

# Dennis Discusses CP and the Labor Movement

NOW I wish to pass on and deal with a couple of tactical mistakes, which were directly connected at times and to one degree or another, with the errors in judgment and analysis which our party made in respect to the war danger, the fascist danger, and the economic situation; and which in turn further aggravated and contributed to our party's weakness and isolation. While the advanced workers opposed and resisted the expulsion of the Left-led unions from the CIO, they did not wage an ALL-OUT ideological, political and organizational fight either to try to prevent this split in labor's ranks, or to heal this damaging breach in the trade union movement as soon as possible after the expulsion had taken place.

Prior to the expulsions, the Left approached the struggle in the labor movement against the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine as if war was virtually around the corner. And the party compounded this mistake by continuing a very harmful, untenable, and sectarian policy.

We developed the struggle for peace in the trade union

movement in a doctrinaire and inflexible manner, not taking into account the level of understanding of the workers. Furthermore we made foreign policy issues the acid test of all united front relationships, and neglected the possibility of maintaining certain left-center coalitions on other important issues, including key economic questions.

The advanced sector of the Left never learned how to combine its own principled and correct position on a number of these questions with the necessity to follow a flexible tactic in

*The report by Eugene Dennis to the recent four-day meeting of the Communist Party's National Committee is now being published in pamphlet form. The main section of the report consists of a critical review of the Party's work over the past decade. We print below that portion of the review dealing with trade union policy:*

the trade union movement, even as some of the experiences of the French and Italian Marxists showed was possible and necessary in the CGT and ICL.

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**AFTER THE EXPULSIONS**  
of the eleven national unions

from the CIO, the Left did not fully appreciate the gravity and consequences of what was then taking place; and on more than one occasion, the advanced workers continued to press for the adoption of certain sectarian policies in the unions which aggravated the sharp breaks and ruptures that developed between the Left and diverse Center forces.

During this period, the Left failed to estimate correctly the relation of forces in the labor movement. It did not sufficiently see the ebb and flow of the movement. It tended to exaggerate its strength in the CIO. It did not sufficiently realize that much of its mass influence derived from its participation in broad left-center coalitions.

Failure of the Left leaders and of the Party to recognize these facts of life and to seriously reexamine the new relation of forces, was a factor in all the sectarian errors made and contributed to weakening left-center coalition relations.

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**SOME COMRADES** may ask: What is all the commotion about? Can anyone guarantee that the split in the CIO could have been avoided? This is not the question. The real question is, did we do everything possible to prevent the split? Did we work in a manner and pursue such policies that would make it more difficult for the split to occur? To this, we must answer: No.

The split in the CIO was precipitated through a number of

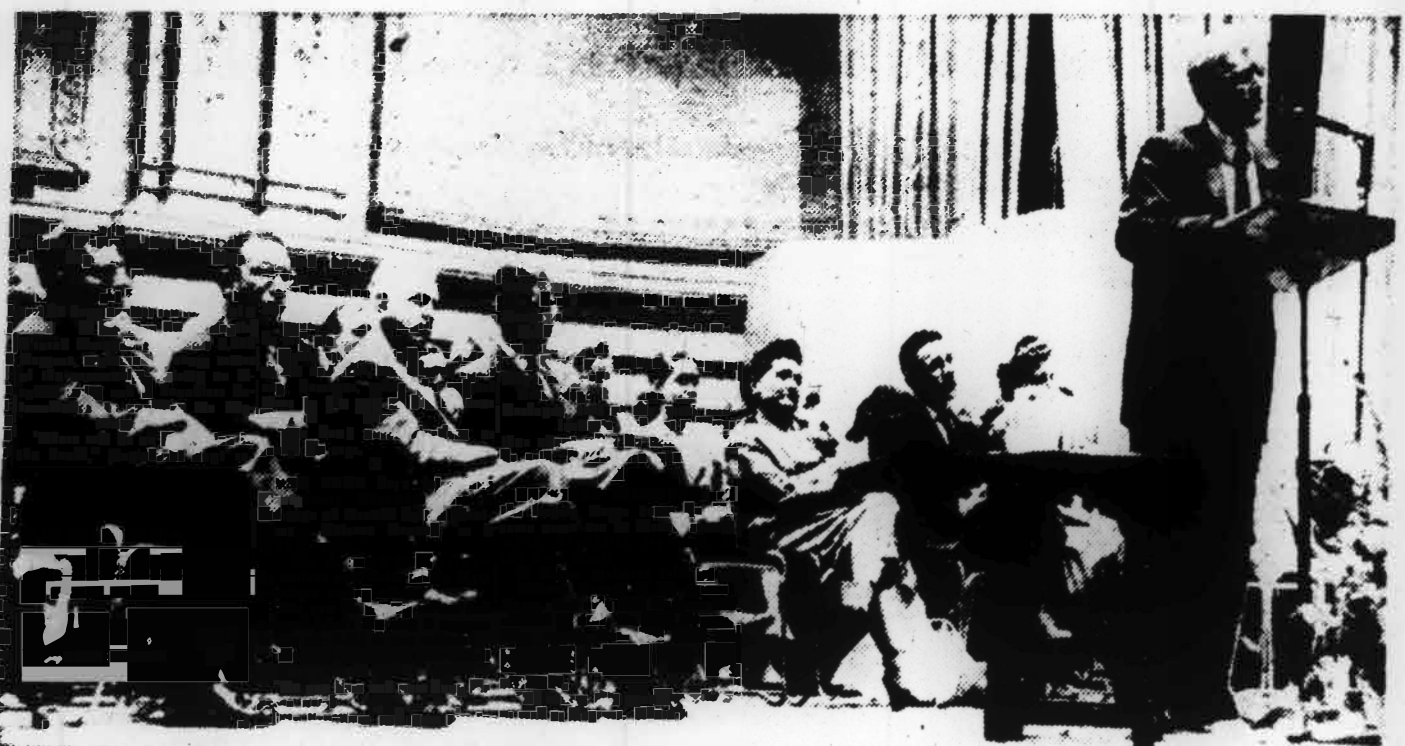
issues on which the Left could have maneuvered and reacted more flexibly. But the Left's fight-back policy suffered from all the sectarian tendencies that hampered its united front work in the mass trade unions led by the more conservative and Right-wing reformist and Social-Democratic leaders. Moreover, the split was, in fact, already prepared and under way, when the Left allowed itself to be isolated and defeated through the break-up of various Left-center coalitions in a number of the CIO unions where the Left-progressives were strong. Certainly, the situation in the NMU, the Transport Workers and District 65 come to mind

A contributing factor to the split in the CIO, the slowness in taking measures to try to overcome this division—was no doubt the practical abandonment of the Left's initiative in the fight for trade union unity. This went hand in hand with speculation about the desirability of eventually establishing a "third" labor federation.

Already in the late '40s, there was an open expression that under the existing circumstances (the war danger, the menace of fascism, the going over of most of the AFL and CIO leaders to support of the cold war, etc.) trade union unity and united labor action would be against the interest of the workers.

Instead of becoming the champions of trade union unity, and thus coming closer to the rank and file and certain leaders of

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Eugene Dennis addresses the 32nd anniversary meeting of the Daily Worker at Carnegie Hall.

tion, the TWUA's executive council report and the convention resolution on foreign policy, followed close to Reuther's position.

The resolution adopted specifically noted Reuther's proposal of 2 percent of the gross national product for economic aid.

The resolution denounces the military aid given Franco Spain and demands that "we should use our influence to help root out feudalism, colonialism or dictatorship without seeking to enforce upon others our own views as to the exact structure of their government. We must abandon the notion that free nations which adopt different economic or political systems, or on some issues disagree with our position, should be denied our friendship and support."

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RIEVE even said he'd rather have a "Russian visa in my pocket" than "an H-bomb in my back yard." I saw no "red" influence in the Textile convention, but the influence of the views expressed by Rieve was strong enough to get unanimous adoption of the above resolution, notwithstanding Meany's warning against yielding to united front approaches.

At the recent education conference of the auto union held in the same auditorium, the 3,000 delegates were equally partisan to Reuther's similar approach.

The high point of Meany's speeches is usually his warning against any united front with Communism. He is really aiming at any idea of a policy of peaceful relations like that expressed by Rieve, or in the Machinists' Journal recently.

The Meany-Lovestone tactic can be compared to that used by the extreme rightwing red-baiters who vent their fury against Communists but actually aim their heavy guns at liberals. Meany believes that the more he shouts of "slave labor" camps and the more insults he hurls at the Soviet leaders, the more difficult will it be to oppose his foreign policy and seek a new approach.

## Dennis

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the AFL and CIO and helping to set the workers and their local organizations in motion, the negative attitude of many Party leaders, including various trade union cadres, towards labor unity made it easier for the reformist trade union leaders to isolate the Left still further.

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MOREOVER, the extremely harmful nature of this anti-unity approach can be seen in the subsequent fact, that, in the main, the advanced workers did not play an active and influential role in helping to bring about the merger of the AFL and CIO. Even after organic unity became a reality, a section on the Left, inclusive of the certain Party forces, failed to grasp the very positive achievement that this historic step represented, and kept pointing to the dangers, and to the obvious fact that the labor reformists at the head of

AFL and CIO remained reformists. And some went so far as to assert that the AFL and CIO were "labor fronts" and that the merger was engineered by the State Dept.

What they did not see is that labor unity—far from being a plot on the part of Big Business in pursuance of its general policies and its foreign policy specifically—was in fact, spurred on as a result of the growing attacks on the part of the employers. The merger reflected, to one degree or another, the desires and pressures of the rank and file to achieve greater unity and strength in the big economic and political struggles that the workers were being compelled to wage.

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THERE IS, TOO, the ques-

tion of the formation of the Progressive Party in 1948, which also widened the cleavage in the CIO and weakened the ties between the Leftwing and the mainstream of the labor movement. At this point I do not want to argue whether or not an independent peace ticket should have been entered and developed in the 1948 elections.

Personally, I believe it would have been correct and I consider that both the objective conditions and certain subjective factors warranted such a bold move.

Certainly, the impact of Wallace's break with the Administration over the Truman Doctrine and the widespread resentment in labor's ranks over the strike-breaking role of the Administration in the miners' and railwaymen's strike—gave a big impetus in 1947 and early 1948 to the progressive trend towards independent political action and for organizing an independent presidential ticket in opposition to the Truman and Dewey candidacies and bipartisan war program.

However, I also believe it was erroneous and harmful to support the formation of the P.P. as a third party, and not to have taken into account certain changes in the electoral situation which developed in the final months of the campaign. Insofar as the position of our Party on this question is concerned, I assume a particular responsibility.

But the fact remains that whether the Progressive Party came on the electoral scene as a party or a ticket, life—and the election returns in November, 1948—clearly revealed that the PP (at least, as a national organization) had no promising future in the political life of the country. Not to recognize this then, and to entertain the illusion that the contrary might be the case, was not only a mistaken political judgment per se, but also made it increasingly difficult for the Left to reorient and to forge the broad democratic people's coalition which it advocated.

WHILE THE PARTY leadership modified its position on this question in 1949 and 1950—as in the Lehman-Dulles senatorial contest—we did not draw all the conclusions from our mistakes, did not place the matter for definitive correction in the 1950 elections. While the 1952 Draft Resolution attempted to do this, sectarian attitudes in the leadership and in the Party blunted the necessary corrections in the Resolution as finally adopted.

Consequently, remnants of this dual policy were expressed in some of the official reports at the August 1954 national election conference, and are still to be found in the practical work of some Party organizations.

But, on the whole, the policy projected for the 1954 elections represented a turn as far as our electoral policy is concerned. The tactical line set forth in the 1954 Program was a major contribution designed to reorient the Party and the whole Left to restore and extend our mass ties and influence in the mainstream of the labor and people's movements. There is no doubt that the Party program played a very positive role in the 1954 elections and in helping turn the tide against McCarthyism.

## Lapin on South

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only 2,200 registered white voters in the county." (Total population in the county is 30,561).

That's how Sam Engelhardt gets elected to the state senate—and that's how he intends to keep it.

But for all his power and cockiness, Engelhardt seemed curiously defensive.

He kept emphasizing that the White Citizens Councils are against anti-Semitism and oppose violence.

I should explain that this hard-faced bigot represents the more respectable and conservative wing