

The Communists and The New York Elections

By Albert E. Blumberg

THE NEW YORK CITY campaign at this point is a study in contrasts.

On the one hand there is the lethargy that everyone talks about. On the surface the elections seem as good as over. Unlike 1953, the mayoralty slates picked by the machines are unopposed in the Sept. 10 primary. And the GOP choice of Christenberry virtually assures the reelection of Wagner.

The labor and liberal forces are supporting Wagner and the Democratic ticket, but with no great display of enthusiasm. For the Wagner Administration has lagged badly on housing, education, school integration and other vital matters and to this day is stalling passage of the Brown-Isaacs-Sharkey bill outlawing bias in housing. It has continued to press a disgraceful municipal witchhunt. It has been featured by graft and corrupt machine politics.

Christenberry and the GOP ticket would abandon even the inadequate welfare measures of the Wagner Administration. Christenberry's own past association with pro-fascists and present relations with Trujillo round out a picture that can please only the Daily News with its program of McCarthyism and Herbert Hooverism.

The Liberal Party, despite encouragement from the Post and considerable pressure from within its ranks, has declined to enter any candidate of its own for citywide office and instead has endorsed the Wagner ticket. The labor movement, as yet disunited, has given no independent lead. The independent progressive forces, unfortunately, have not been able to place a citywide candidate in the field.

But progressives would make a very great mistake if they saw only this side of the picture. There is another side. It is the sharp contrast between the lethargy of the campaign and the vitality of the urgent issues that concern and move the people of our city.

During the summer of slate-making, one major civic issue after another has come to the fore, growing out of the abominable slum housing, discrimination and exploitation that make life miserable for the workers and especially the Negro and Puerto Rican peoples.

Important mass movements exist or are taking shape around a number of questions. These include the Brown-Sharkey-Isaacs bill; a positive program of jobs, education and recreation to combat juvenile crime; the exploitation of Puerto Rican workers by employers and racketeers posing as labor leaders; the lag in school integration; proper housing and relocation measures.

But the impact of these movements is not yet felt in the political arena. In this respect the picture in New York corresponds to that in the nation. A great gap exists between the popular movements on issues (civil rights, H-bomb ban and the like) and the prevailing political forms and alignments which thwart the popular will. More and more the need emerges for a political realignment led by labor and directed against the trusts that will give effective



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political expression to the growing people's coalition on issues.

In the New York campaign, a major advance can be made in the fight for such a realignment despite the absence of an independent electoral coalition. The basic character of the campaign is still to be determined. It will depend primarily upon the extent to which the unions and the organized movements among the Negro and Puerto Rican peoples and other progressive groupings are able to force live issues into a dead campaign.

The possibilities are at hand. For in New York as in the nation the popular struggles are not without their political effects.

A number of campaign developments illustrates this. Wagner is being subjected to increasingly sharp criticism in the Negro community and among such forces as the Post, the Liberal Party and others who are supporting his bid for reelection. There is growing resentment at his failure to press for prompt passage, without weakening amendments, of the anti-bias housing bill.

The power of the movement for Negro rights has caused the Democratic and GOP machines to designate an unprecedented number of Negro candidates for City Council. The GOP have named four and the Democrats two. A breakthrough in Negro representation in the Council is assured for the Bedford-Stuyvesant area in Brooklyn where all three parties have named Negro candidates—a tribute to the struggles of the past several years. On the other hand, it should be noted that the machines have not felt the same pressure on the question of Puerto Rican representation.

Discontent with Tammany policies and practices has touched off an unusual number of liberal insurgent bids for Democratic leadership in Manhattan in the coming Sept. 10 primary. Stevensonian Democrats in the Bronx are contesting the machine choices for Borough President and City Council. Some liberal forces, like the ADA, are supporting Harris Klein in his primary fight for the Democratic nomination for Borough President in Brooklyn.

Finally, while the Liberal Party endorsed the city-wide Democratic ticket it has given significant expression to the

widespread sentiment for independent political action by naming its own City Council candidates in all but five districts. The candidates include a Puerto Rican in Lower Harlem, several Negro leaders (unfortunately in one instance in a district where the GOP has also designated a Negro community leader) and a few trade-unionists.

With the main period of the campaign still ahead, the 1957 elections offer a real challenge to Communists and other progressives to seek out and act on every possibility of advancing the fight for the people's needs and for independent political action.

This means concentration upon a four-point program between now and November:

1.—To support the chief movements on issues: to help these movements exert maximum pressure upon the mayoralty and councilmanic slates. The unions, especially, should be encouraged even within the context of their general support of the Wagner ticket to insist upon clear-cut commitments from that ticket on the urgent questions that concern the people.

2.—To help develop popular election coalitions in a number of councilmanic districts, with particular emphasis upon winning gains in Negro and Puerto Rican representation and laying the basis for further gains in '58.

3.—To help extend the beginnings of independent labor political action and organization, in accordance with the program of COPE and other political arms; to help secure a maximum registration of trade-unionists, as well as Negro and Puerto Rican voters.

4.—To assure the most effective expression of the Communist Party's own independent electoral role as an essential factor in strengthening the people's coalition.

This last requires prompt action to guarantee the signatures necessary to qualify Elizabeth Gurley Flynn as an independent People's Rights candidate for City Council from the lower East Side.

Placing this outstanding Communist and labor leader on the ballot will be a signal contribution to the struggle to restore in full and for all the political freedoms set forth in the Bill of Rights.

Her candidacy will strike a new note. She will be able as no other candidate to bring the vital immediate issues into the elections and to relate them to the broad questions of peace, jobs and equality. For she will bring to the campaign the rich understanding that comes from a lifetime of devotion to the workingclass and the clarity that flows from a socialist perspective.

current smear-labor propaganda against labor.

Wisconsin did, indeed, present a shameful picture to the world by its shift from progressivism to McCarthyism. Some now say the state is entering a "new era" and is marching "back to La Folletteism." We certainly hope the march forward has resumed in earnest. The spotlight will be on Proxmire, of course. He is expected to represent the true Wisconsin and help remove the blots and stench still lingering from the disgraceful McCarthyite era.