
VII

Democracy and the Constitution

WE are celebrating several anniversaries. Two hundred years ago, in 1737, was born Tom Paine, destined to become the fiery tribune of the people in our Revolutionary War of Independence. One hundred fifty years ago we received our United States Constitution, product of the revolution which had stirred the whole world, and representing a compromise between the conflicting interests which fought the war. Eighteen years ago was born the Communist Party, the Party destined to carry on and complete the work begun by Tom Paine, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln.

The Communist Party is still small and weak, having only fifty thousand members in a nation of one hundred thirty million population. Yet small as we are, our Party has won a national standing of importance, because the whole country begins to realize that we have something of importance to say, has begun to listen to our claim that "Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism."

To a certain degree we must thank our enemies for the enormous audience our Party enjoys today. They have told such colossal lies about us, they have so fantastically exaggerated our strength, that interest and sympathy was aroused for the Communist Party instead of the intended fear and abhorrence. When Al Smith, Hearst and the Liberty League last year accused President Roosevelt of being a Communist, they thought they had seized upon a sure-fire method of destroying him politically; but that did not prevent twenty-seven million voters from giving the President the greatest majority ever cast in American politics. When Tom Girdler, Henry Ford and William Green accuse John L. Lewis and the

C.I.O. of being Communist, that does not halt the great sweep of two and a half million newly organized workers into the industrial unions.

No intelligent person believes the arrogant lies that President Roosevelt or John L. Lewis, or the C.I.O., are Communist—but millions are already believing that if even such mildly progressive men and movements are all called "Communist," then the real Communism cannot be so bad after all, and is something worth looking into quite seriously.

There is no party and no leader which has a mortgage upon the American people today. Old allegiances, old flags, old parties have lost their magic. Old alignments are being dissolved. The people are putting to the test every program, every party, every slogan, every leader. A new political alignment, a new party system is in the making today in America. Our country is in a deep political crisis.

We are in the third major crisis of American history. The first was that of the struggle for independence and the formation of a democratic nation; it began in 1776 and was closed in 1800 with the victory of Thomas Jefferson and his party over the economic royalists and aristocrats of that day. The second crisis was that of the further extension of the democratic revolution through the abolition of Negro slavery; it came to a head in 1857, with the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court, was solved by the victory of Northern armies and the emancipation of the slaves, and was closed by the adoption of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution (which is still waiting, however, to be enforced).

The present, third, major crisis in our history arises from the fact that political power, as expressed in the democratically registered will of the majority, is challenged by economic power, as expressed in our economic royalists—the small group of rich families which owns and controls 95 per cent of our productive economy. Our economic royalists are moving to destroy our political democracy, which has been undermined by losing its economic foundations.

American democracy, as established by the Constitution and

the victory of Jefferson in 1800, is in danger of being destroyed. But it is not threatened by the Communists, nor by any vague proletarian dictatorship. It is threatened only from the side of the privileged, the rich, the Liberty Leaguers, Wall Street and their agents and lackeys. The Communist Party throws all its resources into forming and strengthening the united front of all progressive and democratic people to defeat the reactionary threat, to preserve the Constitution for the people, to maintain and extend American democracy.

Last Friday I listened, in company with most Americans, with deepest interest and attention to the extraordinary speech of our President. There is not the slightest doubt that it expressed the deepest desires and thoughts that unite the majority of the American people against the threat from Wall Street and the Liberty League. I have no hesitation in declaring for the Communist Party and its followers, that with the central thoughts and the direction of President Roosevelt's speech, we are in practical agreement, and that on such questions with which we disagree these are not questions for immediate practical solution.

Let me make this precise by quoting from the President those thoughts with which we agree:

In our generation, a new idea has come to dominate thought about government—the idea that the resources of the nation can be made to produce a far higher standard of living for the masses if only government is intelligent and energetic in giving the right direction to economic life.

That idea—or more popularly that ideal—is wholly justified by the facts. It cannot be thrust aside by those who want to go back to the conditions of ten years ago or even preserve the conditions of today. It puts all forms of government to proof.

With this central thought of President Roosevelt's speech, we declare our heartiest agreement. With every group or person which makes this thought the guide in formulating policy, we of the Communist Party can find an ever-growing basis for common action.

What prevents this policy from being expressed in govern-

ment action, and what threatens our democratic control of government? President Roosevelt answered this question correctly as follows:

We have those who really fear the majority rule of democracy, who want old forms of economic and social control to remain in a few hands. They say in their hearts: "If constitutional democracy continues to threaten our control, why should we be against the plutocratic dictatorship which would perpetuate our control?"

We Communists declare our full agreement with this identification of the main enemy and the form of its threat against the people.

The President then goes on to express a fear which we believe to be without ground, with which we disagree, and which we think is already disappearing from the minds of progressive Americans. He said:

And we have those who are in too much of a hurry, who are impatient at the processes of constitutional democracies, who want utopia overnight and are not sure that some vague form of proletarian dictatorship is not the quickest road to it. Both types are equally dangerous. One represents cold-blooded resolve to hold power. We have engaged in a definite, and so far successful, contest against that. The other represents a reckless resolve to seize power. Equally we are against that.

In these words the President himself gives the grounds for answering his own fears. The reactionary forces are dangerous because they already "hold power," and have a "cold-blooded resolve" to maintain it against the majority even if it means the destruction of democracy and the establishment of a "plutocratic dictatorship." This is a terrific threat, for these economic royalists control the economy of the country, control a large part of the President's own party in Congress, control numerous local and state governments, and are building up private armies, vigilante movements and arsenals.

But the impatient ones among the masses, those who want to jump to utopia overnight, can have no power except the power of large numbers, and numbers they can get only if the majority of the people should come to feel that they

have been betrayed by their progressive and democratic leaders, or if these leaders should prove themselves incapable to "produce a far higher standard of living for the masses." Only produce constantly that higher standard of living, even show only a consistent and effective fight for it, and all fear of the impatient masses can be laid aside as unreal.

The American masses are very patient—far too patient in fact—and the President has no real problem of holding them back. In fact, he could have advanced his program more effectively against his enemies, if he had called the masses to his assistance more consistently. Roosevelt's strength lies solely in his support among the masses, and if he sincerely wishes victory he must rely more upon it, as did Thomas Jefferson before him.

Proletarian dictatorship can become a practical order of the day in America only if President Roosevelt's promise of a higher standard of living under the present system is defeated or betrayed. We of the Communist Party are prepared to co-operate with everybody who will help to win that higher standard of living for the masses.

The Communist Party repudiates now as in the past, all theories or proposals looking toward a forcible imposition of Socialism or any utopia upon the majority of the people. We repudiate the "reckless resolve to seize power" by any minority. If there should arise in America anything similar to the situation in Spain, where the democratic republic while repulsing the fascist invasion was stabbed in the back by the "uncontrollable extremists" (a minority of the anarchists and the Trotskyist P.O.U.M.), that we, like our brothers of the Spanish Communist Party would be in the forefront of the struggle to suppress such "extremists," who are really agents of fascism, and render them harmless.

The Communist Party represents a strong and growing force to support and help every progressive tendency in American political life, and in no case to distract the progressive People's Front from its fight against the main enemy, the reactionaries and fascists.

Therefore we declare that President Roosevelt's fears of impatient ones, who want utopia overnight, who want some vague form of proletarian dictatorship—this fear is not valid, and especially is he wrong to say it is "equally dangerous" with the threat of the economic royalists to destroy democracy.

The proof of what I say can be found in the reception given Roosevelt's speech itself by the reactionaries and by the Communists. The Liberty Leaguers foam at the mouth with rage against the President, but we Communists welcome his speech, agree with its central thoughts, and quietly and calmly tell the President that he has nothing to fear from us, but, on the contrary, will receive our help, as long as he really tries to carry out his declared program.

It is to the merit of President Roosevelt and his administration that they point definitely in a progressive direction, in the spirit of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. It is their weakness that they seem unable as yet to move decisively in the direction in which they point. The last session of Congress, with its shameful sabotage of all progressive legislation, sharpens this point. Of what avail is it for 27 million people to vote for Roosevelt, if that same vote also carries into office a majority of Congress ready for shameless treachery to the people's mandate?

It has become clear beyond all dispute that the Democratic Party is not a reliable vehicle for realizing that program to which the President is committed. A considerable section of the Democratic leaders are already in a bloc with the Republicans under the blessings of the Liberty League. The old party banners and lines mean nothing. What shall be done about this? Here the President gives no clear lead, but only asks for renewal of confidence in his leadership.

It is doubtless true that the masses are more than ever united around the President, due to the vicious attacks against him by the known enemies of the people. But this alone is not sufficient. The power of the masses must be organized, to put into office, local, state and national, sincere progressives and labor men, real representatives of the masses. Even if we

give the President credit for the maximum of sincerity and determination, he is powerless without a well-organized party of the people. *That does not exist yet. But without it the reactionaries will certainly win the coming battles.*

Furthermore, we venture to declare that even the limited aim of preserving democracy requires a more far-reaching program and more fearless challenge to the economic royalists than has yet been given. The essential features of Jefferson's program must be brought up to date. Two of these are basic: first, to provide democracy with a solid economic foundation and thereby secure effective people's control of government; and second, to collaborate with the friendly peoples of other lands for mutual protection against aggressive and war-making powers. Both of them are represented as yet very weakly and timidly in Roosevelt's program.

Jefferson's theory of democracy realized fully that political power can be maintained and extended only when given a solid economic foundation. He thought this was secured in the wide distribution of small landownership and individual cultivation, which embraced the great majority, buttressed in the cities by the majority of skilled handicraftsmen who owned their own tools. Jefferson's victories were not lasting because this economic foundation was undermined and has now all but disappeared.

More than two-thirds of the population has been completely divorced from the land since Jefferson's time; of those who remain on the land considerably less than half are owners, while most of the small minority of owners are themselves hopelessly entangled in mortgages. The cities have swelled to embrace the great majority of the population, most of whom are wage-earners without the slightest property in the means of production, and only the most meager personal property.

Individual private property no longer furnishes any foundation whatever for political democracy; all the laws to strengthen individual private property now only go to bolster up the power of the economic royalists, a few hundred families who effectively monopolize the economic resources of the country.

It is the sheerest utopianism to expect the restoration of the economic foundations of democracy upon which Jefferson relied. Modern science applied to production, modern power and machinery, has doomed forever the old economic system. Some new way must be found to secure economic power to the people, otherwise political power, democracy, will inevitably be lost to them.

There is serious advance being made in this direction, but still without energetic support from the Roosevelt administration which helps only in the negative way of benevolent neutrality. This advance is the glorious sweep of trade union organization, led by the C.I.O. and John L. Lewis, especially into the strongholds of monopoly capital and the plutocracy, the mass production industries. Here alone we find a serious guarantee of the preservation of democracy, of the realization of a higher standard of living for the masses.

Let the farmers and the middle classes take a leaf from the book of the C.I.O., let them bring their Jeffersonianism up to date, let them join forces with the working class, which welcomes them with open arms—then truly, and only then, will democracy have created for itself some guarantees and strongholds.

The threat of reaction and fascism comes not only from within, but also from without. Jefferson recognized this clearly in the first years under our Constitution. As Secretary of State under Washington, it was Jefferson who threw American influence squarely behind the new French Republic, gave credits to it, and threatened an embargo against any power that invaded France. It was the economic royalists of that day who fought for "neutrality," behind which they conspired with the enemies of France, and as Jefferson foresaw, finally conspired also against their own country, the United States.

It is the weakest point of the Roosevelt administration that only in words does it continue this Jeffersonian tradition, while in deeds it surrenders to the Tories on one practical question after another, giving comfort to the fascist invasion of Spain and the Japanese rape of China.

The threat of foreign fascist aggression has already reached the land border of the United States, and parades its military forces already upon our soil. Who does not know of the Brown Shirt and Black Shirt troops, organized on American soil by Hitler and Mussolini? Who does not know that in Mexico, our neighbor to the south, fascist armies are being built and drilled, in agreement with and under the direction of fascist agents from Germany, Italy and Spain, while little Guatemala is being prepared for the role of Portugal? Who is blind to the machinations of these same forces, plus the Japanese, throughout Latin-America, especially in Brazil?

In face of these facts, what becomes of the illusion of isolation and "neutrality"? It is revealed as self-deception and cowardly retreat before the advancing armies of fascism.

America must be kept out of war in the only possible way, by America helping all peace-loving peoples to defeat the fascist attempts to spread war throughout the world.

The United States is a powerful country, once it is united in its determination to accomplish something. If we threw our moral and economic power into the scales definitely against the fascist war-makers and in favor of peace, together with France, China and the Soviet Union, we would rally the enthusiastic support of the people of Britain and its Dominions, we would rally even the people of Germany, Italy and Japan, who, knowing they had powerful and determined friends, would rise up and throw off their bloody dictators.

These are the things that are called for by a modern policy in the spirit of Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson. These are the things that will be necessary even to carry out the simple and mild progressivism of Roosevelt.

The progressive program is not revolutionary or Communist. Despite the reactionaries' hysterical slander, there is nothing of Communism in this program, nor about Roosevelt, Lewis and other progressive leaders. It can all be achieved under capitalism—if the progressives rally the people for a real battle to achieve it. It all falls far short of socialism.

We Communists are the party of socialism. We believe that

all progress will be threatened as long as economic power is still in the hands of the economic royalists. We hope to convince the majority of the people eventually to take over the national economy as national property, and make useful working citizens out of the economic royalists. But until the majority is ready for this, we propose to keep the majority organized on a lesser progressive platform for which they are ready to fight—even if it is the middle-of-the-road progressivism of Roosevelt. At all costs the economic royalists, the plutocrats, the fascists, must be kept out of power in the United States.

Our Communist Party is 18 years old. But its roots go back much farther in American history. It is directly descended from those heroes of the European Communist movement who, under the inspiration of Marx and Engels, came to America to fight on the side of Lincoln and Emancipation during our Civil War. It absorbed the inspiration of those early American Communists of the utopian school, the finest spirits of their day, who made of America a great experimental ground in the search for better social organization. It grew directly out of the old Socialist Party formed under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs, Victor Berger, and their associates, at the turn of the twentieth century.

Today, the Communist Party has drawn to itself everything vital in the revolutionary traditions of our land, it is bone and flesh of the American workers, farmers and intellectuals, it embodies the great American tradition of the melting-pot which fuses the best from all the world, it realizes the great slogan of Tom Paine who said: "The world is my country, to do good is my religion." Our Party has been able to become so thoroughly American precisely because it has nurtured itself upon the teachings of the greatest thinkers of the world, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

The remnants of the old Socialist Party, with whom we parted company in 1919 when the Communist Party was formed, have lost their roots in the America of today, have lost contact with the American masses, are wandering in the

swamps of romantic sectarianism, precisely because they refused to follow the great thinkers of scientific socialism.

Such a party as ours does not spring into existence overnight. It required years of intense effort and many inner struggles before our Party was able to overcome and throw out of its ranks all hampering and destructive influences which afflict young movements. Only in 1928 were we able to part company forever with the poisonous Trotskyites, who in their latest developments stand revealed as the agents and accomplices of fascism. Only in 1929 did we throw out the first cousins of the Trotskyists, the Lovestone group. In the battle to cleanse our own ranks of such degenerating political influences, we found the road to the masses, we found the road to the building of a sound, healthy, practical, growing party of Socialism, which is winning the masses by its correct, clear-headed leadership in the practical problems of the day.

It is unfortunate for our friends of the Socialist Party that they refused on principle to learn from our experience. When they realized the bankruptcy of their Old Guard leadership a couple of years ago, instead of turning to a united front with the Communist Party, which we offered them in all friendship, they turned instead to the trash and poison which we had thrown out of our Party. They took the Trotskyites in last year, secretly and shamefacedly but none the less effectively.

We warned our Socialist friends: "You are swallowing a poison, which you will soon have to puke out again." They would not listen to us then, but they have been forced to do as we predicted. Week before last the Socialist Party puked. The Trotskyites are alone again. But their poisonous influence still remains to plague the Socialist Party and may still result in its death.

Our Socialist friends still, for example, think that they have moved over to the "left" of the Communists. They have the opium-illusion that by fighting everything progressive, and especially the Communists, they are fighting for Socialism. They still do not understand that their confused sectarian position is discrediting their name among the masses, harming

the cause of Socialism, and objectively aligning them with the reactionaries.

How otherwise explain the absolutely fantastic mistakes made by the chief Socialist leader, Norman Thomas. You will remember that in 1933 we had the Blue Eagle brand of New Deal, a national coalition beginning with Wall Street and the Liberty League elements, and extending to the left to include everyone but the Communists, with many signs of fascist tendencies within it. At that time Norman Thomas found it possible, together with Hillquit, to visit Roosevelt, pledge support and praise the New Deal as the best possible short of Socialism and almost Socialism itself.

But in 1935, when the Liberty League organized the Republican-Democratic offensive against Roosevelt, when the fascists turned on him—precisely that moment was chosen by Norman Thomas to also turn bitterly against Roosevelt, and in 1936 to make such a campaign that was officially welcomed by Landon and his aides as a help to them.

Up until 1933, Norman Thomas was an advocate of the League of Nations, at a time when it had the function only to preserve the Versailles Treaty. But when Hitler withdrew, when the Japanese withdrew, when Mussolini defied it and stopped attending its Councils, when the Soviet Union entered, when the League became even if very inadequately the scene of a struggle for peace—at precisely that moment Norman Thomas turned against the League and began to denounce it.

Last year when the Socialist Caballero became premier of the Spanish Republic, we pleaded with him to throw the Socialist Party fully in support of that government, but he refused and was suspicious of Caballero; but when Caballero, proved inadequate, was replaced by Negrin, another Socialist premier, then Norman Thomas suddenly hastened to the support of Caballero. Such is the policy of a Socialist Party which refuses the People's Front, and thereby becomes the plaything of Trotskyist and reactionary influences, losing the respect of all workers and progressives.

Problems are becoming more difficult today, more compli-

cated. Their solution demands more than ever a party which unites all the best capacities of the working class, more clear-headedness, more firmness, more energy, more devotion, more sacrifice. The Communist Party has demonstrated its capacity to fill this need. We are proud of the best example we have to demonstrate this—the participation of our members in the glorious Lincoln and Washington Battalions in Spain. It is a guarantee of the vitality of democracy, not only in Spain but also in America.

Not the least part of the struggle for democracy in America is to realize in life the long-promised full citizenship rights of the Negro people. We of the Communist Party have taken over and developed the honored tradition of the Abolitionists, whose work is not yet finished. Through our battles for Negro rights in a thousand places, through the Scottsboro and Herndon cases, we have earned the epithet from the Ku Klux Klan elements of being the "Negro Party." We are proud of that, because we know that only thus can we be truly the White Workers Party. It was Karl Marx who wrote, regarding our Civil War: "Labor with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labor with a black skin is branded."

Our Party is becoming today a mass Party. This is determined not alone by numbers, but first of all by where we stand in relation to the masses and their movements. Today we are in the midst of every great struggle, every great organization of the masses, giving them the answers to their problems which they demand of us. We have won the respect of our enemies, and the sympathy of millions of friends. This is the great significance of our 18th Anniversary. This is the significance of the splendid convention of the Communist Party of Massachusetts which has been meeting in Boston these two days.

But our new position in the midst of the masses, who move in their millions, presents us with ever growing problems. We cannot meet and solve them unless our party membership grows correspondingly. Now large numbers of friends around our Party is not enough; we must bring them into the organized body of the vanguard, into active membership in the Com-

munist Party. Tens of thousands of our friends are only awaiting a serious invitation to join our ranks.

How true this is was brought home to me sharply last weekend when I attended the Southern States Conference of the Communist Party in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In a hall of the City Auditorium gathered 130 delegates from 11 Southern states, Negro and white, men and women, larger and more representative than the seventh convention of our Party for the whole United States.

What a transformation is coming over the old reactionary Solid South; it is breaking up, a new Solid Progressive South is in process of birth, and in the midst of it works and grows the Communist Party.

One delegate, a textile worker, who had joined the party three weeks before, apologized to the conference when he spoke, for being just a backward worker who was only beginning to learn the duties of a Party member, and who had *only brought in ten new members* since he joined. If only our old Party members had this same fresh enthusiasm and initiative of this comrade, how quickly our Party would emerge as a major power in American politics.

Let us on this combined anniversary of the Constitution of our country, and the founding of our Party, go forth determined to invite our tens of thousands of friends, which for each member means the five, or ten, or twenty, whom he personally talks with, into the ranks of our Party. Let us make our Party meetings, and its life generally, more interesting and better calculated to hold and keep the new members, and transform them into powerful leaders among the masses. Let us forge a powerful instrument of progress, which in the coming year will be able to help create a powerful People's Front of the majority of the American people, as the first stage toward winning the majority for the future socialist America.

Address delivered at the Massachusetts Communist Party convention, Symphony Hall, Boston, September 19, 1937.