

SOCIALISM AND ELECTIONS

By MAX GORDON
(Second of 2 Articles)

SOME PROGRESSIVES with socialist views, who formerly supported the Progressive Party nationally and the American Labor Party, in New York, have said they plan to vote this year for one of the three small parties with socialist programs.

The view expressed by these progressives is that both major parties are dominated by reaction, and there is no real choice between them. They are tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee.

If there were a large, significant vote cast for socialism in our country, a persuasive case might perhaps be made out for such a ballot. But, as noted yesterday, the great majority of socialist-minded workers have chosen to align themselves with the labor movement in the political battles in which it is involved. And these battles are being waged today around current issues within and between the major parties.

Hence the vote for candidates and parties which profess socialism does not measure the strength of socialist conviction among the nation's workers. It has no other real significance.

I BELIEVE that those who spurn the conflict within the major Party arena, and turn to what seems to me a futile personal gesture, are in error. They mistake the relationship between the economic and political struggles of worker, farmer, Negro, small businessman for improvement of their condition, and the struggle for socialism.

This is the ancient problem of relation between immediate demands and ultimate goals, which has long dogged the Left throughout the world, as it had dogged earlier movements for social transformation.

As I see it, the two are organically connected. Both arise out of the inherent evils of the existing society, and out of the desire of the underdogs of that society for a "redress of grievances." Up to a certain point in the struggle against the existing evils, most of the system's victims are concerned simply with reform, with "immediate demands." Some, more far-sighted, believe only a basic social change, a new system, can in the long run overcome the evils of the old.

But at a particular stage in the struggle for reform, the victims, primarily on the basis of their own experience, arrive at the conclusion that these advocating revolutionary change are right, that such change is necessary.

The experience of social movements in general reveals, I believe, that the most effective leaders of movements for fundamental social change have been those who aligned themselves with, and gave leadership to, the prior struggle for reforms. Certainly, it is true of movements for socialism, from Marx, Engels, Debs and Lenin to such current figures as Mao, Togliatti, Thorez, etc.

WHAT, THEN, is the situation in our land today? The great mass of American workers, Negro people, small farmers do not now view socialism as the way to resolve their difficulties under capitalism. They look for the remedy in economic and political struggle designed to correct particular evils within the system.

They conduct their political struggle along traditional lines, within the confines of the capitalist-dominated major parties. At times, their dissatisfactions break through the two parties, and they form a third party devoted to reform. But such is the maneuverability, as yet, of American capital, and the flexibility of its political mechanisms, that these third parties have not had a long life.

To maintain the two-party system, however, American capitalism has had to permit considerable leeway for the operation of pressures from the workingclass and other oppressed groups. And these pressures are being exerted today both within and between the two parties. In the election campaign this year, they have had a considerable impact on campaign developments, particularly as regards the Democratic Party.

What, then, should be the political direction of those who have concluded that socialism is, in the long run, the only genuine solution for the evils of capitalism? For most of them, particularly those who are workers, the answer has been self-evident. They are active participants in the trade union movement, and have not separated themselves from its political struggles. To do so would mean isolation.

As for others, they, too, it would appear to me, need to associate themselves with the de facto, loose alliance of class forces, based on labor, which has been striving to win the Democratic Party to its program.

It is this alliance which alone can be the moving force for socialism when it determines from its own experience that this is the solution to the evils of capitalism.

This is not to say that education and agitation for socialism is now out of place. It certainly is not. It is a necessary part of the total experience of the workingclass and its allies. Nor are organizations that profess to be for socialism excused from the necessity for creative development of socialist theory based upon American experience, tradition and reality.

But such education, agitation and theory are sterile and ineffective if those who undertake them are isolated from the political battles in which the workingclass is actually engaged.

Correction: Yesterday's article by Max Gordon carried a verb syntax which was an interesting printer's combination of the old and the new. The original article carried the verb "have arisen." It was changed in the proof to "arose." What came out was "have arose."