

¶ Chapter XII

IS A PEACE PROGRAM ALSO PRACTICAL POLITICS?

HENRY WALLACE'S FAMOUS SPEECH ON SEPTEMBER 12, in Madison Square Garden, New York City, together with his letter to President Truman of July 23, 1946, which was published as a consequence of the Garden speech, marked a turning point in world affairs. It may be taken as a classical example of how a peace program can be made practical politics.

"But Wallace got fired from his Cabinet job as a result of that speech! Not much of a practical victory!" exclaims the man who understands practicality in narrow terms.

Yes, Wallace was "fired" from the government for making that speech. Yes, in a certain sense that was a technical victory for Vandenberg. But those who see only this surface aspect of events are not prepared to take part effectively in shaping high policy for our country; they can only blunder. Such shortsightedness produces such astounding contradictions as that of the man who, a few short months ago, was pleading with Wallace to resign from the Cabinet on general principles, and now wails that Wallace's dismissal is a terrible blow.

Even our Tories understand practical politics better than that. Thus the veteran reactionary publicist, Mark

Sullivan, wrote in the midst of the imbroglio the wise and profound judgment that Wallace's speech was such a blow against the Vandenberg policy that it was "irreparable." He said that even if Truman dismissed Wallace "that would only modify the condition, and not much at that." The correctness of Sullivan's judgment is only emphasized by the fact that he is an ardent Vandenberg fan and is viciously opposed to Wallace.

From the viewpoint of practically influencing policy, as contrasted with merely holding office, Wallace proved himself the most practical man in America. For Wallace succeeded in stopping short Vandenberg's drive toward an immediate crisis in Soviet-American relations. Vandenberg was still left in the driver's seat with the levers in his hands—but Wallace had disconnected the clutch! So, while America hasn't got the car moving in the right direction yet, Wallace did stop the wild drive toward the precipice of war.

The secret of the far-reaching effectiveness of a single speech by Henry Wallace lies in the fact that he appealed to the deepest desires of the great mass of the people (for peace) while fighting against their deepest fear (another war) and opposing a policy put over behind the scenes without the people knowing it, in place of the policy they had endorsed in the last election.

Of course it must be understood that in words every party and every politician are going to be "campaigning for peace" from now on. Even those who have been agitating for a "preventive war," to blow up the Soviet Union with atom bombs before they have a chance to catch up with our American "secret," will now be fly-

ing the banner of "peace." The population has experienced such a revulsion against the irresponsible talk of war that it will be politically dangerous to talk about it openly from now until after November, 1948!

That is what Wallace accomplished, even though it was at the cost of being kicked out of the administration.

It is better to have a good man in office than out, other things being equal; but the biggest reason for being in office is to fight for the correct program, and there comes a time when that fight demands that one risk even a break with his own party leadership.

I had my own preview of the Wallace experience some eighteen months earlier. It was on a smaller scale, but it contained the same principles. I was kicked out of leading posts in the Communist Party, and then even from membership, because I would not approve a major departure from the Roosevelt-Wallace program as the key to all progress in America today. And the same persons who denounced me as unworthy because I was supposed to be a Roosevelt-Wallace liberal had to return in practice to the same policy they had denounced in theory. But their confused search for an alternative policy for over a year had done much damage and created disorder in the progressive camp. What they should have been doing in an organized way, with foresight and planning, they did at the last moment, unwillingly, in disorder, without plan, and only under the inexorable pressure of forces and events. The same process is now going on, on a vastly larger scale, in the Democratic Party.

In the light of the September events, it should now be clear to everyone what a profound mistake it was to advise Wallace to resign from the Cabinet in December, 1945. It is now clear beyond dispute that Wallace was absolutely correct when he stayed in the Cabinet and declared his support of Truman as custodian of Roosevelt's policies, and that his ultra-leftist critics were stupid and shortsighted at best.

There is an enlightening contrast in the Ickes experience. The Old Curmudgeon yielded to the pressure and blandishments of the ultra-leftists because he had a personal inclination in the same direction. He seized upon the first pretext to resign from the Cabinet. It was an empty and valueless gesture without any effect in the country in awakening and organizing the progressive camp. It served only to weaken the progressive cause. As a result, when the time came for Wallace to open up the great battle, Ickes was not there to multiply its power by declaring his solidarity from within the Cabinet. Instead he was on the sidelines—and not even supporting Wallace from outside, but with carping criticisms instead.

Every practical and informed person knows that there is no possibility for an effective third party playing an important role in the 1948 presidential election, except possibly as a minor split-off of the main progressive camp, with accompanying disruption of the labor and progressive movement. There are only a few states—New York is one, for the time—where a labor party can develop in *coalition* with the progressives within the main parties, and therefore without splitting

the main body of the progressive movement. Any national attempt at organizing a third party, or a labor party, means to split off the Left in American politics into a decisively minority position as to total votes, and without even a decent minority in Congress. Its maximum total vote in the country would not run over fifteen per cent, at an optimistic estimate, and its representation in Congress would not be more than a mere handful.

If the Roosevelt program is to be carried effectively to the people in the 1948 elections—and it can be, indeed it must be—it will be necessary to eliminate the third-party agitation as a major factor in the movement. Throwing the issue of a third party into the political arena of America at this moment has as its main practical result to deliver the Democratic Party into the hands of its most reactionary wing without even a serious struggle. And this, of course, also gives command to the worst Tories within the Republican Party and makes prisoners of the progressives in that organization.

The Left can play a decisive role in American politics in 1948 only in coalition with the Center forces who lean slightly to the left (partly because that is the only way to victory), but who are decidedly not even faintly socialistic. Indeed, American Labor itself is not properly described as "left" in politics, in the main, but only slightly "left of center." America is still in the Rooseveltian stage of political development at best, even if with great strain and struggle there is a chance to prevent it from swinging far to the Right. Any serious attempt at a third party will merely make certain the

victory of the extreme Right, with native fascists strongly represented in its leadership.

There is not much point in making a detailed analysis of why this condition exists. It is a condition that cannot be changed by any amount of "determination" or "heroism" from the Left. It will probably be changed fundamentally only in the course of the next great economic crisis. It is the basic reality from which all those must work who wish to make the Roosevelt peace program a dominant factor in the practical politics of America.

Independent organizations for political action certainly are necessary. The most effective, however, are those of the type of the CIO Political Action Committee, and the Progressive Citizens of America, which are instruments for acting in a broad coalition, and not, like the third party, a means of splitting the coalition.

The national third-party project is not a practical means for advancing the Roosevelt policy and re-establishing it as the guide for America.

In making this judgment one is not, however, establishing an inflexible principle. It is a purely practical, tactical judgment. The third party is a political tactic, and it is wrong merely because it does not give the results toward which progressives aim.

In making this judgment for the 1948 election, furthermore, one is not prejudging the same issue for any future period. It is conceivable that this condition might change—what is clear beyond doubt is only that it will not change by 1948, that any third party in this next election could only be a hopeless minority, helping the reactionary camp to take power.

I have no hesitation in expressing my individual opinion (which is not essential to the main argument, and on which there might be many opinions) that when the historical moment arrives for a basic realignment and reconstruction of the decisive political party structure in America, what will emerge as the political representative of the masses will not be a third party as now conceived, but a Labor Party with a socialist program. For the same economic crisis which would shatter the structure of the two-party system would at the same time create the mass demand for a radically changed economic system far beyond the reforms of the Roosevelt program. The Roosevelt program was designed to prevent the advent of economic crisis and war crisis, but if and when it fails, and either of these major crises hits the world again, that program will become inadequate. There will then be no practical recourse left short of socialism. I repeat, however, that agreement on this point is not essential for practical unity in support of the Roosevelt program at present.

The Roosevelt coalition came into existence as a gathering of labor and independent progressive groups around the Democratic Party. That party has long been a minority without hope of winning a national election except when the Republican Party was itself split, and when it could gather most of the independent progressives to its side. There is no stable majority in America around either party. The Democratic Party has no hope of maintaining itself as the national administration except through maintaining the coalition with the progressives. It cannot successfully compete with the dominant

wing of the Republican Party on a reactionary platform.

That is why it is not practical politics, even from the most opportunistic view, when Mr. Byrnes surrenders the Roosevelt peace program in favor of the Vandenberg-Republican line, even when he is granted the formal leadership of this so-called "bi-partisan" policy. For he is thereby reducing the Democratic Party to its former minority, as it seems almost certain when this is written will be demonstrated in the November, 1946, elections. (Later: It was.) But the Republican gains will merely represent the weakening of the progressive coalition, not their own gain of mass support.

The practical task for the 1948 election is the reconstitution of the Roosevelt coalition. It is a fight within the Democratic Party to strengthen the forces that follow the line of Wallace who continues the Roosevelt tradition. It is a fight outside the Democratic Party to strengthen the independent organizations and extend their influence. It is also a fight within the Republican Party to mobilize the progressive groups that crystallized around Willkie, and bring them to their logical place within the progressive coalition.

There are powerful forces within the Democratic Party which will resist desperately the return to Roosevelt's line. They are typified by James Farley, who already deserted Roosevelt in 1940, and who deliberately threw the New York state election to Dewey in 1942, rather than come to agreement with the Roosevelt forces. They hold much party power in the Southern states, even though that power is receding and the South

is no longer solidly reactionary. There is no prospect of restoring the Roosevelt coalition except through defeating the Farleys, Bilbos, and Talmadges within the national Democratic Party.

Our third-party advocates proclaim in advance that the struggle to hold the Democratic Party nationally to Roosevelt's line is doomed to failure. According to them the country is fated to experience a more or less protracted period of control by the extreme Right, the Tories of both parties. They have already surrendered the Democratic Party machinery to the enemy. But this defeatism of a section of the progressive camp (fortunately, a small section) is offset by new elements of strength which Roosevelt did not benefit from when he was personally directing the fight.

The most important of these new factors is doubtless the increased numbers and maturity of the labor movement. Despite all losses from the peak membership of the war period, the labor movement engages the loyalty and activity of larger numbers than during any previous election. Their political alertness and activity are on a higher level. They have learned the great lesson that they cannot leave their political problems to be solved by one man, as formerly they "left it to F.D.R."

Furthermore, the progressive middle classes are receiving lessons in the importance to their living standards of the Roosevelt program. The precipitate abandonment of all economic controls after the ending of hostilities, under the pressure of the reactionary Republicans and anti-New Deal Democrats, has sharply worsened the conditions of these groups, relatively even

more than of labor, and brought them a keener understanding of the necessity to oppose the reactionary camp.

Finally, even the higher circles of the financial and industrial leaders are not so united as they were a year ago on the demand that the Roosevelt policies be abandoned. The reconversion has been confused, delayed, and made more costly, precisely because of the precipitate abandonment of the Roosevelt policies. They have already had a big break in the stock exchange that revived dismal memories of 1929-1933. And above all, they begin to sense the steady worsening of America's position in international affairs that results from changing from the Roosevelt to the Vandenberg position. For the first time since Roosevelt's death, a section of business and financial leaders is seriously questioning the soundness of America's course since the scrapping of Roosevelt's policies.

Those who see nothing but division and defeat for the progressive camp, while a united Toryism marches triumphantly back to power, are only weaklings who have fallen into panic because the shape of the world appears new and strange to them.

But if the world appears to be new and strange to some weak progressives, they might console themselves with the thought that the reactionary camp has lost some of its most important bases of power outside of America. The American reactionaries now face a situation where their allies abroad are so pitifully weakened that they exist from day to day only by the constant and increasing support they get from America. That is a

factor of weakness, not of strength, for the reactionary camp in America.

The Achilles heel of the American Tories is to be found in their inability to bring America and the world to a durable and prosperous peace. The vast potential strength of the progressive coalition that marches under the Roosevelt banner lies in its ability not only to promise a peaceful world in which prosperity can be regained but also to show in detail the policies which will bring America to that goal.

Practical politics always comes down to terms of winning majorities and occupying office, and of holding governmental power. The task for the 1948 election is to have in the field a ticket representing such a coalition of Center and Left forces that can be assured a majority vote.

Wallace did not leave the government in order to raise corn. He left it in order to return in 1948 together with a reorganized majority of the followers of Roosevelt.

The practical job of organizing the voters and bringing them to the polls requires a better co-ordination of forces than ever before. It requires a working unity between the main section of the Democratic Party, which is the Center of American politics, together with the independent liberal and labor groupings, which are the Left-of-Center, plus the Left, which is the grouping usually called the "Communists" by the press of the country, and in which the Communists do play an important, though a minority, role.

This all-inclusive character of the Roosevelt coalition

must be further broadened to include more of the Center of American political life. The main direction of the coalition must remain, in F.D.R.'s well-known phrase, "Left of Center." This does not mean that its main political color must be leftist. It is merely the inevitable result of a Center-Left coalition. Its main addition of strength must come from the Center because of the simple fact that the Center is the largest political group in the country. And this will continue to be so at least until after the 1948 elections, whatever one may speculate about subsequent developments. In this respect, the main task is not to win the Center over to the ideas of the Left, but merely to extend the adherence of the Center group to the Roosevelt policies, and to a program of broad unity.

The characteristic feature of American political life at this historical moment is that the main political divisions within the country cut across class lines, as well as across the main party alignments. All classes and all parties are split. Anyone who insists upon clear and logical alignments of classes and parties is doomed to disappointment and failure, so far as immediate practical politics goes. Practical workers with a task to accomplish will take the situation as it exists as the starting point for all efforts.

The Roosevelt policy for a durable peace is the central point for the only practical politics in America today. It can win the votes of all those who in the past supported Roosevelt, and also win new support. It can win the elections.