

It is Altman who provides the cement that keeps this crew together, and Altman who maps out its strategy. Around himself he has assembled all the dregs of Local New York: left-over Old Guardists; Stalinists open and disguised; pacifists of fifty-seven varieties; the stalwarts of the L. I. B.; People's Fronters; petty trade union bureaucrats; all the "grave-yard" socialists, who scarcely know the address of party headquarters. He has whipped them into a group under his slogan: Drive out the Left wing.

#### Altman's Wrecking of N. Y.

Altman has had time and experience to prepare himself for his campaign. For a year he has systematically run Local New York into the ground. Not a single independent Party campaign; three or four mass meetings in all that time under Local New York auspices. Exclusion of all revolutionary Left wingers from all responsible posts and committees. Strangling of Party activities in Stalinist "united

fronts", from the North American Committee to the American League. Sabotage of independent socialist work in the trade unions, with pro-Stalinist Altmanites and pro-Stalinist policies shoved down the throats of the Leagues. Sabotage of the work of the American Committee for the Defense of Trotsky; no Local New York mass meeting on the Trials; no membership meeting on the Trials. No vote ever taken at a membership meeting. Elimination of the City Convention, in defiance of the sentiment of the active membership and the explicit provisions of the City Constitution. Constant pressure against the Call to make it revert to its character under the editorship of the Altmanite, Levenstein. Systematic, day by day, provocation of Left wingers, whenever they open their mouths, whether in public or inside of the Party. Flooding of the Labor Committee, when some of its decisions displeased him. Driving full-speed toward support of La Guardia.

Now, as his campaign nears its

climax, Altman's tempo increases, and the bureaucratic blows fall fast. By a combination of provocateur and policeman tactics, he breaks up the membership meeting of June 4th, in order to prevent discussion on Spain. He passes a ruling that branches cannot instruct delegates to the City Central Committee without a week's previous notification. He rules that it is a breach of discipline for branches to recall City Central delegates except under charges. He gerrymanders the membership allocations. He rules that a branch protesting any ruling of the City Executive is subject to the lifting of its charter. He turns down applications for Party membership from all those suspected of sympathy to revolutionary ideas. He prefers charges against left wingers on every conceivable ground. And, on July 6th, his Central Committee began the expulsion and suspension of Left wingers from the Party.

In Altman, the Right wing finds its fitting leader.

#### Thomas for La Guardia

Every day, the implications of Thomas's course become clearer. At the July 12th meeting of the New York City Central Committee on the New York City Election Campaign, it was Thomas who was chief spokesman for the Altman resolution. Thomas, who has so often written and spoken about "genuine" and "bona-fide" Labor Parties, who has, in words, been so critical about Stalinists and liberals for their "opportunists" approaches to the Labor Party question, showed in his remarks that the resolution would mean support of La Guardia. In the voice of a "tired radical", he complained that he never again wished to go through another campaign like that of 1936, where "everyone was against us", and the Socialist Party isolated. Still more revealing is another recent incident: A short while ago, as part of the general drive in Spain against revolutionists, several Americans were arrested by the Government in Barcelona. These included three of our own party comrades—Harry Milton, Charles and Lois Orr (the latter two subsequently released), and Hugo Oehler, secretary of the Revolutionary Workers League, and for many years a well known militant in the labor movement of this country. Thomas—who for so many years has capitalized on his "defense of civil liber-

ties"—has made no public utterance on the arrest of our three comrades; has declined to participate in a public committee or speak at a public meeting in their defense; and was influential in the decision of the Workers' Defense League not to intervene. His one specific statement appeared in his column, where he used the arrests to make a vicious thrust at Oehler. Civil liberties, it seems, are all very well in normal times; but these comrades were on the wrong side of the barricades—the side of the revolutionary workers—during the Barcelona events.

Thomas still retains a few illusions. He has hoped, and still seems to hope, that it is possible to expel a number of the "bad", "factional-minded" adherents of the revolutionary tendency, and to retain the good "constructive" mass workers. Thomas can be pardoned his mistake: he has had no opportunity in his experience of learning the meaning of revolutionary solidarity. Prior to the Special Session of the N. E. C., he inclined to believe that the Party crisis could be solved by instituting a "loyalty oath" demanding fealty to the Second International, and thus weeding out the "die-hard" revolutionists. His colleagues explained to him the awkwardness of such a proposal coming at that time.

Let no mistakes be made about Thomas. Thomas no longer occupies the "independent" position which he so long tried jealously to guard. He has given up his independence. He is not an ally of the Right wing; he is now an integral part of the Right wing, and he must act accordingly. He has made his choice; and, through his decision, he has signed his own political death warrant.

## 5. - The Role of Norman Thomas

Norman Thomas has, for many years, been the outstanding figure of the Socialist Party. As has often been the case with outstanding figures Thomas has for a long time believed that his position could enable him to rise above the Party and its conflicting tendencies, much as the State sometimes aspires to rise above the warring classes. Unfortunately, this is not possible, no matter how outstanding the figure may be. This Thomas should have learned from his experiences in the struggle with the Old Guard. Then, too, he tried to rise above the conflict, tried up to the last moment, at the Chicago Convention, and even thereafter tried to minimize and delay the consummation of the conflict in the split. In the end, with sorrow and with indignation, he nevertheless had to choose.

In the past few months, also, Thomas had to choose. It is a painful thing to have to choose, when either alternative of the choice really costs something, particularly when you are one who considers himself above the petty squabbles of ordinary mortals. It is disturbing to one's disposition; and somehow seems to break through the shell of the grand generalities—"socialism in our time", "defense of civil liberties", "unity against war and fascism", "elementary decency", and the rest—which are so pleasant and often so convincing to utter, and which commit oneself to so conveniently little.

#### Thomas with Right wing

We must give Thomas this credit, however: he has chosen. After some delay, some hesitation, some effort to eliminate the necessity for making a choice, after days when—as immediately following the November Elections—he talked at length about quitting the Party and the movement, Thomas made up his mind, and made it up firmly. He decided to join forces with the Right wing; and he made this decision just preceding the Chicago Convention. The decision was not accidental, but it is not necessary here to trace its political genesis and development.

Thomas is a determined man, and once having decided, he acted in a determined fashion. At every crucial point, he dominated the Chicago Convention. Under his whip, the alleged Clarity majority went down like wheat before the storm. The real and telling blows against the Left were struck by Thomas. And in fighting against the Left, Thomas, like all others of his kind, finds no difficulty in forgetting

his pacifism and his love of democracy and "civil liberties". Anything goes in a fight against the Left. Thomas is no legalist when it comes to opposing revolutionary Marxism. On the question of the suppression of the internal organs—that outrageous violation of genuine party democracy, on the exclusion of members of the Appeal tendency from the N. E. C., Thomas threw down his gauntlet. When resistance developed, he did not hesitate to deliver his cheap ultimatum: do it my way, or I refuse the leadership of the Party.

Following the Convention, Thomas traveled in Europe for two months. During this time, however, he kept his stand unmistakably clear to the Party membership by appointing Lewis as his alternate at the Philadelphia N. E. C. meeting. There was some speculation in certain sections of the Party about where he would stand upon his return. Such speculation was wasted. Immediately upon his arrival back in this country, he held a series of conferences with representatives of the Right wing. He gave them his guarantee that he would go down the line in the drive against the Left wing. All doubts were set at rest.

#### The Thomas Line

As in other cases, Thomas' attitude toward the internal situation in the Party could just as easily be deduced from his point of view on the key political questions. His column—which like all his public utterances and writings he conducts without the slightest regard for Party discipline or legality—during the weeks since his return has made an interesting study. He assigned responsibility for the Barcelona events to the POUM and the Anarchists. His criticism of the Soviet persecutions has been consistently from the right, using them as a text from which to attack the whole conception of a workers' state (and, in passing, suggesting at least the partial guilt of Stalin's victims). Openly in his column he attacks not merely the Fourth International, but the members of the Party who believe in the Fourth International.

These things are not out of keeping with Thomas' traditional politics. It is important to observe, however, that since his solid incorporation into the Right wing, Thomas' politics have actually suffered a retrogression—a natural and usual result of his present lineup. For example: Thomas, in his column, gave the lead for what is by now, apparently, "Party policy"—the de-

mand that the neutrality embargo be applied by the U. S. Government to Germany and Italy. This demand is, in political fundamentals, identical with the reformist-Stalinist position on "sanctions" (and is of course supported by reformists and Stalinists); and is diametrically opposed to the Marxist position on war and the War Resolution of the Party. In the issues of July 10th and 17th, the column has contained a series of downright reactionary comments on the C.

The so-called Clarity group allegedly constituted a majority at the Chicago Convention. It took formal responsibility for the majority on the new N. E. C. In a certain sense this is true; but what that truth means can be understood only by realizing that Clarity is not in actuality a genuine political tendency. Clarity has no program, either in general or with reference to concrete conditions as they arise in the life of the Party; and having no program, it cannot consolidate a genuine political grouping. Clarity is a half-way house; a temporary resting spot for those whose political ideas are still confused, who have not yet made up their minds where they stand and in what direction they propose to go (which, in passing, is why Thomas appeared more or less an ally of Clarity until he definitely chose the Right wing). Clarity is based on confusion, on words out of joint with actions, on brave motions and feeble deeds, on endless "maneuvers", on temporizing, hesitation, delay. Clarity spends its time building houses of cards, to watch them blown over by a puff from Left or Right. Clarity holds endless caucus meetings which can never decide anything; writes documents and make speeches that have no relation to reality, and complains bitterly at reality's rudeness in contradicting its documents and speeches; makes elaborate plans which can never be lifted from the paper on which they are written. In all of these features, Clarity is a classic example of a centrist tendency.

As a centrist tendency, Clarity tries to mediate between the "extremes" in the Party, to hold the balance between Right and Left. For this reason, Clarity is always for "peace" and "unity" and "truce" and "putting off decisions". In actuality, of course, such politics is nothing but unscrupulous and hypocritical double-dealing and horse-trading.

## 6. - The Clarity Group

In practice, it results in an unending series of miserable capitulations to the Right and treacherous blows to the Left.

#### Evolution of Clarity Group

The evolution of every such centrist grouping is the same. While political conflicts are developing, and before lines are drawn with complete clarity, such groupings show signs of strength and growth, and even may appear for a while as the "majority". Then, as the conflict matures, the ground is cut away from the middle, and only two roads are left. The centrist grouping is pressed to the wall. It has to jump. Normally, the bulk of the leadership of the centrist grouping enters a bloc with the Right (not openly or honestly, of course, but with suitable "formulas"); while the active and militant ranks of the centrist grouping take their proper stand with the Left (while they were formerly prevented from doing only by the ambiguous and two-faced politics of the centrist leaders), and the passive and reactionary sections of the centrist ranks go over to their natural home in the Right. The centrist tendency, as an independent grouping, is blown to pieces; and remains, if at all, only as a pitiful clique.

Clarity reached its point of maximum surface development at the Chicago Convention, where it claimed an outright majority. Even then, however, underneath that surface the inner decay was well advanced, and showed itself in a dozen instances. The chief symptom was the fact that whenever Thomas cracked his whip, the Clarity "majority" crumbled without a shadow of resistance. Nevertheless, Clarity took over its "majority" on the N. E. C. From then on, the disintegration of Clarity proceeded with cumulative speed. The general process outlined above has been taking place in condensed form.

It was impossible from the out-

set for the "Clarity N. E. C." to function. The only N. E. C. which could have functioned would have been one which was really determined to develop the Party firmly into a revolutionary organization. This would have meant prominently an N. E. C. which would have laid down the law to the disloyal and anti-revolutionary Right wing, whose sole aim is to prevent the revolutionary development. But a Clarity N. E. C., by the nature of centrist politics, is not that kind of N. E. C.

#### Impotence of N. E. C.

The character of the N. E. C. became at once obvious in the fact that it could not run the Party. It took the N. E. C. more than three months even to publish the Convention proceeding! Only one issue of the American Socialist Monthly has appeared to this day, and not a single issue of the discussion organ voted by the Convention—and subsequently scuttled by the N. E. C. itself. Two issues of the Call have been cut, to eight pages; and the decision to move the Call to Chicago has of course never been carried out. The Party "registration", scheduled for immediately after the Convention, is only now getting haltingly under way. No pamphlets have been published. Not a single organized campaign has been conducted. Where the Party has been active, this has been due solely to local initiative. All of these symptoms are due, not to "sabotage" on the part of either Right or Left (as Clarity would like to pretend in order to excuse its own responsibility), but to the fact that the N. E. C. has provided no firm leadership; and, because of its political nature, could not.

The Right wing, however, had no intention of waiting around for Clarity and the Clarity N. E. C. to make up their minds. They went ahead at once with their plans to smash the Party and