor party, when organized, will help develop the revolutionary working class movement of which the Workers Party is the leader?

In answering this question our policy in the trade unions offers an analogy which points to the right road for us to travel. It is the Communist policy as formulated by the Communist International and as practiced by the Communists in every country, to remain in the trade unions and there to carry on the struggle for industrial unionism and for a more militant and revolutionary unionism. In this country the Trade Union Educational League is conducting the struggle for such a unionism. The Trade Union Educational League is an organization within the trade union movement. Its slogans are, stay in the union, fight in the unions for amalgamation, for industrial unionism, for a more militant unionism.

This policy is based upon the more fundamental Communist conception that the Communists must stay with the masses in their struggles.

They must fight with them. They must not separate themselves from the mass of the workers but constantly carry on the struggle in close contact with the masses and thus develop more revolutionary action. This does not mean that Communists may not take a position in opposition to the desires of the mass of the workers when those desires are of a counter-revolutionary character. But as already shown, the organization of a labor party, far from being a step backward will be the greatest step forward in the life of the American workers.

The policy which we pursue in the trade unions, to carry out our policy there, is the same policy which the Central Executive Committee proposes shall be pursued in relation to the coming labor party. We must become part of it. We must work with the workers who go into the labor party. We must carry on our work of educating them to a clearer understanding of the class struggle and the tactics which must be pursued for the workers to win that struggle in close contact with them, as part of the labor party.

In what has been written above the answer to the question whether the Workers Party is to be liquidated when the labor party is organized already appears. If the Communists are to carry on a work of education in the labor party, if they are to be the driving force which will constantly push the labor party along the road of more revolutionary action, then they must be a closely united, well organized party within the labor party.

The Workers Party not only cannot be liquidated, but it must be strengthened. It must become more powerful. It must be a better disci-

plined organization. Its members must have a deeper understanding, a better education as Communists. Only a strong, powerful, disciplined party with an educated, understanding membership can play the part in the labor party which the Workers Party is destined to play.

The Workers Party must publish newspapers, it must publish leaflets and pamphlets and books. It must develop programs and slogans of action, it must lead the labor party into action. Inside of the labor party it must intensify its activities a hundredfold in order that it may inspire the mass of the workers in the labor party with its Communist understanding and purpose. Our part in the labor party is to make it the Workers Party — a Communist party — not to give up the Workers for the labor party.

How ridiculous the suggestion is that the Workers Party will not be needed when the labor party is organized is also made clear by what has happened in the trade union movement in this country. There the Trade Union Educational League has been specifically organized to carry on work in trade unions analogous to the work which the Workers Party must carry on in the labor party. The Trade Union Educational League will be no longer needed when the trade unions become militant, revolutionary industrial unions and just so the Workers Party will be no longer needed when the labor party becomes — what the Workers Party is — a Communist party. Our slogan must be: “For a Labor Party!” But at the same time, “For a stronger, more powerful, better disciplined Workers Party!”

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.