

FORUM

Discussion & Information Bulletin
of the Independent Socialist League

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April 1950
Vol. 1 No. 3
(erroneously
marked "Vol II")

VOL. NO.
II 3
April, 1950
15 cents

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THE ISL AND LABOR POLITICS

By Susan Green

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Next on Labor's Agenda

The creation of a labor party in America would be a revolutionary step. Anything savoring of revolution is today in disrepute. This is true both because Stalinism is identified with radical measures based on class struggle, and also because there is grave doubt in the minds of American workers as to the advantages of the English experiment with a labor government. This attitude will lead labor ranks to try everything short of taking the plunge into a labor party.

Aside from this general political mood, concretely in this country labor will be tied to the Democratic Party in the next period because of the existence of the Dixiecrat-GOP coalition. This coalition can be made the scapegoat for every failure of the Fair Deal, and will be. As long as Truman can blame his political opponents for the non-passage of his Fair Deal measures and as long as labor leaders can convince their followers of the same thing, labor's aim will be to outvote this coalition at the polls. Labor's objective is bound to be to vote into the administrative and legislative branches of government liberal-labor control -- mainly through the Democratic Party.

The position of labor today may be gleaned from comments in the CIO News on the adjournment of the 81st Congress. Here are some samples:

"They've been moving steadily, if not spectacularly, toward realization of the goals set forth in the Democratic Party platform... One of the important things accomplished was to force into the open the GOP-Dixiecrat coalition and expose it for what it really is... With few exceptions, lawmakers supported by CIO-PAC fought for labor's program... In no instance did more than eight of the 168 PAC-endorsed House members vote contrary to CIO's legislative program. The record in the Senate was equally good... The trend toward reaction so evident in the 80th Congress was checked by the elections last year and a trend toward liberalism started... The next phase of this action clearly is to break the hold of the coalition on the Congress by electing additional Representatives and Senators who will stand true to their pledges, and by re-electing those who have fought so valiantly for progressive pieces of legislation..."

Until the liberal-labor coalition, the CIO here indicates, becomes strong enough to carry out the Fair Deal program, no significant discreditment of it is possible. It is only when such a liberal-labor power has been created by the votes of labor, and it fails to fulfill its promise, that there can happen in labor's thinking that ideological change without which no mass movement towards a labor party can grow.

Of course, the point of departure of the ISL is that the Fair Deal, and the progressive betterment of the wide masses implicit in it, is not realizable under capitalism. Specifically, the ISL holds that America has entered into a stage of expansive militarism under which the economic and social status of the working people is bound to deteriorate, and that the liberal-labor coalition in the capitalist party will buckle, under the basic pressures of this phase of American capitalism. The ISL does not hold that the Fair Deal is possible under capitalism but that it will come to quicker and better fruition through labor's own political instrument. Rather the ISL contends that the independent instrument has to be forged to fight for the people's interests -- wherever that fight may lead. So that if a labor party starts with merely the Fair Deal program, it will have to go beyond the confines set by the capitalist parties in order to carry out its program.

These are lessons labor has to learn through its own experience, and, as stated above, the experience it has now ahead of it is to exhaust the possibilities of a liberal-labor coalition within the Democratic Party.

Ivy Tower or Shachtman Motion

The ISL is, therefore, confronted with the alternative either of keeping out of active politics altogether at this time, doing a strictly propaganda job on the labor party and on Socialism -- ensconced in the righteous certainty, as is the SLP, that since we are right the masses will eventually come to us; or of working out a policy for intervening in active politics along the general lines of the Shachtman motion.

The Shachtman motion comes, I take it, from the understanding that labor will not go from the Democratic Party to a labor party in one leap, nudged by our propaganda. There will have to be forming within labor's ranks during this period of the liberal-labor coalition experiment, a core of workers who will have been gradually educated towards the acceptance of the labor party by experience and through concrete actions. The ISL can, in its small way to be sure, begin to advocate this type of action.

Wherever a situation offers itself in a local, State or national election for labor to act in the spirit of a labor party, if not in its form, the ISL should consider whether it can perform a progressive role therein. Is it a question of the PAC bucking the cast-iron party machine? That could very well get our support. Is the labor bureaucracy evading the issue of taking political leadership where it is obviously called for? We could try to make the rank and file see the importance of stepping out in front in the situation. And in cases where labor could and should offer a better program through its candidate, this the ISL can likewise point out.

There is some doubt whether the Shachtman motion applies to the ISL as such or only as a modus operandi for trade-union comrades locally -- a sort of left-hand-not-knowing-what-the-right-is-doing arrangement. To draw a distinction between official League policy and unofficial policy to be carried out by individual members would be the kind of two-faced conduct ultimately discrediting the League. Not that every time a trade-union comrade says or does something LA has to have an editorial on it. Not at all. However, it must be the official orientation of the League and of LA that during this period of the liberal-labor coalition experience of labor, they can further the labor party objective not only by propaganda but by trying to be instrumental in effecting "labor party" actions.

Where Could the ISL Act?

In the New York discussion of the plenum motions on political action most attention centred around the Abner case in Chicago. It was indeed an interesting situation and may be typical of others to come up in the future. However, this is by far not the only sort of situation where we can have something to say or some side to take.

On the national scale the most important candidacy, from labor's present point of view, is that for Senator from Ohio to run against Robert A. Taft in 1950. Labor has openly committed itself to put its all into the defeat of Taft in 1950 -- Taft, the embodiment of Taft-Hartleyism. Yet, while Taft has been stumping the State in his own behalf, the Democratic Party has been backing and filling, shillying and shallying, and has not yet named a candidate. Now it transpires that Truman may not be averse to the re-election of Taft as Senator and to his running as Republican presidential candidate in 1952. Perhaps the labor bureaucracy is playing along with this idea. Be that as it may, here is a case of national importance, where, if labor's contentions are to be taken as bona fide, it has to step into the lead. Not that the labor bureaucrats will. But the ISL and LA can try to apprise the rank and file of the delinquency of its leadership in this political spot, and to show the necessity for labor to take the initiative on its own behalf, for the middle class farmers, for the professional workers, etc.

Another development that may yield opportunities where "labor party" actions will be pertinent, is in the South and Southwest. In these regions there are newly expanding industries, also the concomitant drive for labor organization, and both the CIO and AFL have made considerable headway. At the same time there is something of a political renaissance in the South, with the Negroes voting in larger numbers and with the growing labor population realizing that the Dixiecrat machines and the old politicians in the Democratic Party have to be defeated. Here definitely is a milieu in which labor may, time and again, be able to take the lead for itself, for the Negroes, for the poor and middle white population.

Though we do not have trade-union comrades in these regions, LA can do good educational and agitational work in concrete situations as they come up.

Of course, this whole development needs to be followed closely. For example, PAC had a full-time representative in Georgia to organize the defeat of James C. Davis from the 5th Georgia District in the last Congressional campaign. The 5th District includes the city of Atlanta. Davis is viciously anti-labor. The PAC declared the issue of the campaign to be unionism in the South. Congressmen, it said, can be for or against the employers' anti-union drive. However, PAC did not run a labor candidate. Wasn't this a spot where, if we had our people there, could have been utilized to press for "labor party" action, if not for the labor party? And not having our people there, would it not be of great educational value for LA to analyze such situations for its readers and to propose certain actions?

Other opportunities present themselves in that hundreds of CIO and AFL members run as candidates in the elections, without our small say-so. In Virginia, Temple Kessing, president of CIO Paper Workers Local 675, was elected to the House of Delegates, being the first CIO member elected to the House. In Camden, New Jersey, Frank Meloni, member of CIO Wholesale & Retail Union, was elected to the State Assembly. In Waterbury, Connecticut, Armond Fiorelli, CIO metal worker, won for Alderman. In Freehold, New Jersey, Wilfred Walker, CIO-UAW member, was chosen for City Council. In Louisville, Kentucky, Clarence Lattis, CIO-UAW member, became Alderman. In New Jersey seven out of eleven members of the City Council of Florence Township are CIO steelworkers. In Buffalo, New York, James J. McCabe, president of Steelworkers local 2497, was elected to the City Council. The above is, of course, a very incomplete list of candidates and their victories or defeats.

How were these candidates named? How were the campaigns conducted? Was there something the ISL could have done? And now that these officeholders are in local and State governments, the rank and file should not permit them to be on their own from this point out. The demands, the interests, the pressures of organized labor should constantly be felt by them. Labor has to learn to keep tabs on representatives from its own ranks and make them responsible to it.

Union men hold not only elective jobs in local and State governments, but also appointive jobs. Sometimes these appointive jobs are given as patronage -- reward for support. Sometimes, too, a liberal like Governor Bowles of Connecticut makes such appointments as a matter of principle. Bowles has made several such appointments to quite responsible posts. Should these union men be written off as just politicians, lost to the rank and file? No indeed. Again, labor should claim them as responsible to it, making its demands felt, and

asking for explanations as to why such demands are not fulfilled when they are not.

There has been some controversy in our ranks about the successful Shelley campaign in California. But we have heard nothing about the campaign of Gayle L. Collins, an international representative of the UAW. He ran for Assembly from the 69th District in California, and trailed the machine Democrat by 3000 votes. But the campaign was significant in that Collins, a CIO man, got the support of the AFL, though the AFL has more numerical strength in that district. Collins' manager was an AFL man. Both organizations realized they were fighting the Democratic machine with a labor candidate. I do not know what kind of campaign was fought. But ISL members on the spot, if any, might well have entered into this situation, not only because of the united labor fight against the Democratic machine, but also because of the opportunity to present the best possible platform, including the advocacy of a labor party.

The general opinion seems to be that the ISL trade-unionists in Detroit could not have supported Edwards in the last election. The primary consideration should be whether or not they could have done constructive work, from our point of view. It must be recalled that Edwards' opponent Cobo made a veiled racist campaign, appealing on this basis to small propertied people, and so on. Edwards did not rise to the requirements for a forthright, unequivocal working class platform. Could the ISL comrades have challenged Edwards: "If you are labor's candidate, then be its spokesman on all points. If your ties with politicians and machines prevent you from being a labor candidate on all fours, then you have no right to run as such." In other words, a challenge for the clarification and radicalization of Edwards' position seemed called for. Only after such a try on the part of ISLers could the decision have been made on whether or not to support him.

The 60-dollar question has been raised, Do members of the ISL join the Democratic Party? This is supposed to floor the most hardy ISLer. How can he join a capitalist party? Admittedly, it's a distasteful step to take. However, no principle is involved. Basing ISL policy on an understanding of the present situation in labor politics, the only approach to whether the comrades involved join the Democratic Party or not - probably in most cases, whether they register in the primaries or not - is a purely operational one. Each instance would have to be decided separately. The criterion would have to be whether joining or registering would further the particular objectives the ISL sets in each instance. And in each instance the step would have to be taken in a discreet and principled fashion.

Some NC Opinions

Comrades on the NC show considerable timidity and inconsistency in their proposals. For example, Comrade Ferguson is

for supporting labor candidates who believe in the labor party but run in elections on the Democratic ticket "under the mistaken belief that this will lead to building a sufficient segment of labor Democrats to launch later a Labor Party by subsequent split." Such labor candidates are to be supported but - mind you - from the outside, no joining the Democratic Party. These candidates are running because they hope by their activity to make "more concrete" - in Ferguson's words - "their demand for and activity on behalf of promoting the slogan 'build labor's independent machine.'" Isn't it conceivable that under certain very special circumstances members of the ISL might do more at the side of such labor militants within the Democratic Party than outside, always making clear why the ISLers take such action?

Comrade Garrett, on his part, is for supporting labor candidates of the kind and in the situations envisaged by the Shachtman motion, but -- god forbid -- the members of the ISL must not participate in the struggle in the primaries to get these candidates on the ticket. It is this struggle, of course, which is the important thing, meant to encourage and strengthen rank-and-file-initiated action. Quite conceivably the PC might advise comrades in such promising situations to register and enter into the primary fight, depending on what good might be accomplished thereby. Naturally our comrades would make to the militants involved the proper explanation of why they choose to be at the latter's side in their struggle.

Comrade Hall, opposed to the Shachtman motion and fearful that such a policy will discourage altogether those few militants who now favor a labor party, reduces the function of the ISL in the coming period to sitting in the spectator's gallery, to be sure under a banner. Yet this is a period of intense labor politics. Though not on the level hoped for, there is interest and motion throughout labor's ranks. Consequently here is a milieu within which the ISL may perform some concrete tasks in fundamental political education through advocating definite actions. Certainly such a policy is beset with dangers - to be avoided, however, as our best intelligence will allow us to.

If Comrade Hall is gloomy about our ability to steer a principled course through such a milieu, let him consider the fact that in 1944 the convention of the WP passed a resolution presenting to French revolutionaries the policy of advocating a CP-SP government. (Incidentally I was opposed to this resolution because under no circumstances would I advocate putting the CP into power, knowing what power in the hands of the CP becomes). However, the idea behind the WP resolution was that the French workers would learn to discredit both the CP and SP only through these parties' failure either to answer the call to power or, taking power, to satisfy the working class. What a challenge to the intelligence and political acumen of revolutionaries - the traditional enemies of both the CP and SP - to put out such a slogan and still not com-

promise themselves with the workers. Yet it was deemed quite possible to do this. Certainly in the less acute and simpler situation presented to us in following the general line of the Shachtman motion, the ISL and LA will find the ways to keep its principled position clear and yet do those things that may help labor to more maturity, while it goes through this experience with a liberal-labor coalition in the DP.

Comrade Hall, amidst a mass of unconvincing objections, produced one that appeared more weighty than the rest. If I understood him correctly, he holds that the ISL must not compromise on its simon-pure labor party position because Taft-Hartleyism is not the exclusive possession of the Republican Party but is also part and parcel of the Fair Deal and of the Democratic Party. He did not go into an explanation, but presumably he bases himself on the official position of the ISL that present-day American capitalism, rapidly militarizing itself, engenders Taft-Hartleyism in some form or other. Indeed this basic explanation must constantly be made to workers in our propaganda for a labor party -- and incidentally in propaganda for a workers government, which two last words have been neither seen nor heard for a long time.

However, true as may be Hall's point, it does not alter the fact that labor believes there is a difference between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party on Taft-Hartleyism. Labor puts the Fair Deal and anti-Taft-Hartleyism in the same package. When labor's illusions about the Fair Deal are exploded, then also will be exploded its confidence in the anti-Taft-Hartleyism of the Democratic Party liberals. As explained above, this disillusionment will come to labor only after the experience of electing into administrative and legislative control enough Fair Dealers to lick the reactionary coalition. When the Fair Dealers, in unquestioned power, fail in their promises on social security, on Taft-Hartleyism, etc., labor's eyes will be opened. Do we sit and wait in the meantime?

If members of the ISL should enter into primary situations or elections where labor's independence can be furthered, they naturally would never do so as supporters of the Democratic Party. They are advocates of the labor party and opponents of the capitalist parties. They say to those militants with whom they have influence: "You know our position on a labor party. We believe that it alone can fight for the interests of the workers and of the great majority of the people, and that such a party alone can be held responsible to the people. You, who are militants, are not quite convinced of this, and the mass of workers are not even thinking about a labor party. We can either climb into our ivy tower till labor is disillusioned with the Fair Dealers, and then perhaps see labor's retrogression by the impact of disillusionment and discouragement; or we can stay with labor and try wherever possible to encourage its independent action, even within the Democratic Party setup, so that the fanks may learn something about their strength, their ability to do things themselves, and thus be prepared for a constructive step forward after this Fair Deal honeymoon is over."

Those opposed to the Shachtman motion have sought to show that it is futile, a going around in circles, they say. Pointing to the Abner case, they ask, supposing he should win the primary fight and even be elected, must not the outcome be that he will become part of the liberal-labor coalition? But, of course, he will. The whole assumption is that labor will work within this coalition. A successful primary fight is a skirmish, not a war, but such skirmishes build up the know-how for winning the war -- the war for a labor party when and if it is declared. Furthermore, the interest of the rank and file in Abner does not end with his election and becoming part of the liberal-labor coalition. The ranks must continue to regard him as their own, subject to their interests and their pressures. The need for this kind of follow-through by the ranks should be hammered home by ISL members locally and by the ISL and LA.

Will There Be a Labor Party?

While we are ardent proponents of an independent labor party, we do not know that the course of labor politics in America will be through a labor party, namely, through the formation of an independent labor party of the kind we now have in mind. There may be a different development. Isn't there a possibility that the reactionaries, conservatives and Dixiecrats will coalesce into a political party with such men as Byrnes and Eisenhower as leaders? In such case, the liberal-labor-coalition will remain as the Democratic Party. With its ranks cleared of the rightist elements, the leftist tendencies in the Democratic Party would be strengthened. In essence this would be not too far removed from the conservative and labor division in politics as in England. Whether, with such a political division, American labor would feel the need to form an independent labor party with the content we now give it, remains to be seen. If there be such a development as above described, isn't it likely that from there labor would have to go into a more radical workers party than what we now have in mind as an independent labor party?

Comrade Shachtman's reasoning that a labor party must emerge in this country, runs something as follows. The Democratic Party is a machine rooted in economic interests and in the patronage system. The labor bureaucrats pressed to seek political power, will be in head-on conflict with the bureaucrats of the patronage system. The latter will not give ground or change its character, and therefore the former will have no choice but to branch out for themselves.

There seem to be some flaws in this reasoning. In the first place, the patronage system is not as invulnerable as claimed. Political machines can be broken up by the electorate, as has been recently shown in some instances. In the second place, there need not be a head-on conflict between labor and political bureaucrats. A modus vivendi and a modus

operandi can be arrived at between them. This is evidenced by the growing number of labor candidates and of appointments of labor officials to political jobs. In the third place, there is no evidence in this country that labor bureaucrats want to assume political responsibility in leadership. Quite the contrary is the case.

What the ISL can do in the present situation is to teach, encourage and urge rank-and-file thinking on current problems, rank-and-file initiative, rank-and-file actions in situations where the ranks may become aware of their independent entity, their power and their crucial importance. All this is concretized in the labor party, and we of the ISL educate and propagate for this objective. From this kind of preparation alone will come political developments in the interest of all working people and of all society. Just what physical form these developments will take, there are no prophets at hand to tell us.

Our Last Convention

The resolution adopted at our last convention on "The Situation in the United States and Our Next Tasks" contains the following very wise paragraph:

"In any case, however, what is indicated for the period ahead is a process of the growth, consolidation and extension of the political apparatus of the labor movement or of its three sections. This holds true even if -- indeed perhaps especially if -- the project of 'capturing' the Democratic Party is embarked upon. This process has a logic and internal drive of its own and also presents great opportunities for the left wing of labor and for pro-labor-party militants. These have, in the first place, the task of demanding that these political machines do not merely remain top committees of bureaucrats; that they be extended and built from the ground up, or at any rate extended down to the involvement of the rank and file of labor; that the rank and file have the decisive voice about what these political machines should do, what politics they should pursue, what candidates endorse, what platforms put forward. Shape the PAC and LEP into functioning membership groups in the grass roots of the labor movement!"

However, there was unfortunately no implementation of this attitude in the resolution, except for the calling of a Political Action Congress of Labor. Though such a congress would be a tremendously progressive step, this is not really working at the grass roots. I submit that the general line of the Shachtman motion does permit exactly the kind of grass-roots activity the above quotation describes, and my ideas expressed herein enlarge the vision of possibilities for such activity.

Is it not time to question our policy of the protest vote,

the vote for some socialist candidate? Is this not an evasion of a complicated problem rather than a facing of it? We have not ourselves been impressed by this policy, many of us not even bothering to go to cast the protest vote. Thus by our acts we evaluate the policy as unsuitable. Labor is trying to accomplish something by its votes. The CIO and AFL will be spending some six or seven millions to prove this in the 1950 election. Is this the time for "token voting" as a policy in the absence of a labor party? Is it not incumbent on us to enter into the milieu of labor politics as we find it, therein, according to our means, to try to influence an understanding of and actions toward more class-conscious politics? We have ceased to put up our own candidates "to do our duty." However, we still tell workers "to cast a Socialist vote" -- and thereby we still "do our duty."

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THE ABNER CAMPAIGN AND ISL POLICY

By William Barton

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The article by R. L. Ferguson in the March 27 LABOR ACTION on the campaign of Willoughby Abner for the Democratic nomination for State Senator from a Chicago district may be a good report of political events. From that viewpoint those of us with little additional information are in no position to criticize. But, Ferguson has presented far more than a news account. He has a position to offer, though he does not state it as such. The implication is obvious -- Abner's campaign in the primaries should be supported by readers of LABOR ACTION who can be involved.

There is not merely the advice to Democratic enrollees in the 5th Illinois Senatorial District to vote for Abner. That is a debatable question, but it is not the one which this writer wishes to debate right now. The point at issue is Ferguson's implicit evaluation of the Abner electoral effort as one warranting enthusiastic support as a part of the fight of the labor movement against one of the most powerful machines of the capitalist parties. With all his qualifications, Ferguson appears definitely to regard the campaign as a possible "step" in the direction of independent labor politics.

Without knowing all the details of this particular situation, this observer believes that Ferguson's attitude is part of a dangerous delusion that LABOR ACTION should be combatting, not fostering. The 1948 election was considered "our victory" by much of the labor movement, both leaders and rank and file. Too many regard the Democratic Party as "their party", producing that tie to the Fair Deal Administration which has proven so ruinous.

The dispute with the Chicago representatives of that administration, according to the article, came about because the CIO-PAC's nominees were all turned down by the political bosses. In other words, even if some of the PAC selections had been accepted by Arvey and company there would have been no fight. This is hardly a fitting start for an independent labor political fight.

Ferguson concludes by calling for an independent campaign by Abner if he should lose in the primary, but calls such a possible defeat "an outcome not at all inevitable nor to be wished for." I am not so sure. Nothing could be more embarrassing to Ferguson than Abner's primary victory. To refuse to support him in the election under the Democratic banner would then be comically illogical. To support him would mean working for the victory of a candidate on the Democratic ticket, who would undoubtedly be then warmly endorsed by the same

machine that had previously been his enemy. This has been the general experience in similar elections.

If Abner then won, he might actually find himself in frequent conflict with some of the other Democratic Chicago legislators. The nature of such conflicts is indicated by Abner's reported charge that "the machine has not cooperated even with its 'liberal' governor, Stevenson, on many vital issues." Abner might thus line up with the state's leading Fair Dealer against some of the local recalcitrant Democrats.

Opponent Marshall Korshak was probably not far off when he told Abner, "I don't disagree with anything you say." That is the crux of current labor politics. The official Fair Deal program is the political program of the labor movement, in most essentials. Most "machine" politicians are outspoken supporters of the same program. They may disagree with labor about just who is to get the political plums; a machine has to live, regardless of its program for the voters.

Even if there were frequent disputes over posts, that would hardly be sufficient to prompt LABOR ACTION enthusiasm over a specific attempt by labor unions to get their men in. But, even such conflicts are not too likely to become widespread. A pattern of American politics has been developing for the past decade and a half which is likely to become more prominent. The Democratic Party apparatus rests on two separate organized groups -- the machines and the labor movement. They are not distinctly separate, for the machines base their appeal on the "pro-labor" color of their party. In turn, they support candidates of the labor movement, as well as the ideological affiliates of the Americans for Democratic Action. This latter has occurred less in some areas than others, but should be more typical everywhere in the near future.

The problem of creating a political apparatus for labor has been solved. The two tasks now are the creation of a year-round organization and the termination of the status of an adjunct of the Fair Deal organization. The former is largely dependent on the latter. Support to any development which will accentuate the alliance with the Democratic Party is hardly to be desired. A primary victory for Abner would do just that. Members of unions in that district and others with close political ties to those engaged in the campaign might find it proper to maintain their liaison with their close co-workers by participating in the campaign for Abner; they can thus reveal the possibilities of independent political action. But it remains politically off the beam for a reporter for LABOR ACTION to add his voice.

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THE LABOR BUREAUCRACY IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

(A Discussion of Political Policy)

By Gordon Haskell

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The Independent Socialist League is discussing a proposal on political action by Comrade Max Shachtman which is designed, in the opinion of its author and those who support it, to give the independent socialists a political lever in the present situation.

And some kind of a lever is badly needed. For we are faced with a situation in which the working class, despite its great organizational power, remains a pretty inert political mass which is stuck solidly to the Fair Deal wing of the Democratic Party.

Every discussion of the political tactics to be adopted by revolutionary socialists has to start with this fact. And every proposal has to start with two questions: 1) Why does labor stick to the Democrats despite all the kicks in the teeth and the backside they have got from their friends? and 2) What forces or developments can be expected to start the working class in motion away from its political alliance with capital, and towards independent political organization?

On the first question there seems to be a fair amount of agreement within the ISL. Just prior to the elections of 1948, when it seemed that the Democrats were going down to defeat in the post-war reaction, there was growing sentiment among the ranks of the workers and even in the labor bureaucracy for some kind of political independence. But the smashing Truman victory at the polls dampened the ardor of the conscious pro-labor party trade unionists, reconvinced the hesitant ones of the necessity of continuing with their past political policy, and stopped the development of pro-labor party sentiments among those who were just beginning to think along labor party lines.

The fiasco of the Wallace movement put another knife in the back of the labor party idea. But all this was just the psychological reaction to the social situation in the country. Even more important than the Truman victory was the continued high employment and the growing intensity of the cold war and its by-product of the anti-Stalinist, anti-subversive drive.

It is important that we keep these things in mind in a discussion of political policy. For the moment we lose from sight the general social conditions which are the chief determinants of the political policies of both the working class and the capitalists, we run the risk of shaping our policies on the basis of secondary considerations.

Why do the labor leaders and the workers generally cleave

to the Democratic Party at this particular time?

Because the Fair Deal wing of that party has been able to offer them enough to reinforce the conservative side of their political thinking. The Fair Deal has promised much more than it has produced. In many instances it has gone against the wishes of the labor leaders and the ranks. But still there is high employment in the country. Homes are being built. The fair dealers try to keep rent controls on. They resist the Republican efforts to slash the budget...and the budget represents 25% of the national income. In the face of these facts why should the labor leaders break with the Fair Deal and enter what seems to them (and is for them) the extremely dangerous road of organizing the workers into a class party?

And then there is foreign policy. The labor leaders support the administration's foreign policy to the hilt, and they dream of doing nothing else. For them, and for the ranks as well, to advocate any other kind of a foreign policy would require a degree of political understanding which would verge on socialist consciousness. They can comfortably support the policy of American imperialism because, for one thing, it gives them a chance to clean out the Stalinists and the radical "subversives" from their own front yard and clamp on the labor movement their own machine control more solidly than ever before.

If these be the major reasons for the adherence of the working class and above all the labor bureaucrats to capitalist politics, what changes must take place in the social situation which would, in turn, change the thinking of enough workers to give the idea of independent class politics some real mass backing in the unions?

It will not be enough for the Fair Dealers to fail to keep their political promises. They have never kept them. A sufficient deterioration must take place in the economic or social situation of masses of workers to convince them that their only salvation lies in independent political organization. They must become convinced from experience that neither Fair Deal nor any other kind of capitalist politics can give them what they want or at the very least guarantee them what they have. As long as our present social order and our present political parties can satisfy the workers more or less at the present level, they will not break them from their dependence on capitalist politics and capitalist politicians.

But doesn't that mean that until such a major social turn takes place the ISL is doomed to "political isolation"? Doesn't it mean that our labor party slogan will continue to fall on deaf ears? Yes it does. But so will appeals to the labor leaders to launch an open struggle against their political Fair Deal allies inside the Democratic Party.

But then what is the use of Comrade Shachtman's proposal? Does he, perhaps, see some fissure in the labor-capitalist political alliance into which a lever can be driven now, under the present circumstances, and by means of which the process of separation can be started before the change in the general situation takes place which has been described above as necessary to the development of political independence by the working class?

The key to Comrade Shachtman's proposal is contained in the following phrase in his motion (FORUM, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 20) "...to support a line that will deepen and sharpen the conflict of interests between the bureaucracy of the official capitalist parties and the labor leadership that has attached itself to these parties, thereby contributing to a separation between them."

The "fissure" is the "conflict of interests" between the labor and Democratic bureaucracies. The lever is the political policy of urging the labor leaders to themselves contest for major posts against the candidates of the regular Democratic machines.

In his motion Comrade Shachtman does not describe the fissure at all. But he has done so before the New York ISL membership more or less as follows. The Democratic politicians base themselves on a machine, the life-blood of which is patronage. For their power and influence they depend on their control of that machine. The labor bureaucrats, on the other hand, base themselves on their union organizations. Their political power depends on their position as union leaders, and not on the patronage of a political machine.

And as they become increasingly aware of the political power which the unions give them, they cannot be satisfied with the role of vote-catchers for the machine politicians. They can be satisfied only with the substance of a political power to which they feel their social role entitles them.

In this conflict for power and prestige of two bureaucracies which have different social bases, Comrade Shachtman sees the fissure into which he proposes that we do our share to drive a political lever. Once sufficient forces have been gathered to push on the lever the fissure will be widened, the conflict between the bureaucracies increased, and the working class will then find it easier to pour through the gap and drive to real organizational and political independence on the parliamentary field.

The trouble with this whole theory is that it lays much too great emphasis on a generalization. And more than that, on a generalization which has relatively little significance in the political life of America today.

It is true that the bureaucracies of labor and of the

Democratic Party have different social bases and that hence their ambitions collide. Friction there has been and there will be, and even dog-fights. But a labor party will not be formed in this country on the basis of this contest of ambitions. For the labor bureaucracy to launch out on the open seas of class politics is a much too serious step to be taken on the basis of the thwarted political ambitions of this or that labor leader. The labor leaders will be driven to break their present political alliance only by developments in the class struggle which pit them against the Fair Deal, such as strikes and problems of defense of union rights, lay-offs, unemployment and a general discontent in the ranks of the working class which might take the form of factional developments in the unions, in general disrupting the stability of the bureaucrats' control.

Despite the frictions which exist between the two bureaucracies, they stick together. They are cemented by a common capitalist ideology; by the whole atmosphere of "national unity" which is part of the cold war; by their shared contempt of the political abilities of the working class ("they won't even register or vote"); by their joint stake in the wealth and prestige of American imperialism.

To be sure, these are the same factors which keep the ranks in line. But the shoe begins to pinch the workers long before it makes the bureaucrats uncomfortable. When unemployment and speed-up and continued price increases and long strikes with meager results and the witch-hunt atmosphere in the plants and continued discrimination against Negroes -- when all these begin to build up into a consciousness that things are getting unbearable, the advanced strata of the workers will compel the labor bureaucrats to draw new political conclusions.

The trouble with Comrade Shachtman's proposal (and I am dealing with only one of its troubles in this article) is that he is greatly over-emphasizing a constant source of friction between the bureaucracies and is attempting to base a political tactic on it.

But isn't it possible that the inevitable political separation of the classes in America will start with friction inside the present political alliance of the Fair Dealers with the labor bureaucrats, that is, inside the Democratic Party? Yes, it is "possible." But the experience of the pro-labor party movement in 1948 shows that when disillusionment with capitalist politics takes place in the labor movement it takes the form of tendencies toward independent political organization and not for continued struggle inside the Democratic Party.

That is the situation towards which our policies must be directed. The revolutionists must keep their eyes open for the cracks in the capitalist-labor political coalition

which herald a real struggle, and quickly adopt policies which will serve as levers to widen them. But in our anxiety to get out of the political isolation imposed on us by the social and political situation of the working class in America today we must not delude ourselves into mistaking dog-fights over the bones of political office between bureaucracies for major social struggles. For such a mistake can only lead us into a dog-fight, and that isn't, as they say, our kind of red meat.

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