

LABOR ACTION

Independent Socialist Weekly

MAY 14, 1956

FIVE CENTS

7th ANNUAL PAMPHLET-ISSUE LABOR POLITICS IN AMERICA

The Case for A Labor Party

1. WHY LABOR NEEDS ITS OWN PARTY
2. THE GIANT IN SHORT PANTS
3. LABOR AND THE DEMOCRATS
4. PAGES FROM LABOR'S HISTORY
5. THE NEGRO FIGHT NEEDS A NEW PARTY
6. THE LIBERAL PARTY EXPERIENCE
7. THE SOCIAL MEANING OF LABOR'S POLITICS

Towards a Basic Realignment in U.S. Politics

WHY LABOR NEEDS ITS OWN PARTY

By H. W. BENSON

Any discussion of politics in the United States must sooner or later get around to the question of a "third" party.

Some caution against having "too many" parties. Others insist that another major party could only be a "protest" movement that could never win. Still others insist that the "two-party system" is so deeply entrenched in American life that it can never be replaced. Then there are those who warn against "class" parties, praise the virtues of "broad coalitions" that represent all the people and shun concentration of too much power in too few hands.

Most of this argument misses the mark; for what is at stake is not the "number" of parties, or even the two-party system as an abstract principle, but the reality of current American politics embodied in two real, not abstract, parties: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

The basic fact is this: since the organization of the majority of the American industrial working class, an achievement of the last 15 years, the structure of the nation's political party system has become utterly obsolete.

Power bumps back and forth, like the old Toonerville Trolley. But that section of the population which is largest in numbers, most strongly organized, strategically placed, and powerful, is hardly represented inside either of the two old parties.

That part of the population is the working class; and it scarcely obtains formal representation even in the party which it regularly supports and usually puts in power, the Democratic Party.

What is necessary is not just "another" party but a thoroughgoing reorganization of U. S. politics; a realignment of forces to truly represent reality. And in this realignment a party of the working people must emerge: a labor party.

Consider for a moment the absurd line-up of classes in the ruling parties.

Bedfellows

The Republican Party has traditionally combined a most open concern for the big monopolies with the support of masses of independent farmers. Those who farm the farms are trapped in one party with those who farm the farmers. Monopolists who control the stockyards and packinghouses mulct the stock farmers who sell their animals at low prices to the meat trust only to discover that the public pays sky-high prices on the retail market. The milk farmer is milked by the dairy trust.

Yet they all cohabitate in one party, whose slogan might truly be "What's good for General Motors is good for America."

Now the farmer is becoming restive and turns toward labor.

In Michigan, a new organization of dairy farmers collaborates with the CIO. In Iowa, and other grain states, new farm organizations are

rising, contemplating not merely cooperation with the AFL-CIO but actual affiliation to it.

The farmer, then, is looking away from big business. But what does he find in the other party?

The Democratic Party unites the Slave Dealers of the South with the New-Dealers of the North.

This party held power for 20 years with the support of the democratic masses of the cities: workers, Negroes, and poor people. Yet, in Congress, the party is domi-

nated by the representatives of the Southern planters and mill owners who choose its top leaders and run its main committees.

Here in the South, the party remains in power by excluding the masses from political life: the whites by trickery; the Negroes by terror. Backwardness and dictatorship, that is the Democratic Party in the South.

And in the North? The Democratic Party is run not by the millions who put it in office but by ex-

clusive machines of bosses, some legally and others only morally corrupt. The rich and powerful who buy the Republican Party outright have to buy the Democratic Party through its political bosses.

Such is our "two-party system." Would another set-up put too much power in the hands of one class? Could another system increase the influence of a small minority and thwart the will of the majority?

Anyone who answers such questions should ask himself: what do we have now?

Millions of farmers vote Republican only to learn to their dismay that they have turned the country over to Wall Street. And millions of workers and Negroes vote Democrat only to discover that they have turned the nation over to slave-dealers, or at least to a coalition of Southern reactionaries and Northern Wall Street agents.

The Difference

As the people switch back and forth in the dizzying quest for proper representation, they never get what they want. At bottom, the power of wealth and monopoly remains; privilege and exploitation dominate in both parties.

High prices; growth of monopoly; war and imperialism; cycles of unemployment and prosperity; corruption in government; high taxes for the poor; ever-higher profits for the rich; small business to the wall; concentration and monopoly: It continues alike under Republican rule as it did under the Democrats.

Do you mean to say, it will be asked, that both parties are the same? Not at all.

They are as different as a Stanley Steamer and a Model T. Ford. But both are outlived in the age of jet-propulsion.

As we have just pointed out: they are different. Each appeals to different classes; each proposes a program different in important respects. To put it truthfully, each deceives different sections of the population by different devices.

But in this respect they resemble one another: the voters who put them in power cannot get what they want.

A Fable

Farmers vote for a better life and higher income for themselves. They get high monopoly prices for the machines they must buy.

Labor and Negroes vote for democracy. They get right-to-work laws, and terror at the Southern polling booths.

They vote for Lehman; they get Eastland at the head of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

(Turn to last page)



CHAPTER 2 Trade Unions and Politics

THE GIANT IN SHORT PANTS

By BEN HALL

The union movement is already deep in politics, and not because it is weak but because it is so strong.

Basic industry is organized, and labor by its sheer economic power, is able to win concessions from the employer. But what it wins on the industrial field is taken away in the legislative hall.

If it wins a union shop, "right to work" laws are passed in the states and the Taft-Hartley Law in the nation. If it raises wages, income-tax laws shift the burden off the rich onto the poor.

So it goes. The more powerful the unions become, the greater comes the pressure from Big Business to undermine by law what cannot be cut down in open fight.

The great paradox of political life is this: Labor is at the peak of its economic power, enrolling the majority of industrial workers. Yet its political and legal position is at a low point.

Not because it is inactive. There is more political activity in and by the labor movement today than ever. But most of the activity seems deliberately framed toward self-stultification and frustration.

The political arm of the united labor movement is the Committee on Political Education (COPE), replacing and combining the CIO-PAC and the AFL's LLPE. Like its predecessors, it formulates programs and demands; it calls upon workers to vote; and where legally permissible, it endorses candidates. For decades, this has continued.

For decades, labor's political committees have predicted and announced great victories at the polls; yet, a sobering few moments after each victory, labor discovers that the fruits of victory have eluded it. What are the mechanics of this disillusionment?

STACKED CARDS

Periodically COPE will publish an accounting of the voting record of congressmen. It will point out that the politicians whom it supported, or whom it will support, voted "right" on 70 per cent, 90 per cent, or 100 per cent of the questions that came before Congress. Most of them are, of course, Democrats. And those whom it opposed voted "wrong"; most of these are Republicans and Southern reactionaries.

One gets the impression that a liberal bloc in Congress is clearly and militantly aligned against a reactionary bloc. But all this is self-delusion.

The record shows only what was allowed to come before Congress for a vote. The two-party system stacks the cards.

The key questions are seldom voted on. Or, if they are, the vote is a formal gesture.

What labor requires is a militant political fight in and out of Congress for its program. But it is satisfied with a simple raising of hands on a selected few issues.

The men who are elected to Congress are not crusaders chosen by labor to give encouragement to the fight; they are political time-servers of the old parties chosen by bosses and wardheelers.

WORDS AND DEEDS

Take examples from only two fields: foreign policy and civil rights.

The labor movement stands foursquare for Negro rights in all its platforms, declarations, resolutions. Words are not enough but they are something. Before acting, it is necessary to decide that the cause is just.

And so labor solemnly declares that the Negro is entitled to full democracy and demands measures of all kinds to implement these rights: the right to vote in the South, the end of the Southern filibuster system, etc., etc., etc.

In 1954, labor boasted of a great "victory" when the Democratic Party won control of Congress. Meanwhile Negroes in the South are shot to death

in Democratic Mississippi for trying to vote.

The Supreme Court throws out segregation in the schools. 100 Southern Congressmen sign a manifesto calling for resistance to the Supreme Court decision and giving moral encouragement to those who would crush the rising movement of Negroes for democracy. On the list of signers of this notorious call for human degradation are two men supported consistently by labor political committees: Lister Hill, chairman of the Senate Labor Committee, and John Sparkman, labor-backed candidate for vice-president in 1952.

How seriously can Negroes take labor's printed declarations, how significant can the platforms be treated, when the politicians actually endorsed by labor are not bound by it? Or, as in this case, are found on the side of its enemies?

But the apologists for these "liberal" allies of slave-dealers will retort: Hill and Sparkman are liberals on general questions, but they can resist the Southern "tradition" only at the risk of political defeat.

Let us put them aside, then. What about the Northern liberals? Where are they?

100 reactionaries in Congress signed a manifesto. Where are the liberals to sign their own manifesto to give encouragement and support to the Southern Negro fighters?

We speak, now, of the hundreds of politicians who were supported by labor in 1954. Here, in the midst of the most critical struggle of American democracy in a generation, they cannot even rise to the heights of a simple declaration.

What has happened to labor's platform—where is it and who is fighting for it?

We go further: While courageous men are dying for democracy in the South, where Democrats rule, it is impossible to list a half-dozen white statesmen, politicians, candidates, senators, representatives, in all the 48 states combined, who have spoken out clearly and completely on this issue as individuals. And we do not refer to vague declarations of sympathy for the plight of the Negro in general.

We want to know: which side are you on in this struggle? Who has spoken out in support of the Montgomery boycotters and said that they are right? Who has called upon the Negro to go ahead with his fight to vote and to attend school in equality? And who at the same time has denounced by name those in Congress and in the states who give moral support to those who shoot down Negroes and who encourage resistance to the simple demands for democracy?

Not Stevenson, not Truman. Who?

Up to yesterday, the labor-backed liberal wing of the Democratic Party was concerned only with party unity with the slave-dealers. And so they remain to this day.

Labor's program, platform and demands are one matter: but what it gets and whom it supports are quite a different thing.

THE SAME GULF

On foreign policy: the same gulf between lofty thoughts and sordid reality.

Some five years ago, Walter Reuther promulgated a vast program for material aid to the peoples of Asia, predicated on encouraging their revolutionary aspirations to democracy, against colonialism, for peace and economic progress. That was his program, and properly interpreted, it could have been a rallying call to oppressed peoples the world over.

But once these words were put on paper, the labor movement proceeded as

usual to elect its usual candidates to office.

During the Indochina crisis, while the nation seemed on the brink of a new war, Paul Douglas, labor-backed senator from Illinois, was asked by reporters at a UAW educational conference: What is the Democratic program in this crisis? His reply was astounding and almost unbelievable. He said that he did not know what the party's program could be because the small band of liberals in the Senate were not consulted on policy by the party's leaders! If Douglas, a duly elected senator, is kept out of the party's most crucial decisions, the labor movement must be locked out completely.

SYMPATHY IS NOT ENOUGH

But let us consider current events. Last month Chester Bowles, speaking before the 7th annual UAW conference, outlined a program for foreign policy which generally expresses the view of the most advanced sections of the labor movement.

He spoke with sympathy for the aspirations of Asians and Africans for freedom. "Many people, perhaps, a good share of people, feel the time has come for America to have a new and different foreign policy," he said, adding: "Peoples throughout the world are asking, what is our national purpose?" He spoke of China and how a small band of Communists were able to win control of the country. "While we backed Chiang Kai-shek he was living in the past and trying to build his future on corruption and feudalism and all of the things that the people of China were prepared to reject." He decried the fact that America had backed colonialism in Indochina while "we allowed Communism to capture the leadership of a nationalist movement."

And he might have spoken of Spain where "we" allied ourselves with the Franco regime, and of Korea where "we" helped to install dictator Rhee. And he could have told how Eastern Europe was carved up after the fall of Germany. He could have spoken of many more such things, and the UAW and its leadership would have nodded in approval.

For our labor movement, at least its most progressive sections, would like to find a democratic foreign policy; they want to appeal to the peoples of the world and give support to their struggles.

But they cannot. They vitiate their own good intentions because their platform remains on paper while they continue to support the Democratic Party.

WHERE WERE THE DEMOCRATS?

"My party is going to be tested on all these issues," said Chester Bowles, "and I believe the Democratic Party is going to stand up to that test. I believe it is going to prove itself before the American people." With these few words he wipes out everything that he said.

And with the same thought labor wipes out its own platforms.

The Republican Party administration has been in control of the White House for only four years. Politics, say the leading Democrats and Republicans, stops at the water's edge. The fundamental line of U. S. foreign policy has continued without serious challenge from either party for decades.

It has banked upon and backed not the world peoples' struggle for freedom and justice but their exploiters and oppressors.

For a new democratic foreign policy? Of course. But if it is to come through the election of the Democratic Party, we ask: Where was your progressive policy in the 20 years of your administration?

Eisenhower was elected president in 1952 and the Republicans won control of Congress. What did the majority who put them in office want? Obviously, they did not want to repeal the great gains won under the New Deal; no one would dare to suggest such a step for it would mean political suicide. They wanted lower prices; they wanted an end to the Korean War; they wanted lower taxes for the people; they wanted to root out corruption in government.

But think: *This was the program of the labor movement!* It is precisely to such aims that COPE will dedicate itself.

Why, then, were millions duped into voting Republican?

Obviously because they saw no alternative.

Could they take labor's political platform seriously? The unions devised excellent planks but on administration which they had supported had been in power for decades. And the evils and discontents remained.

But above all, no one had an opportunity to vote for labor's platform; they could only elect candidates endorsed by labor, and that is quite another thing.

We could summarize the dilemma: labor had its political committees to write down its desires but the voter has no chance to support these desires; the voter may support candidates backed by labor's committees but they are not pledged to labor's programs.

That was the dead-end in 1952. So it is in 1956.

How, for example, shall the Negro vote in 1956? Labor's committees are for democratic rights; but they do not run for office; the Negro can vote for candidates backed by labor, but they are deliberately evasive at best. What is he to do?

FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

And so it will remain until the union goes forward from a Committee on Political Education to an independent Labor Party.

We face this fact and say: there must be a realignment of forces; there must be a labor party.

But there are those who find this fact somehow unpalatable; they do not like "class" terminology. But while the name "labor party" is an honest expression of what is and would present the issue without deceit to the people, a name is still just a name.

The old parties and the class alliances they represent are not fitted to modern times. Let the realignment take place democratically; in any new progressive people's party, let those who bring a majority of the popular support enjoy a majority control. With this simple democratic precept, the working-class character of the new movement would be guaranteed.

The old parties are founded on a quite different principle: those who bring the most money get the most power in its affairs.

Another objection: a labor party would provoke "class conflict." We warn the reader to be particularly careful here.

Note: if the Democratic Party is controlled by a tiny minority of bosses and Southern landlords while 17 million organized workers rally support to it, that presumably does not stir up "class antagonisms," although it would be hard to find a more provocative set-up. But if the vast majority who put the party in power should have a correspondingly large share in its actual affairs, that would create distasteful class antagonism!

Actually, all this is only a roundabout means of announcing that the minority of bosses would not permit the majority to rule in "their" party.

A democratic and progressive third party would be the party of labor and its allies; it would be based on labor's strength, labor's program, labor's social weight. It would be the natural complement to labor's struggle for industrial democracy.



LABOR ACTION

May 14, 1956 Vol. 20, No. 20

Published weekly by Labor Action Publishing Company, 114 West 14 Street, New York 11, N. Y.—Telephone: WATKINS 4-4222—Re-entered as second-class matter May 24, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1874.—Subscriptions: \$2 a year; \$1 for 6 months (\$2.25 and \$1.15 for Canadian and Foreign).—Opinions and policies expressed in signed articles by contributors do not necessarily represent the views of Labor Action, which are given in editorial statements.

Editor: HAL DRAPER

Associate Editors:
GORDON HASKELL, BEN HALL
Business Mgr.: L. G. SMITH

CHAPTER 3 Support the Fair-Dealers?

LABOR AND
THE DEMOCRATS

By HAL DRAPER

Remember . . . ?

Back in 1948, Truman upset the pollsters by his unpredicted victory, after a whistle-stop campaign in which he hauled out all of the best phrases of the Fair Deal and polished them up. In a moment of glowing gratitude, he told the press next day, "Labor did it!"

In fact, labor had a great part in doing it. It was done against the propaganda of the one-party press, against the apathy of the Democratic machine itself, and in spite of the fact that Truman himself had done little or nothing as president to make labor happy.

He had brought back the most hated of anti-labor weapons, the injunction, and had used it to break three great strikes; he had, not long before, appealed to Congress for a law a good deal more vicious than the Taft-Hartley Law—a law to draft strikers into the army; his record of positive accomplishment was not impressive. Expecting his defeat anyway, important sections of the labor movement were getting ready to break away. Even William Green, semi-fossilized president of the AFL, was talking about a labor third party, not to speak of several CIO leaders.

But as candidate, Truman delivered the goods—with speeches. He inveighed against the "special interests" and heartless big business, even if it was not always clear what he proposed to do about it. This is sometimes called "social demagoguery" but in capitalist politics it is considered very smart. He seemed to be telling labor that he was for labor's program; he seemed to be telling the small farmers that he was for their program; and they warmed up and flocked to vote for him, sweeping him back into the White House.

The Republicans were perfectly correct when, scandalized, they accused Truman of making a "class" appeal, stirring up "class antagonisms." He did, in that same "smart" fashion. It got him elected, even though the labor leaders who flocked to him insist on making speeches denouncing the idea of a labor party with a "narrow" class appeal.

BACK TO NORMAL

"We did it!" crowed labor too, echoing Truman, not bothering to denounce itself for this obviously "class" analysis. In those briefly happy days, there was a temporary upsurge even of wild talk about "taking over" and "transforming" the Democratic Party into a reliable instrument of labor's interests.

One reason why this talk died down pretty rapidly was that, as soon as the Candidate became the President again, he went back to normal. You can't put butter on a speech about the "special interests."

Truman and the Democrats made no attempt to deliver on promises of civil-rights legislation. They made no meaningful attempt to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act. Truman went in for more strikebreaking, as the railroad workers found out.

His labor supporters were tarred with the festering corruption that boiled up out of his administration. Labor had to fight against Truman-appointed war-mobilization agencies infested with dollar-a-year big businessmen like the same C. E. Wilson who later told us "what's good for General Motors."

We got the Korean war. In foreign policy, we also got the U. S. turn back to friendship with the Franco fascist regime, and the change of line back in favor of Chiang Kai-shek.

We got the "subversive list," instituted by none other than Truman, and the government-initiated witchhunt which got started long before McCarthy.

This was the Democratic Party back at the old stand, with a Fair Deal sign over it.

"TAKE OVER" THE PARTY?

A second reason, no doubt, why the talk died down of "taking over the Democratic Party" is more basic: What does it mean to take over a party like the Democratic Party?

(Incidentally, most of all this applies to the Republican Party even more, but we are not discussing the Republican Party separately because there is no important tendency in labor's political movement to orient in that direction. All the real questions of labor's dependent politics concern the Democrats.)

These two old parties are not programmatic groupings, but power coalitions and federations of machines. The Democratic Party is a coalition of city political machines and bosses, Southern reaction, and labor and liberal pressure-politics. When the chips are down, it follows the politics of the more enlightened Northern capitalists tempered by the vicious racism and DixieGOP conservatism of the Southern white-supremacists. In this Popular Front, there is a division of labor: The workers and farmers provide the votes, and the city machines and Southerners run the Democratic administrations, while the labor-liberals mutter angrily and sometimes even protest audibly.

Truman may have got back to the White House by pitching his "class appeal" in one direction; but once

back in the White House he knew what class had to be followed in deeds.

Now then: suppose labor and its liberal allies "captured" this party in some sense—not merely in some small town where it could elect the aldermen, but where it counted, in the national seats of power. Suppose, for example, labor and its liberal allies made a real fight at a Democratic national convention and sought to put over its own program, candidates, and party leaders. . . .

Would the Southern reactionaries bow to majority rule and accept the new leadership and spirit that had "captured" their party? The very thought is ridiculous, of course. They would walk out. They even walked out on Harry Truman in 1948.

Or the city machine politicians—would they simply salute their new leaders, underwrite the new program, and go along no matter what? The thought is almost as ridiculous. Could all the capitalist politicians and wardheeling fakers who infest the party submit to a labor-"captured" Democratic Party simply out of a spirit of discipline? This spirit doesn't exist.

Or would the labor movement simply capture itself in "taking over" the Democratic Party? Would it not rather be, at the very possible best, the beginning of a general sweeping realignment in American politics that would produce precisely what the labor leaders say they want to avoid: a party of labor?

Even if we assume for the sake of argument that it is conceivable, if not likely, that labor should really set about reforming this power-coalition called the Democratic Party and give it a progressive program and some likelihood that the program will be carried out: is it reasonable to expect that it could beat the entrenched Democratic political machines on their own terrain, inside the party, and make the effort worthwhile?

PRESSURE-GROUP POLITICS

So, as we were saying, these were some of the considerations which put a quick end to the burgeoning idea of "taking over" the Democratic Party. But what is the alternative to that, if labor is to stay in political activity, as it must?

For the labor leaders, the alternative was—and still is—going back to the status of just another "pressure group" in the Democratic Party. Get behind the good things and good men; complain about the bad things and bad men—try to move the party over to the "left" as a whole. . . .

There are a number of difficulties about this pressure-group role, even though organized labor is so big, so powerful and so influential that it is the most feared or courted single pressure group in politics.

The first difficulty is inherent in the fact that labor is not inherently a pressure-group at all, even though it tries to act like one. It is a separate class.

What we mean concretely is this: If the natural-gas lobby can pressure both the Democratic and Republican Parties into jumping through the hoop, that is natural; because the interests of the oil and gas men, while only one sector of the total business interests, fit into the capitalist-party program; and as long as their special demands do not hurt all of business too much, they can get their way. True, it is another robbery of the public, but that is what bourgeois politics is for.

But if the labor movement tries to "pressure" the major parties into (say) repealing the Taft-Hartley Law, it finds itself up against the solidarity of all business interests, who are entrenched in the old parties.

Labor's distinctive program, even where exceedingly modest, tends to raise society-wide issues and tests, by its very nature—issues and tests which are not resolvable by pressure-group means.

CAN'T USE THE SHUTTLE

That is a fundamental difficulty. There is another difficulty in labor's pressure-group politics which is more immediate—and which has wrought havoc with labor's effectiveness on the political field.

A pressure-group in this political tug-of-war can hope to exert its pressure only in one way: by promising support or withholding support—votes or campaign contributions, or anything.

Every social, economic and political pressure group in the country can operate this way. The neo-Klansmen in the South can threaten to bolt to the Republicans. The farmers can mutter about voting Democrat instead of for Eisenhower. The NAACP leaders can hint cautiously about voting GOP. Even the natural-gas men can grumble over Eisenhower's veto with the implied threat of punishing him with votes or, more likely, campaign contributions. So it goes.

But labor cannot operate this way.

Labor's political movement cannot shuttle its votes back and forth between the two old parties, or successfully threaten to do so. If Adlai Stevenson refuses to make even a verbal obeisance in favor of the Negroes' epochal fight in the South, can Reuther and Meany "get even" by announcing support of Eisenhower and Nixon? If labor is dissatisfied with what it gets from the Democrats, outside of talk, where is it to go?

In the last analysis, this too is the outcome of the fact that labor is not merely a pressure group, not merely

even a very big pressure group. It has a program, even when its leaders do not formulate one or are incapable of formulating one. Its program, branded on its forehead and unconcealable, is: labor's needs and interests.

Its leaders can ignore this program, as they most often do successfully; its leaders can reduce this program to empty words, as they do very skillfully; its leaders can betray this program, as they do in good time too. But the program is there because it is spelled out in the course of the daily struggle in the shops and factories over the conflicting interests of two different classes.

Because the program is there, the labor leaders are prevented even from maneuvering with the more reactionary of the two parties and are inevitably oriented toward that party whose brand of social demagoguery appeals in its direction.

THE SPINNING WHEEL

Now, everybody knows this is so. Hence the difficulty. **As long as labor has nowhere else to go, what is the pressure upon the Democratic machine to heed its complaints, protests, proposals or lamentations?**

True, on a local scale in some areas, labor politics has flirted with "liberal" Republicans, as in New York City, but not where the main issues are decided.

True, the labor leaders can try to threaten, not that they will break with the Democrats and go to the Republicans, but that their rank and file will—unless such-and-such measures are carried out. Or they can threaten, usually with more justice, that unless the Democrats concede a few more crumbs, the worker-voters will just sit it out despite doorbell-ringing. A small component of labor's enormous pressure-power is thus brought into play. Even this small component has power. But how little compared to what is possible, as can be seen from the present political impotence of labor's political arms in an important election year. . . .

In 1948 there was an enormous pressure on Truman, besides his fear of defeat. This was the Stalinist-led Wallace candidacy of the Progressive Party, which momentarily threatened to attract away part of the working-class support indispensable to Truman's election. This was an important reason for Truman's leftist talk in the campaign.

In 1952, and again in 1956, the fear of a Southern bolt is either the reason or the pretext for the pussy-footing on the Jim Crow question even by Northern Democratic liberals, like Stevenson.

But they are not afraid that labor will bolt.

No, labor is in their pocket. Safe. Don't have to worry about it much. It's the other side they have to worry about, the reactionaries, the current "moderates."

So labor's tremendous political strength is expended like a free-spinning wheel stuck up in empty air, going nowhere.

A TRANSITIONAL ROAD

Sooner or later labor will have to break with this Democratic Party and do what every other working class in the world has had to do: form its own party. But there are different roads through which this can happen.

Meanwhile the great majority of the trade-unionists do not see or agree with this necessity. The most politically conscious among them believe in working with and supporting the Democratic Party. In spite of the lessons of experience, the leap over to a new party is still too great, at least for this period of war-economy prosperity.

But for us, who are for a labor party, this does not mean an end to our dialogue with such workers. We have a very important thing to tell them:

You, for whatever reason, are against forming a labor party now. You want to support Democrats against Republicans, and good Democrats against bad Democrats. You want to do this not because you are a careerist or are looking for a wardheelers' job, but because you think labor's interests demand that you support the lesser evil against the greater evil.

Very well, then, you will work within the Democratic Party, but—

Work!

You're for a forthright civil-rights program by the Democrats? Then fight for it. Don't just advocate it: fight for it, for that is the only way it will be won.

Demand that your leaders at the Democratic Party conventions—and there will be a platoon of labor leaders there as delegates—fight all the way down to the floor on behalf of a few propositions of elementary democracy: clear endorsement of the desegregation decision of the Supreme Court; strong provision for its implementation; repudiation by name of all those who are fighting to keep the Negroes under, like the signers of the Southern Congressional Manifesto.

Insist that the Democratic platform firmly call for the repeal of Taft-Hartley. Call for abolition of the congressional seniority system whereby the Southern bloc automatically controls a Democratic Party-controlled Congress.

Implement Reuther's threat that "You cannot have Mr. Eastland and have us at the same time."

Labor's political machine can work in the Democratic Party by capitulating to its machine, or it can work to really achieve those good things which it claims it can convince the Democrats to accept.

So far, it has mainly tagged along as a fifth wheel of the party, not as a dynamic left wing of it.

Yoa, who want to work in the Democratic Party: fight at least for what YOU believe in, since you disagree with our Labor Party views; and if you fight for it in the Democratic Party we will see whether you are right, and can really get what you want; or whether your fight will merely open up a different and broader road leading to genuine independent labor politics, a labor party, by breaking with this party.

CHAPTER 4 Yesterday and Today

PAGES FROM LABOR'S HISTORY

By JULIUS FALK

In the history of the American labor movement there is a moral and a lesson for the labor movement of today: the need for and the inevitability of independent working-class political action.

In the past century the voice of independent labor politics has often been low, but seldom mute; and in innumerable instances it was loud, clear and full of promise.

Even before the Civil War the organization of workingmen's parties often coincided with the limited successes of unions of skilled craftsmen. The first of these parties dates back to 1828—in New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere—when suffrage for white males was only rarely limited by property qualifications.

The issues on which these parties fought corresponded to the elementary human needs of the time such as the ten-hour day and equal, decent and free education. In a number of cities these parties met with considerable success at the polls.

But the working class was as yet weak. Numerically they were a tiny minority of the national population; and politically they were disoriented by the pull of stronger parties on the outside and by the factionalism of Owenite utopian colonizers within. In a few years these labor parties disappeared from the national scene, and in the panic of 1837 their trade-union complements were decimated.

Although shortlived, their historical value is permanent as early demonstrations of the irrepressible nature of the class struggle and its political expression, be it the struggle between merchant capitalist and craft worker in the 1820s; or between finance capital and the industrial proletariat a century later.

Following the Civil War there were a host of third parties. Sometimes they were union-based labor parties; in many instances, however, they were alliances of exploited worker and oppressed farmer. For example:

The National Labor Union, organized in 1866, from its inception placed its reliance on political action.

In 1874 the Greenback Party was formed. Primarily an agrarian reform movement, it nevertheless formed an alliance with trade-unionists and, as the National Party, received 1,000,000 votes in the elections of 1878. The popularity of the Greenback-labor alliance, induced by the depression of 1873 was wiped out during the economic revival of the early 1880s.

THE POPULIST PERIOD

By 1884 another depression was in the offing. The Knights of Labor, theoretically an all-embracing radical movement whose vertebrae were made up of industrial trade-union assemblies, experienced a tremendous rise in membership and militancy. The Knights, growing from a sect to a mass movement with a membership of around 700,000, plunged into intensive political activity.

Mass strikes and independent electoral activity became the earmarks of the year 1886. In New York, the Knights, the Socialist Labor Party (formed ten years earlier), single-taxers, reformers, etc., organized the United Labor Party. With Henry George as its candidate for mayor in 1886, the party received 68,000 votes—30 per cent of the total cast. In Chicago the same year, and on the heels of the Haymarket affair, a union-based United Labor Party also won 30 per cent of the votes cast in its municipal elections.

But the United Labor Parties like the National Party were overcome by economic recovery and internal weaknesses.

The impulse of underprivileged masses to break out of the restrictions of strictly bourgeois politics was continued in the People's Party (the populists). The People's Party was largely an agrarian protest movement but it was more than that. It developed into an alliance of farmer and urban worker who saw no fundamental conflict of immediate interest. This alliance added to the powerful impetus given to the populists in the 1890s.

In the presidential elections of 1892 the People's Party polled over a million

votes for its candidate, General Weaver, and in the congressional elections two years later the party received more than 1,500,000 votes.

But the People's Party, too, could not survive the economic revival of the late 1890s and its internal disharmony. It committed political suicide by endorsing the Democratic Party's candidate in 1896, Bryan, and was shortly absorbed by that party.

POST-WAR EXPLOSION

Where labor and agrarian discontent in the post-Civil War period was manifested in labor parties and alliances of farmer and worker, the spirit of protest was sustained in the early 1900s by the Socialist Party and the National Non-Partisan League.

The former differed from labor parties, not only in its socialist platform but in its lack of an affiliated trade-union base. Nevertheless it became a mass party of social protest, recruiting its strength from worker and farmer alike and gaining six per cent of the national vote in 1912.

The Non-Partisan League differed from the People's Party and the earlier National Party in its almost exclusive concern with agrarian reforms and recruitment of farmers. Also, unlike the Greenbackers and populists, the Non-Partisan League failed to put up national slates and sought electoral victories by pressing for its candidates in primary contests of the major capitalist parties.

On the heels of the 1918 armistice the drive toward labor political independence found renewed strength. The unions had grown enormously during war-time prosperity. With the war over, the class struggle burst forth with an unprecedented violence and magnitude.

In 1919, 25 per cent of the non-agricultural working class were engaged in fierce, protracted strikes. From the Boston police strike to the Seattle General Strike led by the AFL Central Labor Union, "strike" was on the order of the day.

What enthusiasm existed among the working class for the war-time Wilson administration was largely dissipated by the negative political consequences of the war, by the threat of depression (soon realized and reaching its depths in 1921 with five million unemployed), and by the open-shop offensive which was a conspiracy of government and capitalists to destroy the trade-union movement.

Both parties were openly, cynically and brutally on the side of the anti-union offensive. The question of independent labor politics grew inescapable.

NATIONAL LABOR PARTY

The president of the AFL, Samuel Gompers, held fast to his political-dependence policy, looking for favors from those who were busy issuing anti-union injunctions and sending the militia against striking workers. But just as craft-unionism found itself surrounded and threatened by the wave of strikes in all the mass industries, so did Gompers' anti-independent political bias initially fail to smash efforts by more militant unionists to break out of the strangling grasp of the two-party fetish.

Numerous local labor parties sprang up throughout the nation, organized and led by progressive trade-unionists. The largest union in the country, the United Mine Workers, representing 400,000 workers, adopted a motion to organize a labor party at its 1919 convention, only to have it sabotaged by the opposition and passivity of the UMW's conservative leadership.

But over the heads of the top national leadership the unionists in city after city and state after state organized their local parties. In November 1919, many of these local labor parties were amalgamated into the National Labor Party.

The convention was tremendously impressive for its numbers of unions represented and militant spirit reflected in its program.

Gompers, however, stepped up his opposition to labor's political insurgency and the effectiveness of his active hostility was clearly seen in the 1920 nominating convention of the Labor Party.

The party succeeded in placing itself on the 1920 ballot as the Farmer-Labor Party—in only seventeen states, which is a partial explanation for its small vote of around one-quarter of a million. However, to this figure, as an indication of political and social protest, must be added the nearly one million votes for Eugene Debs on the Socialist Party ticket.

It was in the 1920s that the movement was organized which had perhaps the greatest potentiality in the long history of labor and third-partyism for developing into a permanent and powerful union-based party of the working class: the Conference for Progressive Political Action.

THE CPPA TRIES

The CPPA owed its formation to the activities of the AFL-affiliated railroad unions which numbered nearly 1,500,000—more than a third of the entire AFL membership. And among these railroad unions it was the 300,000-strong machinists union headed by ex-socialist William Johnston which spearheaded the CPPA.

The leadership of these railroad unions was not made up of radicals; basically it was as yet conservative in temperament and moderate in social outlook. But the railroad workers had come to enjoy a fresh sense of power and authority in their great numbers; they had not suffered crushing defeats by the time of the CPPA's founding conference in February 1922, as was the case with many of the major unions; they resented the railroads' return to private owners by the government which had taken over their operation during the war; they had been enthused over the Plumb Plan which would have given the unionists some control over their own destiny.

The railroadmen had thus gained a broader vision which went beyond the limited purview of economic class organization. They witnessed havoc wrought on the working class first by the Democratic Party administration under Wilson, then by the Republican rule of Harding. They recognized the threat to their own union's stability in the union-busting activities of both parties.

The AFL railroad workers' leadership responded to and reflected the self-assurance and heightened social vision of the rank and file. It organized a conference to explore the possibilities of non-partisan political action.

At this conference, held in Chicago (February 1922) were representatives from the Farmer Labor Party, state labor parties, the Non-Partisan League, the Socialist Party, etc. (The only wing of the labor movement not invited was the Communists.)

LA FOLLETTE'S STAMP

The first Conference for Progressive Political Action was not organized to form a labor party, but those who attended and favored the formation of such a party hoped that the movement would shortly strike out on its own politically.

However, at the second conference of the CPPA held in Cleveland during December 1922, the differences between the cautious railroad union leaders and some of the pro-labor-partyites came to the fore and prompted a split in the organization. By a narrow margin this conference rejected the immediate formation of a labor party and the Farmer Labor Party withdrew its support, condemning the CPPA with particular vehemence.

Despite this split the CPPA was forced by the pressure of events to move in a leftward direction.

Faced with the choice of Davis or his rival Republican twin, Coolidge, the CPPA chose an independent course. Meeting in St. Louis during February 1924, the CPPA decided on a nominating convention to be held three months later.

At this July convention Senator LaFollette was the unchallenged nominee of the CPPA for the White House.

Although a powerful and popular figure, he was not the most fortunate choice for the future of labor political action. But with the CPPA developing into a mass movement, and with its ticket headed by LaFollette, the AFL national leadership was forced for the first time out of its national non-partisan shell, and it broke precedent by endorsing the candidate of the Progressive Party. The attitude of the AFL, however, was not designed to lead the movement but to follow it, content to have LaFollette stamp the new party with his own particular brand.

FOUR YEARS TOO SOON

In the elections, LaFollette garnered 5,000,000 votes. It was a remarkable showing, although he only carried his own state, Wisconsin. Seventeen per cent of the voters cast their ballot for a party which, for all its programmatic deficiencies and special appeal to farmers, was a party which owed its existence to the political consciousness and independence of the trade-union movement.

But the trade-union leaders were distraught. Five million votes were not enough. They had expected ten. Their own boldness had frightened the railroad union leaders and their AFL superiors back to their more natural conservatism.

The pre-election proposals to organize a permanent labor party after the elections were dropped. The excuse was the "small" vote. The Wisconsin senator was among the first to scuttle the movement and the CPPA was given its coup de grace at its February 1925 convention. Thus ended a promise.

In 1925 the CPPA was abandoned. Four years later came the Great Depression, the harbinger of mass discontent and mass radicalization. In the middle thirties came the dynamic organizing drives of the CIO. What would have happened to American politics during these years had the leadership of the CPPA faced up to its responsibility and pressed the organization of a labor party?

What would have happened if the 15 million depression unemployed had a Labor Party to champion its interests and if the rising CIO had a political party to champion the cause of industrial unionism?

The questions permit only speculation, but that does not gainsay the likelihood that the political relationship of class forces in the United States today would be vastly different, and a happier one for the working class.

NOW IT CAN BE DONE

What is the significance of the past failures of the American working class to organize itself on a permanent political basis? What can we learn from it?

To begin with, it must be recognized that the inability of the working class in the past to found its own party was not purely fortuitous. While its development was not precluded by objective circumstances, laborism was at least seriously handicapped by a multitude of social factors which no longer exist today.

And that is the point, the main lesson.

In the earliest workingmen's parties, organized more than a century ago, their power to survive was limited by the fact—among other reasons—that the working class was composed of a small economic minority of widely dispersed craftsmen, internally separated by craft jealousies and a lack of intercommunication. Today a concentrated industrial proletariat represents the majority of the population of a unified nation.

In the post-Civil War period the political rebelliousness of the working class was often drained off by utopian panaceas and by alliances with farmers in which unionists and workers played a subordinate role: thus the political fate of the working class was made unduly subject to the frequent fluctuations of the mood, politics and economics of the agrarian population.

Today that is all changed. The specific weight of the farmers compared to the workers is now light with regard to numbers and social weight. Where the dwindling Knights of Labor sought an alliance with the populists, today it is the discontented farmer which seeks the cover and support of the mighty AFL-CIO.

With America's industrial revolution of the 1880s followed by waves of mass immigration, the bourgeoisie was able ultimately to discourage the political as well as the economic organization of a new multi-lingual working class by encouraging national and racial antagonisms. Today, the working class is essentially a cultural entity, with the main residue of divisive bigotry in the working class anti-Negro racial prejudice.

(Continued on next page)

CHAPTER 5 Jim Crow and the Democrats

THE NEGRO FIGHT NEEDS A NEW PARTY

By MAX MARTIN

A recent column by the N. Y. *Post's* Murray Kempton gives an incident which lights up the relationship between the rising tide of the Negroes' struggle for civil rights and contemporary American liberalism. Inasmuch as liberalism is the dominant political ideology of the labor movement, such an illumination also reveals a good deal about the relations between the Negroes' heroic battle for democracy and the political views and actions of the unions.

According to Kempton, the "First Lady of American Liberalism," Eleanor Roosevelt, tendered her resignation from the national board of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People on April 16. As explanation for her move, she claimed that pressure of time prevented her from attending board meetings. One week later, Mrs. Roosevelt obviously experienced a change of mind; she returned to the board.

This much is in the public domain. But Kempton goes on to some *informed* speculations about the real reasons for her resignation.

He states that "the leaders of the NAACP had no reason to be unconscious of her discontent with what had gone on at some of the meetings she had attended." The NAACP for instance, supports the amendment of Representative Powell (Dem.—N. Y.) to bar federal financial grants to schools which refuse to start desegregation. Mrs. Roosevelt opposes it.

But what must be even more painful to her are the criticisms which such NAACP leaders as Roy Wilkins have made of Mrs. Roosevelt's favorite candidate, Adlai Stevenson, and the Democratic Party as a whole. And while the Negro leadership has tempered these criticisms insofar as public expression is concerned, there can be no doubt that in private (at NAACP board meetings, let us say) it has relaxed its restraints. Hence Mrs. Roosevelt's discomfort and annoyance.

She has expressed on a number of occasions her bewilderment and dismay at the criticisms made of Stevenson on the score of Negro rights; and there is no reason to doubt that her puzzlement is genuine, since there is no reason to believe that she understands or is capable of understanding the conflict which exists between the efforts of the Negroes to put an end and for all to the outrageous Jim Crow system and supporting the Democratic Party.

To Mrs. Roosevelt and to thousands of liberals, including those whose ties and loyalties to that party do not have the "official" quality which exists in the case of Mrs. Roosevelt, the Democratic Party is the be-all and end-all of political life and all political struggle has to be accommodated to it.

But the fight of the Negroes, like all significant social struggles by progres-

sive elements of society, runs squarely into conflict with that party.

Every action taken by a Southern Negro or a group of Southern Negroes to realize any one of the democratic rights which all citizens theoretically enjoy immediately brings the fighters against Jim Crow face to face with some governmental authority. One of the causes of the increasing concern with politics shown by the unions lies in the fact that year by year the workers find that their demands are no longer realizable by economic struggle alone, but require action in the halls of government for their actualization. As true as this is for the unionists, it is even more true and more directly apparent for the Negroes.

ROADBLOCK TO FREEDOM

Just consider: Do the Negroes wish to vote? Then they face the resistance of the various state election boards and committees.

Do they wish to put an end to segregated schools? The school systems of the various Southern state governments stand in the way.

Do they desire an end of segregated transportation in Montgomery? Then they have to fight the municipal government of that city.

And of course, it is no secret as to which party is in control of the state and city governments throughout the South. The struggle against racism in the South is a struggle against the Democratic Party in the South.

The Jim Crow system consists of an intermeshing network of institutions and practices; primary among these are the legal structures throughout the Southern states which provide the skeleton and backbone of the entire system. To end segregation and discrimination governmental action is required and for that the Negroes need either governmental power or effective strength to influence the government.

In Montgomery, for instance, it is not so much the bus company which stands in the way of victory; it, facing the enormous loss of profit which the boycott has produced, might by now have yielded to the pressure of the Montgomery Negroes; but the police power of the city government has been adamant.

Many of the gains registered by the Negroes in the last decade have come through governmental action. The program of such organizations of the Negro

the country are organized.

Another factor which militated against the formation of a stable labor party up until the 1930s was the matter of "public opinion." In the early days of American labor struggles it was a relatively easy matter for the powerfully entrenched anti-union forces to incite the broad mass of people against the unions. As late as the early 1920s, during the notorious Palmer raids, the bourgeoisie was capable of establishing in the minds of millions a mythical alliance between a mythical bomb-throwing bolshevik and a very real labor organizer. These unfounded suspicions were a major obstacle to unionization.

Today, all this is a matter of history. Unions have broken through public prejudice. They have become an accepted part of American life.

A majority class, an organized class, an increasingly homogeneous class, an experienced class: therein lies the present power and potential of the modern American working class. And its traditions of the past, which often recognized the value of independent political action, combined with this new power, indicate that it will seek fulfillment as a politically organized class, as labor has done in every other country in the world.

people as the NAACP requires for its realization in life more of the same.

But right here the major snag appears. For the fact is, and many Negroes realize it, that both major political parties have run out on the Negroes, have turned their backs on them. They are content with giving out vague platform rhetoric and a minimum of democratic concessions for the Negroes, most of them on paper, as a substitute for that which the Negroes justifiably want—the complete abolition of the Jim Crow system.

NOWHERE TO GO

But the situation is even more specific than that. For it is more than the "two parties" in general which is on trial; it is the Democratic Party specifically, that is, the party of the New and Fair Deals, the party of "liberalism."

But this party consists of three elements: the liberal-labor bloc, the Southern racists, and the conservative big-city political machines. And of these three groupings, it is the last two which dominate and control the party and the first grouping which plays the subordinate role. It is the Southern racists who will control the important committees in Congress, in the event of a Democratic victory.

Moreover, at every turn, the congressional liberals, the so-called spokesmen for the liberal-labor bloc, have themselves capitulated to the conservatives and reactionaries. They have done so on the question of civil rights, as they have on all other major questions.

Thus the struggles of the Negroes for democracy inevitably result in criticisms of the pussyfooting Stevensons and of the party as a whole. But it is at this point that the Negroes face an overwhelming dilemma.

For as long as political life in the United States remains frozen within the structure of the two-party system, there is really nowhere else to turn. All that the leaders of the NAACP can do is privately condemn vigorously and publicly deplore—less vigorously. And here and there a voice suggests that the Negroes should vote for the Republicans.

Thus Congressman Adam Clayton Powell has offered such a suggestion several times during the past few months. And Roy Wilkins made a speech in which it appeared that he was urging the colored people to vote for Eisenhower.

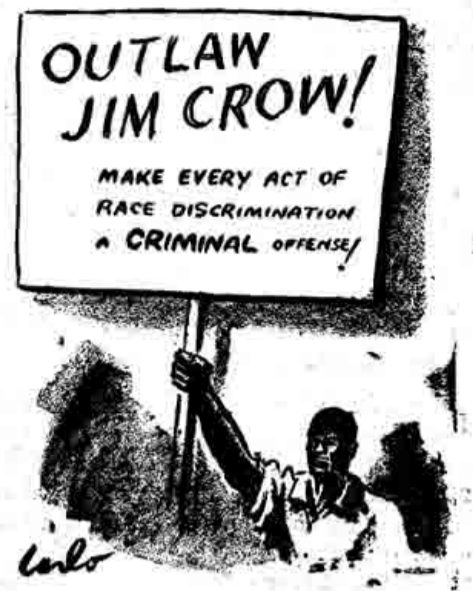
Now there is a good possibility that large numbers of Negroes who have voted Democratic during the last twenty years or so may cast their ballots for Eisenhower in 1956. Such a development could take place on the basis of successful Republican exploitation of the claim—already advanced by Nixon—that it was a "Republican" Supreme Court which made its anti-segregation ruling. But the Negro leadership as a whole and the overwhelming majority of the Negro masses know that no more can be expected from the Republicans than from the Democrats.

LABOR VS. RACISM

But so long as the political choices in this country are confined to the parties which now monopolize political life between them, all that the Negroes can do is issue vague threats of voting Republican in the hope that this will apply enough pressure on their "friends" so as to produce a few grudging concessions. But if the Negro masses in this country face this dilemma, the same applies equally to the labor movement.

The unions find themselves in this squeeze in respect to many matters which concern them—and what political matters do not concern them in this day and age? But more specifically, they run up against this blind wall in regard to the very question which we are discussing, civil rights.

Many commentators have noted that the unions have not at all risen to their social responsibility in the struggle for the rights of the Negroes. Too often they have not engaged in any meaningful campaigns but have instead contented themselves with rhetorical declarations in favor of desegregation, etc. A symptom of this situation was manifested in the refusal of the labor movement to join in the "one-hour work stoppage" proposed by Powell some weeks ago.



The union movement has a clear and patent stake in the current fight of the Negroes. It is more than a struggle for an end to segregation; it is a struggle for democracy.

And throughout its history, the unions have participated in many significant social struggles which were not immediately concerned with the economic demands of labor. Unions were deeply involved in the fights for universal suffrage, for free public education, for the rights of women, and many other issues. They participated in such struggles, not out of political morality and idealism alone, although that too is not to be discounted, but out of recognition that these political demands coincided and intermeshed with the needs of the workers.

The battle for civil rights, the struggle for democracy which it represents, is another such fight.

The Jim Crow system acts as a divisive barrier in the effort to organize the unorganized workers, and hinders the efforts to win gains for the working class. It is a roadblock in the way of complete unionization of the South.

A victory over the Jim Crow system is simultaneously a victory over the anti-labor Southern reactionaries who today block unionization of the South and who, through their control of Congress, hinder labor's efforts to fight against anti-labor legislation.

TAKE THE OFFENSIVE

A good part of the labor movement, and more particularly that section of it which was organized in the CIO, has at least a respectable record on Jim Crow. It helped to achieve an end to discrimination in hiring and promoting in many industries, to wipe out wage inequalities, etc. And in addition, it brought thousands of Negroes into the ranks of organized labor, and brought them in on a basis of equality and solidarity.

But now, under conditions of this momentous struggle, labor has not added its might to the aid of the embattled Negroes. Many reasons have been advanced for this. The uncertainty of the unions that they could bring out large numbers of their white members in demonstrations is one factor. Their fear that large proportions of their white members in the South would leave their union organizations, and perhaps organize a dual racist union movement, is another.

But overriding these facts is the lack of a perspective by the labor movement about taking the economic, social and political offensive. If the unions had a clear-cut program for going over to the offensive, for marshalling an all-out campaign to organize the South, to fight for democracy, then these factors would not have the weight they currently appear to have.

Then the unions could begin an immense educational job among their members to solidarize them with the struggle of the Negro masses. Then they could have a perspective of bringing unionism to millions of Southern Negro and white workers, with a momentum which would overshadow the racist prejudices of some white workers. Then they could engage in a meaningful joint struggle with the Negro masses for civil rights and democracy.

But such a perspective runs into the wall of political timidity which today blankets the labor movement. For such a perspective a new political party is required, the declaration of labor's independence on the political field.

The responsibility for initiating a new party rests upon the unions. The labor movement, in alliance with the Negroes and with the liberals of the middle class, can and must forge the new political instrument which can advance a program to end Jim Crow and many other injustices and inequities in our society.

Pages from Labor's History — —

(Continued from page 4)

undergoing annihilating blows.

In the 1890s and again in the early 1920s, the bourgeoisie almost succeeded in annihilating the trade-union movement. What possibility, one may ask, was there for such a weak union movement to successfully organize its own political party? Whatever merit there may be to this argument, it can no longer be offered today; for unlike the past, a frontal assault on the very right of unionism to exist is not even whispered aloud by any representative bourgeois politician.

In the middle 1920s when the CPPA leaders abandoned their child, they could point to a union movement that had been declining for the past five years. By 1925 the AFL alone had to admit the loss of one and a quarter million members. It might have been argued: how can we begin to build a union-based labor party if the base itself is in a state of disintegration?

Today, however, the AFL-CIO has 15 million members and is growing as against the AFL's three million—and declining number—in the earlier period. More than that, today, the majority of the working class in the decisive economic sectors of

CHAPTER 6 Vanguard or Tail-End?

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

By GORDON HASKELL

The Liberal Party of New York is a unique type of political organization. Nothing like it exists anywhere else in the United States.

Despite this uniqueness, an understanding of the Liberal Party can be very helpful to anyone who wants to understand American labor politics at mid-century, precisely because this party exhibits in a striking and highly developed form many of the characteristics and trends which exist in the rest of the field of labor politics in a less clear-cut way.

The Liberal Party is and has been since its inception a bundle of paradoxes and contradictions.

It is a party based on labor which hotly denies that it is a labor party.

It is a party, furthermore, which represents only one section of the New York labor movement and is treated at best with coolness and usually with hostility by the rest of the labor movement.

It is an organizationally independent party which seeks at most elections to transform itself into an adjunct of the Democratic Party, and even when it is rebuffed and forced to run its own candidates, tries to disguise itself and its role as much as possible from the public.

It is a party which seeks to recruit members and activists on the basis of claims to its independence, incorruptibility and forward-looking, principled program; but when election-time rolls around, seeks to ram down the throats of these same members and activists one political deal with the Democrats after another, winks at the corruption of its ally, and tends to forget its program until after the election is safely past.

TENSION-RIDDEN

How has the Liberal Party managed to survive, much less to function all these years, in view of the fact that it is a sort of half-labor half-party? The answer is that it could only have survived this long because it has expressed in its own way the undecided, tension-ridden political position of American labor as a whole, and beyond that because it has expressed it in the peculiar political surroundings of New York.

The Liberal Party was originally created for the purpose of corraling the large radical and independent vote in New York for New Deal Democratic candidates. It was created by a section of the labor movement (the leaders of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the United Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers) with an old socialist tradition which had adapted itself in the main to the political philosophy of the American labor movement, but which sought an instrument through which to express and at the same time control the radical and independent sentiments and aspirations of the most advanced political public in the country.

It is, on the one hand, a vestige of the socialist training and tradition of the older stratum of the radical wing of New York labor, and on the other an attempt to find a road to the independent political influence, action and power of the American labor movement of tomorrow.

A DEBACLE

Some examples of the twists and turns of Liberal Party politics during the past seven years may be the best way of illustrating how the Liberal Party leadership has attempted to meet the dual pressures upon it: the demand of its active membership for more independence, and the acceptance by most of the membership and certainly by the leadership of its role as an adjunct of the Democratic Party.

In 1949 there was a New York City mayoralty campaign. The Democrats (backed by the bulk of the AFL and CIO) ran the incumbent Mayor O'Dwyer for re-election. The Liberal Party supported Newbold Morris in a coalition with the Republicans on a "clean government" basis.

Within one short year, the picture had changed completely. O'Dwyer resigned amid a big political stink. A Democratic hack, Impellitteri, ran as an independent against the machine. The

machine, in an effort to recover from the O'Dwyer scandal, nominated Judge Ferdinand Pecora for mayor, and the Liberals supported him.

Why? Because there was a gubernatorial campaign that year, and a senatorial one to boot. In their desire to reelect Senator Lehman and to defeat the Dewey machine on a state level, the LP leadership decided to back the Democratic slate up and down the line.

The result: Impellitteri won a smashing victory against the New York Democratic machine, Lehman won handily, and for months the leadership had to explain to the membership why it had been necessary for them to exert themselves on behalf of a couple of party hacks like Pecora and Walter Lynch, the Democratic candidate for governor.

A-VICTORY

In 1951 the Liberal Party reached the peak of its prestige. Since there was no national or state campaign that year, the pressure of the ranks for an independent candidacy in the election for president of the City Council became overwhelming. The LP ran Rudolph Halley against candidates of both the Democrats and Republicans, and elected him in a smashing victory.

But in this campaign, as in all others, the party exhibited a marked reticence about appearing before the voters under its own name. It sought to set up an additional party in the hope of winning independent Republican votes, and won almost none. It permitted Halley to run his campaign on a straight anti-crime, anti-corruption basis, and put its city program in mothballs for the duration.

Nevertheless, the ranks and the leadership felt enormously encouraged by their success. It had been demonstrated that in certain circumstances the Liberal Party could be the strongest party in the city.

THE COUNTS CAMPAIGN

In 1952 the party leadership made a frantic attempt to use their new-found prestige to induce the Democrats to run acceptable candidates for major posts. Needless to say, on a national level they supported the Stevenson-Sparkman ticket. But the Democrats refused to nominate a liberal Democrat (like Harriman) for the Senate, and with obvious reluctance the LP leadership nominated their own candidate George S. Counts for the post.

He ran against liberal-Republican Ives and Democratic hack Cashmore, and gained a whopping 485,000 votes on the Liberal Party line in the midst of the Eisenhower landslide. At the same time Stevenson got 410,000 votes on the Liberal line as compared to 220,000 for Truman in 1948.

Here again, a measure of independence, forced on a reluctant LP leadership, had paid off. In this campaign, again, the leadership had gone all-out for Stevenson, and had done very little to promote the Counts campaign. It was clear that a large number of voters want an independent party, and will show it whenever they are given half a chance.

HOW IT CAMPAIGNS

In 1953 the New York City mayoralty campaign was again divorced from state and national campaigns. Early in the year, both Democratic and Republican Parties showed great division and uncertainty with regard to their candidates. After a long series of negotiations with both, the LP leadership found itself unable to make a satisfactory deal, decided to yield to the practically irresistible pressure from the ranks, and ran Halley again. The Democratic ma-

chine was thrown into panic by the prospect of losing City Hall outright, and got behind a reliable organization liberal, Robert Wagner Jr.

The campaign again showed the basic strength of the sentiment for independent politics in New York City. The LP got 468,000 votes while the Republicans, flushed with national victory, got 661,000, and Wagner was swept into office with over a million votes.

No campaign showed more clearly the distance between the LP and the rest of the labor-liberal movement in America than the campaign of 1953. Wagner was backed not only by both the AFL and CIO councils in the city, but by a whole galaxy of top national liberals from Mrs. Roosevelt up and down the line. Their cry was for party regularity, for support to the Democratic Party as such.

Instead of reacting forthrightly and militantly to this challenge, the LP leadership sought to win by clever maneuver. Once again the campaign concentrated on "clean government" issues and virtually ignored the big economic and social problems of the city. Once again the LP sought to evade the challenge that it was run by "labor bosses" by effacing itself during the campaign and disappearing into a series of "independents for Halley" organizations, with the idea that this was the way to lure independent votes into the fold.

UNSTARCHED

The defeat of Halley for mayor seemed to take the starch out of the Liberal Party leadership. In 1954 they endorsed the whole Democratic slate in advance in exchange for the measly plum of Democratic endorsement for one Liberal for municipal judge.

Rumors flew thick and fast to the effect that the party was going to be dissolved. David Dubinsky, head of the ILGWU, openly speculated on whether the party should continue to exist, and informed it that it would have to count less heavily on the ILGWU for financial support than in the past.

The result was that Harriman, though elected governor, polled only 264,000 votes on the Liberal line . . . less than the unknown and defeated Lynch four years earlier.

In 1955 the LP annual dinner was dominated by Democratic dignitaries. Harriman and Wagner sat on the dais, along with De Sapio, the leader of Tammany Hall! Adolph Berle, state chairman of the party during the preceding years, resigned without bothering to wait till a successor had been found.

And it appears, at the present writing, that in 1956 the LP will just go through the motions while supporting Democrats at every level.

THE OLD GAME

Flushed with the Halley victory in 1951, Alex Rose, a Liberal Party leader and president of the hat workers union, had written in his union's paper:

"The heads of central labor bodies across the land still play the game the old way, by way of promises of 'favors' from local bosses, by personal maneuvering with old-line politicians. They show no confidence in their own latent strength. They are either too lazy or too uncomprehending to assert the political power of their membership. With tragic consequences to the best interests of labor . . . they fail to mobilize all of labor's political potentialities."

The sad fact is that Rose and his colleagues in the leadership of the LP also "play the game the old way," though on a higher level than the men he condemned in the above paragraph.

They are not interested in the "personal" deals and maneuvers with old-line politicians in the narrow sense of the word "personal." But their whole method of politics is to seek to organize a mass base for the purpose of being able to exert pressure on the "old-line politicians," not for the purpose of winning elections and taking over the city and state governments.

Though they bemoan their isolation in

New York, and tend to blame some of the worst deals they have been forced to make on the fact that the rest of the American labor movement has failed to follow their example, they have not raised their voices in the national councils of labor to demand that the Liberal Party be extended nationally, or that a new party be formed into which it would be incorporated.

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER

As a matter of fact, it is clear that the particular brand of politics of the Liberal Party can only continue to exist as long as there is a real political hunger for an independent, honest party of the common people which is never satisfied. But while it feeds on this hunger, the LP leaders brand of politics often tends to demoralize it rather than to satisfy it.

As year after year the ranks have to accept the leaders' stories of "great victories" won behind closed doors; as year after year they are compelled to support candidates whom they had previously opposed, or vice versa, they either turn into political cynics or leave politics altogether. There is a large turnover in the active membership, and a tendency for the old cadres to become bored, indifferent and inactive.

In addition, the LP leadership is now confronted with the fact of a united labor movement. That unity is bound to have consequences in the political functioning of the labor movement in America goes without saying.

To the extent that the LP is a unique and maverick political animal, there will be pressure to kill it off and coordinate the politics of the unions which have been the backbone of the LP with those of the rest of the movement. Thus we may find that all the paradoxes and contradictions which have wracked the LP from its inception may be capped by the biggest and most ironical paradox of all: that the party fades just on the eve of the political realignment in America which it had so long awaited.

Fortunately, the LP is not foredoomed by any iron law of history to continue to waste away on the diet of crumbs from other parties' tables to which its leadership has confined it for so long. For in addition to this leadership, which is pretty well frozen in its hard-bitten, dogmatic theory of maneuverism, there has always been a sizable and healthy section of the rank and file which has pushed for a truly independent role for the Liberal Party.

A NATIONAL EXAMPLE

They are convinced that the LP can actually win elections if it goes to the voters in its own name, with its own candidates, and advocates its own program during elections as well as in its educational literature.

And they understand that even if the party should fail at first to win as a really independent political movement, the tactic of running its own slate would put far more pressure on the other two parties to match it with good candidates of their own than has been the case when the LP has maneuvered for an acceptable candidate at the top of the ticket, and in return for this great boon from the Democrats, has agreed to support most any machine hack they might run for all the offices lower down.

The pressures in American society which have brought about the unity of the labor movement are working inexorably to bring about a general political realignment also. By the very fact of its existence as a separate political party, the LP has been able to exercise more pressure on the Democrats in New York than has the labor movement in any other part of the country.

Though its successes have been minimized by the timid tactics of its leadership, once new political winds begin to blow the example of the Liberal Party will not go unnoticed by the militants in the rest of the labor movement throughout the country.

There is no denying the fact that the LP militants who are for an independent policy for the party have been wearied and in part demoralized by the tactics of their leaders. But the worst thing they could do now would be to give up the good fight.

Even though they have not yet succeeded in getting their party in any consistent way to play the inspiring role of which it is capable, their efforts have not been in vain. Compared to the political role of the bulk of the labor movement and the liberals in the country, theirs has been a noble one. And it may well be that the day is not far off when they will be able to set a real example, to spread the idea of truly independent labor politics far beyond the borders of New York.

CHAPTER 7 **Toward a New World**

THE SOCIAL MEANING OF LABOR'S POLITICS

By **ALBERT GATES**

Behind the façade of a war-economy prosperity, two tremendous phenomena have occurred, both of them still unfolding: the unification of the labor movement and the struggle of the American Negro.

It would be a mistake to observe these in isolation from one another. The two big parties must enlarge their activities in their competing efforts to win these two largest segments of the population; the labor and Negro movements must, in turn, be deeply involved in these efforts.

It is easy to dismiss the significance of labor unity and its political meaning in favor of the more spectacular struggle of the Negroes all over the country, and most particularly in the South. In the long run, however, labor unity contains the potential for greater gains of the American people as a whole, white and Negro. Furthermore, the Negro struggle, as we shall show, is intertwined with that of labor, quintessentially in the area of politics.

The unity of the American labor movement today is not a return to the unified labor movement of old Samuel Gompers. In the first place, at the point of its greatest strength, the AFL of Gompers encompassed only a small fraction of the American working class. Today the union movement, some sixteen million strong, contains the most important section of the working class in the basic industries.

Secondly, the labor movement is no longer the special preserve of a couple of million craft workers. It is the home of the massed millions of industrial workers, AFL and CIO, that form the backbone of the working class.

Unification of the two labor organizations means more than simple addition. There is a dynamic quality to the unification of the American labor movement that contains a far greater potential for struggle and influence on all levels now that both former sections have become one.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

It is quite true that the ideology of the union movement is still backward. That is to say, the ideology of American unionism has not advanced very far beyond pure-and-simple unionism, and sometimes it is not even pure. The dominant ideology of this nation, the richest of all capitalisms, exerts a dominating influence over the union movement.

But even that is not the whole truth, for underneath the apparent placid acceptance of all the reactionary and trite "principles" of American capitalism, the labor movement by its intrinsic social nature comes into violent conflict with the ruling class and its politics. That the labor movement is not very often aware of this role it plays is not the decisive thing at this point in its development.

It has taken the labor movement some years to understand that general social and political questions affect its very life. Politics was always a dirty word in this country

since it connoted wardheelers, precinct captains, city and national machines, corruption, horse-trading, plain and simple sell-outs. The elementary reaction against this kind of politics always had a healthy kernel to it.

Within the last twenty years, however, the labor movement has come to learn, no matter how haltingly and confusedly, that politics in the large sense dominates the



whole of life in a thousand and one different ways.

The labor movement has come to learn after some bitter experiences that the enormous economic gains it has made over the years in the most bitter and protracted campaigns against the financial and industrial ruling class were often lost in the wink of an eye through the instruments of reactionary politics in the form of state and national legislative and administrative bodies.

These experiences have produced an interest in politics which the labor movement never had in the days of Gompers' dominating political slogan: "Reward your friends and punish your enemies." Today labor participates in politics as it never has before. Overtones of the Gompers policy, it is true, still exist. In some areas, they are still quite strong. Very often labor leaders play the game of politics at its lowest possible level: horsetrading.

The important thing about labor's participation in politics now is that it is done more consciously and with political machinery created by both sections of the labor movement before they were united. With unity this participation will be heightened.

The weakness of labor's political action today is its confinement to bourgeois politics in the arena of the two major political parties. Sometimes the labor leaders make feeble "threats" of an independent political party if the labor movement is once again betrayed.

DISTORTED POLITICS

Even so, the political activity of the labor movement today is a distorted form of class politics. Right now it is expressed through the united federation's Committee on Political Education (COPE), successor to Labor's League for Political Education and the Political Action Committee, as well as through many local bodies.

In one place or another, labor has tried either to take over the machinery of the Democratic Party, with which it is most closely allied, or to directly deter-

mine the course of the party. In either case, there has been more unity in the political struggle by AFL and CIO sections than ever before in American political history. The Eisenhower administration has strengthened that unity, incomplete as it is.

It is guaranteed that the labor movement will continue to receive the same disappointments, setbacks and defeats at the hands of both parties as long as it follows its present course. Sooner or later, and we think sooner than most believe, the labor movement will learn that there is no progressive alternative for it save independent political activity through the instrument of an independent labor party.

In a more concentrated form, the Negro people will learn the same lesson, and may learn it more easily and quickly, if indeed they have not learned much of it already. The greater exploitation of the Negroes as workers and members of a different race, is catalytic in the process of class development and political differentiation among them. Negroes have now a certain consciousness of the political struggle that is a little in advance of the labor movement.

HALF AND HALF

Negroes are presently engaged in one of the greatest of social struggles. The courage and intelligence of their fight puts on trial all political forces in the country. What is more, the struggle is carried on in the heart of a reactionary South whose political weight in Washington is far beyond its social and economic importance. Politics being what they are in this country, both parties feel the threat of the Negro struggle.

The Democratic Party appears to the nation as a schizoid, "half free and half slave." The Republican Party too feels the pressure of this struggle upon itself. It desires to win back the Negro vote. At the same time it fears setting into motion an even greater movement than now exists among the most exploited people of the nation, a struggle with repercussions for the entire world.

With a long memory of the Civil War and the Reconstruction period, the Negroes in their overwhelming majority supported the Republican Party for more than sixty years. This adherence was not broken until the coming of the New Deal and the Roosevelt era.

With the same solidity as characterized their support of the GOP, the Negroes supported the Democratic Party. For them, the social-reform meaning of the New Deal transcended in importance the fact that the Southern political machine was powerful in the New Deal party.

This phase has not changed yet. But there are signs of restiveness among Negro voters with the Democratic Party. They resent the new power of the Southern reactionaries in the ruling circles of the party. They are appalled by the evident weaknesses of the outstanding spokesman of the party, Adlai Stevenson.

Aside from the liberal bloc and the all-too-occasional voice of Walter Reuther, the party is unable to make up its mind. Should it pacify its Southern wing on the grounds of practical politics, placate the Negro masses with some face-saving platform, or follow the advice of Truman and ignore the Southerners on the theory that most of them have to go along with the party and that the party can win without them?

Whether or not 1956 sees a mass defection of the Negro voter from the Democratic Party, if that party continues as it has, that defection will surely come. If, however, the Democratic Party does break with the Southerners, then it will occur because of a certain kind of independent role, more militant, more purposive, by the labor movement in the party. By then a new political stage will be reached in American politics.

BASIC TENDENCY

The recent events, however inconclusive they appear to be at this time, reflect, in our opinion, the basic tendency in American labor politics toward independent politics and away from the two major capitalist parties and their ideolo-

gies. Genuine social progress in the United States depends in large measure on the completion of that development, namely, the organization of an independent labor party.

The error of the labor leaders, big and small, in their thinking about such a labor party, is that they do not understand its social role. They conceive of the labor party not as a broad movement reflective of the people as a whole, but as a union party. In this, they merely show that their own political horizons are still limited.

Thus it is that at one and the same time they may threaten to organize an independent labor party and declare against it on the grounds that it would be too narrow since labor does not constitute an absolute numerical majority of the people.

The whole conception of the labor party, however, is based upon its universal character as the political representative of the people, not merely the organized labor movement fighting for the political enforcement of a wage rise. The latter is of relatively small importance compared to the great social problems of our day that encompass foreign policy, military policy and the economic and political problems of our times.

We do not pretend that the question of unionization of the South and the organization of the unorganized are unimportant in view of the political obstacles to organization placed before the labor movement in many states. We only mean that these problems are part of a larger social program which can only be championed by the labor movement, and must be championed by it.

Foreign affairs, military policy, reactionary legislation, the condition of all minorities in the nation are of vital concern to all. They involve the deepest interests of all the people who are, in truth, unrepresented politically.

A FARTHER GOAL

The powerful labor movement is the greatest force for such progress. Its millions of members represent, historically and socially speaking, the most progressive section of the American people. The struggle of the Negroes, for example, will have no final resolution except in the political development we propose.

So while it is good to record labor's political activity and participation in American politics, it is not nearly enough. The labor movement will make its greatest progress when its ideology passes the point of simple trade-unionism and involvement in bourgeois politics, and moves toward genuine independent political action through an independent labor party speaking for and representing the entire nation.

For us socialists, this advance by the organized workers will have a broader meaning than for the rest of the labor movement. For us it will also be an historic step on the road of the American workers' development toward socialist consciousness.

British Labor also went through this pattern: from pure-and-simple trade-unionism to political support of the Liberal Party, then to alliance with that same bourgeois party as an independently organized political force; then to the Labor Representation Committee then to the formation of the British Labor Party as a "third party"; after a while, to the adoption by the British Labor Party of a socialist program; and finally to the emergence of the Labor Party as the strongest single party of the land—the "first party" of the people.

We are confident that the American working class will move this way too. And once it gets going, there will be no stopping it.

This is the 7th of LABOR ACTION'S series of annual pamphlet-issues on basic questions of socialism. Our regular articles and features will be back next week as usual, including the YOUNG SOCIALIST CHALLENGE which appears every week as a section of LA.

The first six pamphlet-issues are still available at 10 cents each, as follows:

- (1) THE PRINCIPLES AND PROGRAM OF INDEPENDENT SOCIALISM.
- (2) INDEPENDENT SOCIALISM AND WAR.
- (3) THE FAIR DEAL: A SOCIALIST ANALYSIS.
- (4) SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY.
- (5) WHAT IS STALINISM?
- (6) SOCIALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS.

Also: BEHIND YALTA—THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

Labor Needs Its Own Party — —

(Continued from page 1)

But hold on: Has there been nothing but reaction, profiteering, anti-democracy? Hasn't there been the New Deal, social legislation, rising incomes, better standard of living for the masses and a hundred and one other things?

Of course, and we have no intention of painting a picture of unrelieved gloom and utter blackness. There has been progress, great progress.

But that simple truth alone tells us very little. The important question is this: how was that progress achieved? how did modern social legislation get on the books?

It was not because of the Democratic-Republican two-party system but despite it.

The Russians now have their folk-tale of the evil Stalin who plotted to turn their nation into a nightmare of terror. We have a charming dream to go along with it. It tells how a noble hero, Franklin D. Roosevelt, sat by the fireside and lifted a nation out of despair into happiness.

But the fairy tale of Prince Franklin is for children. It was not he; it was not the Democratic Party; it was not a club of honorable politicians who happily delivered the social legislation of the New Deal era to a grateful people.

THEY FOUGHT

These gains were won because the people fought; they fought a long and dramatic class battle.

Farmers gathered by the thousands, guns in hand, to prevent the foreclosure of their land; they toured the roads in trucks enforcing their produce strike in a National Farmers Holiday Movement which rallied millions.

Veterans marched on Washington for their bonus.

Unemployed demonstrated, forming into leagues and councils.

And finally, tens of thousands of workers seized the factories in a wave of sit-in strikes that broke open-shoppism in industry.

In the wave of protest, the Socialist Party grew: Norman Thomas polled almost a million counted ballots alone in 1932. Mass indignation mounted and was even misdirected into the Communist Party which grew in size and influence.

These struggles, these demands, this mood compelled the politicians to yield, and under the pressure of the rising people they quickly enacted a series of laws which the people took and went on to demand more.

CONUNDRUM

Let us ask a question: if the great gains of the past generation came from the two-party system, or at least from the Democratic Party, how can you account for this fact: since the era of the great social gains in the mid-thirties, social legislation has ground to a halt. At best, it is reduced to a dribble.

And yet, the forces of labor and liberalism are not weaker; they are far more powerful than ever.

In 1932 the union movement counted only two million. Now it enrolls 17 million. In 1932 the Southern Negro was beaten and disorganized. Now he is shaking up the whole South and rousing the attention of the country.

Twenty-five years after labor's great victories, George Meany, AFL-CIO president, announces that labor's legal and legislative position is at a historic low point.

In these years, the rising of the people was slowly brought under control and curbed by the two-party system of Democrats and Republicans. When the first popular waves subsided, political power remained in the hands of political bosses, slave-dealers, and the rich.

The political forms and structure of American politics are now outlived not because there has been no progress but because there has been so much progress.

The people are too powerfully organized to permit political parties to be run by narrow cliques.

FOR A REAL CHOICE

In fact, the political structure is already cracking up: the Democratic Party is torn between Southern reaction and labor liberalism. Walter Reuther explains: "you cannot have Senator Eastland and have us at the same time." The Negro deserts the Democratic Party while the farmer is deserting the Republicans. But where are they all to go?

What is to replace the decaying Democratic-Republican system?

No crystal ball is handy. The reorganization and reorientation can swirl about in confusion while fantastic alliances are patched together on the spur of the mo-

ment. None can match the fantasy of the old Democratic Party: Eastland and the Negro; Reuther and the "right-to-work" Democrats—all in one coalition!

We say simply this: if the coming political realignment is to be understandable, if it is to achieve the maximum for the people, then a labor party must be formed. Let those who want to rally to democracy and security for the people gather around a party of the working class. Let those who are ready to defend privilege and exploitation form their own party.

For the first time, the people can have a clear choice of alternatives.

DEMOCRATIC WAY

Why a labor party? Doesn't that seem "dogmatic"? Such objections quickly spring to mind.

Remember, always, that the United States is the only modern democratic nation where there is no labor party.

And now, politics can only give a true picture of what is happening in real life when such a party is formed here.

To understand why there should be a labor party, consider first the question of democracy.

Democracy means the domination of government by the popular masses through the forms of free discussion, free organization, free elections. But the vast majority are poor; a tiny minority is rich. This becomes the great danger to popular democracy; for those who own wealth dominate society, not through numbers but through influence.

When a tiny class of bankers and industrialists can dominate the avenues of discussions, the press, the radio, television; when they can buy and sell politicians and intellectuals, then they can thwart the people even under the forms of democracy. Where concentrated wealth accumulates, democracy can live only when the force of money is counterbalanced by the organized people.

For a half century after the founding of the American republic, democracy depended upon the support of millions of free farmers and small merchants who were determined that bankers and commercial combines should not thrust the people aside. They were the backbone of the Democratic Party. But with the rise of slavery and the dominance of slave-owners, and with the rise of industry, the old base of democracy began to crumble; the old alliances were torn asunder.

THE NEW CLASS

A new party, a "third" party if you like, rose to lead the fight against the spreading of slavery. It was the Republican Party, and to it went the support of the masses of people in the North who wanted democracy.

During and after the Civil War, great fortunes were made; industry flourished; trusts consolidated toward the end of the century; the Democratic Party was dominated by the former slave owners; the Republican Party became the direct tool of big business, which began impartially to buy and sell both parties. It was an age of the open domination of Big Business.

Democracy was kept alive by short-lived popular political upsurges, inside and outside the two parties and cutting across both: Populism, progressivism, free-silver. The old base of democracy, the free farmer, had been undermined. The importance of agriculture in the economy was in decline; industry was growing. The revolt of the farmer proved to be futile and despairing; the rule of big business continued unchecked.

Meanwhile, a new class was rising: the modern industrial working class.

But in its vast majority it was unorganized, backward, and largely foreign-born. Although a small minority of the class succeeded in organizing itself, and an even smaller minority founded an active socialist movement, the vast majority remained in disarray, organized only as voting cattle by corrupt capitalist political machines.

So it remained until just yesterday. But now, the whole social balance in America has shifted.

Democracy finds its new social base in a new class: the working class. In the last 25 years, this class has organized itself industrially; it has lifted itself into political consciousness; it is a force so powerful, so invincible that no other class can move without taking its mood into account.

Yet, while the class structure has changed, politics remains formally what it was fifty years ago.

There is no party, there is no consciously organized faction of any party, that expresses and represents the fundamentally democratic class of our time.

If class antagonisms, the self-interest of social groups, do exist in reality, then let them be expressed openly and honestly in the forum of public discussion and politics. It would be a good thing: when a banker decries "socialism" and lauds "free enterprise," let the world know that he is really talking of his profit ledgers.

If class antagonisms do not exist in real life, then no party could possibly provoke them.

American politics today, however, successfully expresses the self-interest and class desires of a tiny group of rich and privileged. Hypocrisy is their device; they are satisfied with the reality of selfish class rule; they prefer not to talk of classes.

But if a labor party must not be organized because class interest is an evil thing that must be barred from politics, what holds the labor movement together? Why do workers organize into unions? Unions are class organizations; they enroll only wage-earners; they exclude their employers; they unashamedly advocate a program in the interests of the working people; they strive ceaselessly for higher wages, shorter hours, pensions and insurance for workers.

Could there be any more scientifically defined class movement?

SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Should any union leader suggest that the AFL-CIO and its affiliates dissolve because the organization of the working class provokes "class antagonism," he would be hastily dispatched to a rest home.

The antagonism between worker and boss is not created by the union; the workers organize because such a conflict of interests already exists. If they cannot organize, they live not in some paradise of class harmony but in a state of super-exploitation.

If the working class is organized in industry, why not in politics?

We may be told: It is true that the union organizes only workers, but it is not true that the union movement adopts a program only for workers; don't the most progressive union leaders always remind us that we want not a "nickel in the pay envelope" movement but one which will be responsible for the needs of all the people?

Precisely! And that is what proves our contention to the hilt. In other words, the union which may appear to employers as a "narrow" self-seeking grab for money is actually a great social movement.

Although it is actually organized on a class basis, it nevertheless is ready to take on the fight of all the poor people, workers or not, organized or not.

In fact, because the union is a working-class movement and is compelled to fight against the big monopolies, it and it alone has been capable of stimulating such a program and of rallying millions behind it. The working class must lead the nation. And a labor party can do no more and must do no less.

LEADING THE NATION

But let us get down to brass tacks. The labor movement talks about leading the nation; the UAW, for example, calls itself the vanguard in America, in words and in resolutions. But these lofty goals are never quite brought to life.

How, we ask, does the labor movement propose to lead farmers, Negroes, professionals, and the poor?

Fundamentally, the task is political; the unions must show how to organize government in the interests of the people. But in the last analysis, at present they have only this to offer: elect Democrats.

But in order to elect a government which will in reality carry out a people's program, it is not enough to pick and choose the few liberals who peep modestly like rare flowers among swamp rocks. A new movement, a new party dedicated to social progress must come forward, and that is a labor party.

Twenty-five years ago, industrial unionism was a dream. Yet in the course of a single generation it has changed the face of America and brought millions of workers into conscious political life. With their rise, democracy in America took on new significance but it was still limited and curbed inside parties dominated by others.

And now, while the united labor movement hesitates in uncertainty, a great movement for democracy arises in the South, arousing hundreds of thousands of Negroes to demand equality.

For a labor party! It has been the need of our generation. It is now the imperative demand of the hour.

The ISL Program in Brief

The Independent Socialist League stands for socialist democracy and against the two systems of exploitation which now divide the world: capitalism and Stalinism.

Capitalism cannot be reformed or liberalized, by any Fair Deal or other deal, so as to give the people freedom, abundance, security or peace. It must be abolished and replaced by a new social system, in which the people own and control the basic sectors of the economy, democratically controlling their own economic and political destinies.

Stalinism, in Russia and wherever it holds power, is a brutal totalitarianism—a new form of exploitation. Its agents in every country, the Communist Parties, are unrelenting enemies of socialism and have nothing in common with socialism—which cannot exist without effective democratic control by the people.

These two camps of capitalism and Stalinism are today at each other's throats in a worldwide imperialist rivalry for domination. This struggle can only lead to the most frightful war in history so long as the people leave the capitalist and Stalinist rulers in power. Independent Socialism stands for building and strengthening the Third Camp of the people against both war blocs.

The ISL, as a Marxist movement, looks to the working class and its ever-present struggle as the basic progressive force in society. The ISL is organized to spread the ideas of socialism in the labor movement and among all other sections of the people.

At the same time, Independent Socialists participate actively in every struggle to better the people's lot now—such as the fight for higher living standards, against Jim Crow and anti-Semitism, in defense of civil liberties and the trade-union movement. We seek to join together with all other militants in the labor movement as a left force working for the formation of an independent labor party and other progressive policies.

The fight for democracy and the fight for socialism are inseparable. There can be no lasting and genuine democracy without socialism, and there can be no socialism without democracy. To enroll under this banner, join the Independent Socialist League!

Get Acquainted!

Independent Socialist League
114 West 14 Street
New York 11, N. Y.

I want more information about the ideas of Independent Socialism and the ISL.

I want to join the ISL.

NAME (please print)

ADDRESS

CITY

ZONE STATE

HANDY WAY TO SUBSCRIBE

LABOR ACTION

Independent Socialist Weekly
114 West 14 Street
New York 11, New York

Please enter my subscription:

1 year at \$2. New

6 months at \$1. Renewal

Payment enclosed. Bill me.

NAME (please print)

ADDRESS

CITY

ZONE STATE