

# A Program of Action for America

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ONE of the most urgent and most important tasks facing our Party is the framing of a Program of Action.

A new situation confronts us. Complicated and new tasks arise from it. A clear and definite orientation of our work is imperative.

The following main features and factors of the situation compel us to take up immediately the question of drafting a program of action:

1. The general trustification of production and distribution; the unheard-of speed of rationalization of industry.
2. The growing economic depression. Widespread unemployment, which has begun to take on a permanent character and which tends to become "disemployment."
3. The deep, growing crisis in the labor movement.
4. The militant defensive struggles of certain categories of the working class (miners, textile workers, needle trades) against the capitalist offensive.
5. The year of 1928 is an election year. The Communist Party will put forward its presidential and congressional candidates under its own banner, and it should have an election platform which furnishes a program to the working class and focuses the attention of the masses on the Party.
6. The Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, which will convene the first of July, has as one of the most important items on its agenda the program of the Communist International.

The American Party has the duty to face those problems which arise from the present situation, to clarify the questions of a program and a program of action, to stress those immediate demands which will be able to mobilize and organize the working class against the offensive of the bosses, to link them up into a system of transitional and partial demands, to connect them with our Communist principles, with our final goal—in other words, to frame a Program of Action.

### 1. *The Difference between a Program and a Program of Action*

The Party has made several attempts to draft a Program of Action. Usually the presidential and congressional elections served as occasions for tackling this problem. In 1922, 1924, and in 1926 the Workers (Communist) Party of America issued its election platforms. In 1924 the Party drew up besides its election platform a special Program of Action: "*Our Immediate Work.*" All these platforms and programs of action show many shortcomings, uncertainties in the analysis of the situation, and all of them suffer from the fundamental error of confusing the tasks of a basic program with the requirements of a program of action.

### PROGRAM AND PROGRAM OF ACTION

What is the difference between a program and a program of action? The program of the Communist Party is the sum total of all those aims for which the Party as the representative of the working class struggles, expressing the interests of that class. A program is for a whole epoch, for the world historic era of imperialism. A program of action does not give the basic analysis of capitalism and imperialism. It is made only for a certain situation, and it analyzes only certain aspects of that situation. The program of the Communist Party must embrace the whole development of society from capitalism to Communism. It must contain the general outline of the transition from the old society to the new one. A program must hold good for the whole span from the conception of the Party to the conquest of power by the working class. A program of action holds good for only a limited, shorter period.

A program contains our principles and only certain basic immediate demands. A program of action contains only certain demands, certain slogans. A program is our general guide. A program of action guides us only in carrying out certain special actions. A program is permanent. If it is good—Marxian, Leninist, scientific—it is not necessary to abandon it. A program of action is very temporary. If it is good for a certain period, it may not and even cannot be good for another period. It will very often be necessary to abandon it and substitute another program of action.

A program contains our whole analysis of capitalism and imperialism, gives our final aims, outlines the whole transition period, maps out the whole road from the beginning to the end of the Revolution. A program of action has much more modest aims:

1. It gives only the analysis of a given concrete situation.
2. It embraces only a system of transitional and partial demands.
3. It puts forward those slogans which are apt to mobilize the masses immediately.

4. It contains such demands as constitute certain steps forward on the road to the emancipation of the working class from capitalist exploitation.

A program of action sums up the tactical tasks of the Party in a given concrete situation. It is not a program; it is only a platform.

## 2. *A Minimum Program and a Maximum Program*

Shall our Program of Action be a minimum program? The Second International had a minimum program and a maximum program. The minimum program contained such demands as aimed to improve the conditions of the workers within the framework of capitalist society. Its maximum program contained the final goal, the establishment of Socialism. The Social Democrats never linked up, either in their programs or in their actions, the demands of their minimum with the aims of their maximum program. Adapting themselves to the prevailing conditions of capitalism, they maintained the goal of Socialism as some misty dream; while in reality they restricted their whole activity to a struggle for those demands which might bring about some slight improvement in the conditions of the working class but which could not overthrow capitalism.

Our Program of Action must by no means be identical with the minimum program of the Social Democrats. The Third World Congress of the Communist International defined precisely and with unmistakable sharpness the Communist position on this question:

"In this struggle the Communist Parties do not put forward any minimum program which would within the framework of capitalism improve capitalism's tottering structure. The destruction of capitalism is now as before the principal task of the Communists. But in order to fulfill this task the Communist Parties must advance demands which satisfy the urgent claims of the working class. The Communists must carry through these demands by mass struggle, irrespective of whether they are compatible with the existence of the capitalist order of society or not. . . . Instead of the minimum program of the Centrists and reformists, the Communist International proposes the struggle for the practical needs of the proletariat, for a system of demands which in their totality destroy the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat, and state the stages in the struggle of the proletariat for a dictatorship."

Our Program of Action must not be a minimum program in the spirit of the Second International or of the present-day Socialist parties. It must be a revolutionary platform, setting forth a system

of demands regardless of whether or not they are realizable within the framework of capitalism.

In selecting our demands our criteria should only be the following:

1. The interests of the working class.
2. The fitness of the slogans to mobilize the masses.
3. If not each demand, the sum total or system of these demands must constitute a definite step forward toward our revolutionary goal, toward the overthrow of capitalism.

### 3. *The Question of General Demands*

A program of action should not contain only isolated demands—transitional and partial. It is also necessary to have such general slogans, general demands, as tend to link up all these slogans and demands into a system. At present in America the following central or general slogans could fulfill the function of such a linking-up.

1. Class struggle vs. class collaboration. Relentless fight against trustified capital. Active resistance to the effects of rationalization on the workers. Struggle against the offensive of the bosses.
2. Save the trade unions from the onslaught of the bosses and from the treachery of the misleaders of labor.
3. Struggle against imperialist war and war danger.
4. Independent political action of the working class. For a Labor Party.

Why these central slogans? The following basic features of the conditions of our present struggle call for them:

1. The whole labor movement is poisoned with class collaboration.
2. The Socialist Party has dropped the issue of class struggle from its constitution.
3. There is no political mass party of the working class in this country. The workers still adhere to the old capitalist parties. The whole A. F. of L. and the leadership of the Socialist Party are against a Labor Party.
4. The A. F. of L. and the labor aristocracy which dominates the whole labor movement today is sabotaging the fundamental problem of the working class: the organization of the unorganized.
5. The A. F. of L. identifies itself with imperialism and puts forward the theory of the "Monroe Doctrine" of labor. The Socialist Party is an advocate of the League of Nations.

Central, general slogans are necessary. But it would be a mistake to think that it is possible to concentrate the struggle of the working class in the present situation, in the period of imperialism, on one or even on a few central slogans. Situations change so quickly today. Life presents such manifold problems. The aspect of the class struggle varies so constantly that to concentrate only on a few demands would narrow down the whole struggle of the working class.

#### *4. Principles and Immediate Demands*

There are still certain notions in the ranks of our Party against immediate, partial, and transitional demands. Some comrades still think that the setting up of partial demands beclouds the issue of our final goal: the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the establishment of a Communist society. Some people ask: Is the Communist Party the party of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat or the party of partial demands? The question can not be put in that way. The correct Leninist formulation reads: The Communist Party is the party of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and just because it is, it puts forward, in order to mobilize the masses, partial demands which it links up with its revolutionary aims. The difference between the Communists and the reformists is not the question of the putting up or not of partial demands. The real difference is first that the reformists want to substitute partial demands for the revolutionary goal, and second that the reformists do not carry out any sincere struggle even for partial demands.

The big program discussion of the Fourth World Congress of the Communist International settled the relation between our principles and partial demands for the program of the Communist parties. The World Congress laid down the following line on the relation between principles and immediate demands:

1. The general program of the Communist International must give the theoretical basis for all transitional and partial demands.
2. The programs of the national sections of the Comintern must clearly and definitely lay down the necessity of partial demands.
3. The partial demands must be linked up with our general goal.
4. The program must make reservations in regard to the dependence of partial demands on the actual, concrete circumstances of the time and place.
5. In the general program of the Comintern it is necessary to give the basic historic types of the transitional demands of the national sections according to the fundamental differences

in the economic and political structure of the various countries.

6. The Congress condemned decisively the tendency which sees opportunism in the inclusion of transitional demands in the program, just as it condemned all attempts to substitute partial demands for the fundamental revolutionary tasks.

#### DEFECTS IN OUR FORMER PLATFORM

The various programs and platforms of the American Party suffer from the lack of immediate demands. The original program of the Workers Party, which was written in 1921 and revised in 1923, does not contain any major mistakes in regard to basic Communist principles, but it does not include any immediate demands and does not even lay the basis for any immediate demands. The 1924 election platform not only contains opportunistic general demands but even forgets to put up any concrete demands at all. The Program of Action "*Our Immediate Work*," enumerates a whole series of tasks for the Party, such as the election campaign, membership drive, educational work, trade union work, shop nuclei, and unemployment, but it stops at party organizational measures and does not contain any demands for the workers. The only issue on which it puts forward concrete demands in the interest of the working class is the problem of unemployment, but its slogans on unemployment contain major, opportunistic mistakes (such as immediate nationalization of industry without a workers' government, control of production without a revolutionary situation, etc.), and among other things it forgets to mention the slogan of shorter hours.

The 1922 election platform likewise forgets the basic demand of a shorter working day.

These shortcomings of our past programs of action and election platforms show that there are still alive remnants of the old Socialist Labor Party sectarian traditions in our ranks. The biggest obstacle in the progress of our Party is the narrow-minded attitude towards immediate demands, such as was expressed in the whole teaching of Daniel DeLeon. In one of his articles: "*Demands, 'Immediate' and 'Constant'*" he went so far as to write:

"Shorter hours — ten instead of twelve, or eight instead of ten — when really and ultimately the hours will be nearer to three than to eight; higher wages, which means less exploitation, when really and ultimately wageism is to be abolished; a minimum of sanitary ventilation in factories, when really and ultimately the factory is to cease being a hole and is to become a parlor; these and the like are not 'demands'; they are intermediary stepping-stones to be dis-

carded as soon as possible in the onward march. They have no place in the platform.

"The 'demand' is ONE—it is the proclamation of the goal. The so-called 'immediate' demands are legion. The specification of them, or of any of them, is superfluous.

"A political party that sets up 'immediate' demands by so much blurs its 'constant' demand, or goal. The presence of 'immediate' demands in a Socialist platform reveals pure and simple politicianism—corruption or the invitation to corruption."

The presence of immediate demands in a Communist platform is, of course, not "pure and simple politicianism." The lack of immediate demands is pure and simple sectarianism.

#### *5. Immediate Nationalization and Control of Production*

There are certain typical mistakes in the various programs of action and election platforms of our Party. The most important of these mistakes is the attitude towards the problems of nationalization of industry and control of production. Our past platforms many times took a stand which resembled the opportunistic attitude of the Socialists on these issues. The source of these mistakes was confusion as to the function of a program and that of a program of action. The Party in its various platforms, led by the desire to present not only our immediate partial demands but some of the major basic transitional demands leading directly to Socialism, committed almost without fail the same kind of mistakes in its various platforms. The most common type of these mistakes was the putting of demands which could be realized only by a workers' government and after a proletarian revolution, to a capitalist government and within capitalist society. That constitutes a very dangerous mistake, because it is apt to create illusions in the minds of the workers. The most dangerous illusion today is the expectation by the workers that their most important demands can be realized from the capitalist government and within the framework of capitalist society. The fundamental illusion of the American working class in any case is the faith in the miraculous power of the capitalist government and the unlimited possibilities for the working class within the present bourgeois society.

Almost all the platforms of the Workers Party contain these mistakes. The election platform of 1924 calls for the immediate nationalization of all industries and for industrial democracy:

"The Workers Party declares itself in favor of the immediate nationalization of all large-scale industries, such as railroads, mines,

super-power plants, and means of communication and transportation, and for the organization of the workers in these industries for participation in the management and direction of those industries nationalized, thus developing industrial democracy, until industry comes under the control of those who produce the wealth of the nation, subject only to such general control as will protect the interests of the producers as a whole."

The Program of Action of 1924 "*Our Immediate Work*", again sets up as "political" demands in connection with unemployment the following points:

"Government operation of non-operating industries and shops. Nationalization of mines, railroads, and public utilities."

The same Program of Action demands on the "industrial" field:

"Establishment of control committees of workers to regulate production and investigate accounts."

The 1926 Program of Action of the Party for the congressional elections repeats the same mistake:

"The workers and farmers must fight for the immediate nationalization of all large-scale industries, including the railroads and super-power projects, and the establishment of the participation of the workers in the management and workers' control. These industries must be operated for service and not for profit."

As the above quotations show, three mistakes repeat themselves very closely linked up in the history of all programs of action of our Party:

1. Immediate nationalization of all industries.
2. Industrial democracy.
3. Control of production.

All three demands were put forward in the various programs of action to the capitalist government and within capitalist society. These fundamental mistakes in our programs of action must be corrected in the next Program of Action of the Workers (Communist) Party, which will serve as the election platform of the Party in the 1928 presidential and congressional elections.

The nationalization of all industries is the first basic step towards Socialism. But it cannot be realized except by a workers' government. A workers' government cannot be established without a proletarian revolution. A workers' government is an empty phrase without the destruction of the State apparatus of the bourgeoisie,



without the building up of the State apparatus of the working class in the form of Soviets. To call for the nationalization of all industries without linking up this demand with the slogan of a workers' government and the Soviets is mere opportunism. It helps to foster the illusion that certain steps towards the establishment of Socialism can be taken within capitalist society and without a proletarian revolution, without the smashing of the capitalist State, without the establishment of proletarian Soviets.

A capitalist government will never nationalize *all* industries, but there is always the possibility that the capitalist State will take under its control some sections of industry, such as mines or railroads. The nationalization of any industry in the hands of an imperialist government is not in the interests of the working class. Just the opposite. It strengthens immensely trustified capitalism against the struggles of the workers. That is true in general, but it is much more true in America, where trusts are already almighty, the bulk of the workers unorganized, and the organized section of the working class permeated with the ideology of class collaboration and split up into innumerable craft unions.

The slogan for participation of the workers in the management of industry, "*thus developing industrial democracy*," is clearly wrong and opportunistic. Participation by the workers in the management of industry under a capitalist regime is equivalent to sharing the responsibility for capitalist exploitation, for the speed-up, and for the worst methods of forced capitalist rationalization. Any illusion as to the possibility of establishing industrial democracy under capitalism is a dangerous, utopian conception. The slogan for democratization of the trusts leads to class-collaboration, compulsory arbitration, eliminates struggles for higher wages and shorter hours. Any slogan for industrial democracy under capitalism must lead to the enslavement of the workers to "their" bosses, and is equivalent to erecting a new powerful prop for the capitalist dictatorship. Industrial democracy cannot be developed "*until industry comes under the control of those who produce the wealth*." It can be developed only when industry is already under the control of the working class.

Control of production by the workers under capitalist conditions is nonsensical and opportunistic. The workers cannot control capitalist industry. Workers' control can be established only after the expropriation of the industries and after the nationalization of the means of production. Control of production is a dangerously opportunistic slogan in the present situation. It is a powerful revolutionary slogan in a revolutionary situation and *only* in a

revolutionary situation, in connection with the slogans of nationalization and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Nationalization of all industries is a mighty revolutionary measure only if it is carried out by a workers' government. Control of production by the workers can not be realized if it is not linked up with nationalization. Control of production under capitalist conditions would give the co-operation of the working class for a better, more orderly, more profit-bringing management of industry. Control of production is one of the most powerful revolutionary measures in a revolutionary situation, after the workers' government is established, after the workers' government has expropriated the capitalists and nationalized the industries in the hands of the proletarian State. These three slogans—Nationalization, Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and Control of Production—are inseparable, must be linked together in our propaganda, and must not appear as independent demands.

How dangerous the slogans for immediate nationalization and control of production under capitalist conditions are is best shown by the fact that the advancing of such demands brings us into the most unpleasant opportunistic neighborhood of the Socialist Party. The national platform of the Socialist Party for 1926 says:

"By intelligent use of the ballot, aided if need be by industrial action, all class divisions and class rule can be abolished; the socially usable industrial wealth can be redeemed from the control of private interests and title and control transferred to the people to be administered for the common good."

The ideal of the Socialist Party is the nationalization of industry as it is realized already by various capitalist governments. The 1926 platform of the Socialist Party states:

"We favor immediate development and operation by government of the water-power now going to waste. The harnessing of the Canadian side of Niagara Falls by the Ontario government, and consequent furnishing of electric power at a fraction of the price paid in this country, is evidence of what public ownership can do. . .

"We favor nationalization of railways under an administrative board, representative of railway employees and the public. The Canadian government has successfully taken over the Canadian Northern, Grand Trunk and Grand Trunk Pacific Lines, after their financial collapse under private ownership."

The true nature of the slogans of nationalization and control by production under capitalist conditions is shown by these Socialist Party demands. It must be a very remarkable brand of Socialism which can be realized by such an out-and-out capitalist government as the Canadian Government of His British Majesty.

Today, in the era of imperialism, it is necessary to avoid the use of such demands as would increase the power of the bourgeois State apparatus. The whole development of monopoly and finance capital goes in the direction of a complete merger of trusts and State. Lenin had already analyzed that process which is now going on at a more speedy tempo in many countries, but in no country with such an increased speed as in the United States of America. There is no country for which it would be more correct to say what Bukharin said about these slogans in his report to the Fifteenth Party Convention of the Communist Party of Soviet Russia:

"Neither nationalization for the capitalist countries, nor municipalization, nor the transfer [of industries] from the hands of private capital to the hands of the State, nor the slogan of workers' control, nor the whole complex of such State capitalistic slogans is acceptable from the point of view of the Comintern. This was the position on this question of the Third Congress of the Comintern, which was conducted under the direct leadership of Lenin."

A negative attitude towards these slogans does not mean, of course, that our Party should take a negative attitude towards social legislation and social insurance or towards the demands for public works as an immediate relief for the unemployed workers. It is necessary, however, to demand guarantees and protection in the interests of the workers. Social insurance should be maintained at the expense of the employers and the State, but it should be administered wholly by the working class. Public works should be conducted strictly under union conditions, hours, and wages, and with all guarantees for labor protection.

#### 6. Some Other Mistakes

The next Program of Action of our Party must also avoid a whole series of other mistakes which were committed in previous platforms. These mistakes embrace sins of omission and commission. The 1926 platform demanded "*the immediate reduction of the army and navy.*" In other words, it fostered the illusion in the minds of the workers that a smaller army and navy would be less dangerous from the point of view of the inner class struggle or the imperialist war danger. The correct slogan would have been: *Militia of all producers.* The same mistake is repeated in the United States section of the program of the All-America Anti-Imperialist League, which demands: "*The reduction of the United States army and navy.*" The Party platforms of 1922 and 1924 completely ignore the problems of the army and navy.

The 1926 Program of Action demanded the "*downward revision of the tariff on the necessities used by the workers and farmers*" instead of demanding the complete abolition of the tariff. The same platform gave its endorsement, though qualified, to the McNary-Haugen Bill, which is one of the most dangerous and utopian attempts advanced by capitalists as an alleged "salvation" and quack remedy for the farmers.

The Program of the Anti-Imperialist League, in which Communists participate, issued the slogan of "*internationalization of the Panama Canal and Canal Zone*." The realization of this demand would mean an agreement between certain Latin-American countries, on the one hand, and the United States of America and Great Britain, and maybe some other imperialist powers, on the other hand. In any such agreement the imperialist powers would have the upper hand. Such a slogan resembles very dangerously the slogan of the Socialist Party in its 1928 election platform for internationalization and democratization of the League of Nations.

The 1922 platform of our Party "*forgot*" to put forward the demand for the complete independence of the American colonies, and restricted itself to the demand for the withdrawal of troops and the end of military dictatorship. Several of the later programs of action of the Party omitted the demand for the completely unrestricted freedom of immigration. The questions of social legislation, the demands for the Negroes, and the problems of prohibition, education, and housing did not play a sufficiently important role in the past programs of action of our Party.

More careful consideration of all demands and theoretical clarity in regard to the problems of our Program of Action are an imperative necessity. Cleanliness in theory is the prerequisite for cleanliness in practice. The example of the Socialist Party, with its fundamentally opportunistic mistakes in all its programs of action, should serve as a warning. The national platform of the Socialist Party for 1926 took up the question of the four million unemployed, not because of the untold suffering of the workers but because it meant a "*waste of man power*." The same platform is skeptical about the present prohibition enforcement because "*further persistence in this tragic farce threatens a complete break-down of law and order*." The platform of the Socialist Party for 1928 does not demand the unrestricted freedom of immigration and the repeal of the infamous immigration laws, but it calls only for the "*modification of the immigration laws to permit the re-uniting of families*." The same platform refuses to recognize the right of the

American colonies for complete independence, and calls only for "autonomy." The sole criticism the Socialist Party has to offer in regard to the present capitalist state in this country is the remark that the Constitution has become obsolete and needs overhauling; therefore, it demands "*a modernized Constitution.*"

#### 7. *An Outline for a Program of Action*

A Program of Action in the present situation in connection with the 1928 elections should be called "*THE PLATFORM OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE*" and should deal with the following subjects: (1) An analysis of the basic features of the present situation; thorough-going criticism of the Republican and the Democratic Parties as well as of the Progressives, the Socialist Party and the A. F. of L. Its key-note should be: *Class struggle vs. class collaboration*; (2) unemployment; (3) the offensive of the bosses; (4) the historic struggle of the miners; (5) imperialist war and war danger; (6) the American colonies; (7) defense of the Soviet Union; (8) role of the Government-strike-breaker; (9) exposure of capitalist democracy; (10) the Labor Party; (11) social legislation; (12) taxation; (13) demands of the farmers; (14) demands of the Negroes; (15) demands of the women; (16) demands of the foreign-born; (17) demands of the youth and children; (18) education; (19) prohibition; (20) housing; (21) the role of the Communist Party and the revolutionary struggle for our final goal: The overthrow of capitalism; Workers' and Farmers' Government; Soviets; expropriation of the capitalists; nationalization of industries; workers' control; Communist society.

