

# Convention Problems of the Socialist Workers Party Under Discussion

## For a New Orientation in the Party's Methods --- A Program of Action

Statement by Ohio-Michigan District Committee

The collapse of the New Deal reform program signifies the incapacity of the capitalist system to solve the social crisis within the present "democratic" order and by internal measures alone.

The ruling class in America is confronted with two alternatives: either extending at its own expense genuinely ameliorative concessions to the masses; or shackling them to an open regime of repression and military adventures. Having abandoned even the pretence of the former with the break-down of the New Deal, the ruling class drives with all haste toward the latter, that is, Imperialist War and Fascism.

### Waiting for Events

For the revolutionary socialists, impeded by the monumental betrayals of the Second and Third Internationals and the resultant bewilderment of the masses, events seem too swift for our capacity to keep pace with them. Observing streamlined reaction sweep down the tracks, a tendency arises to despair of over-passing it. This expresses itself in the phrase, "We must wait for a favorable turn of events!"—a weak apology for sterile passivity.

It is precisely this disbelief in the capacity of the proletariat to fulfill its historic destiny which characterizes those we scorn most, the Stalinists, Social-Democrats, liberals and tired radicals. Our party can justify its existence only by an indomitable program of action which can inspire the masses to confidence in their own power and guide them on the road to social revolution.

The success of this bold orientation rests, however, on a clear understanding of the inadequacy of our present methods alone to keep pace with our tasks. We too must streamline our engine.

### Trying Panaceas

The sense of immediacy and desperation among broad strata of the masses underscores heavily the factor of time in the present epoch. A growing section, including the unemployed and the declassed petty-bourgeoisie, seeks desperately for a quick, decisive end to their misery. Increasingly disillusioned with the traditional nostrums of reform, they experiment with such panaceas as the Townsend movement, the Epic Plan and technocracy. They are ready to try anything in hopes of a "miracle" cure. This psychology is a ripening agent for American fascism, already displaying alarming growth in the resurgence of the Coughlinites with a genuinely fascist program.

But it would be fatal for us to conclude superficially that these masses are "natural" material for fascism. It is largely the "radical" aspects of the fascist program and the promise of bold action which will attract disillusioned masses to that banner, unless our party intervenes with a comprehensible and bold program of working-class action against capitalism that will turn them on the road to the social revolution.

### False Attitudes

To successfully pose our alternative before the masses, we must first cleanse our ranks of certain false attitudes. For instance, we must root out any misconceptions about "going underground" in view of the war danger. Some, seeing only the defeats and the dizzy pace of events, wish to discontinue further open party work and to plunge forthwith "underground"—that is, to bury the party. They conceive of "underground" activity solely in terms of fugitive criminals, concealing identity, hiding behind drawn shades, shunning all human contact. Quite the contrary! The safeguard of our party in war-time from the repressive state apparatus is possible only to the extent that our

party takes on the protective coloration of the masses.

This requires of our party, in this period especially, an energetic and open approach to the masses. For only to the degree that our influence grows roots in the masses will we be able to withstand the repressions of the early war period.

A second attitude, paralyzing in its effects on the party, is that which says, "In this period of reaction, the masses are unapproachable. We must continue to nurse our slender cadres." This reflects a completely false estimate of the actually high receptivity of the masses. The American labor movement is largely intact and has suffered no real defeats. Its militancy is unimpaired, as shown by the recent Briggs strike and the victorious struggle of the coal miners.

### Routine Inadequate

Today, no less than a year ago when the party adopted the Transitional program, we must find a bridge to the masses, in the sense that we still must implement and carry out this program in action. The present routine of the party, its "normal" life, is inadequate to provide the needed acceleration. In terms of what needs to be done, the traditional routine by itself leads to a bogging down of the party. Inertia and discouragement result. Our finances suffer, the press has a crisis, the meetings thin out.

We can no longer rely solely upon the slow processes of union penetration, on sporadic defensive demonstrations against the fascists, on the customary technics and campaigns of the past. All these are essential, to be sure. But in themselves they fail to suffice. The new orientation must be the gearing of the party to a program of action on a national scale, focussed squarely upon the masses, with national direction which can illuminate the ordinary tasks and inspire and direct every member.

### For a Positive Approach

To fulfill such a program, we must comprehend also certain past flaws in our propaganda technique. For one thing, we must modify our too frequently negative approach. We must give the workers something positive, something to fight for. Too often we have appeared to the workers simply to be "agin" everything. After ten years of acute economic crisis, the average worker and unemployed person wants not so much a confirmation of his misery as a road out. Education through a program of positive action is on the order of the day.

Our propaganda technique also suffers from the tendency to attempt to stuff the workers with everything at once. It is a remnant of other days when giving the "principled position of the party" was a task of the propaganda. Effective propaganda for mass appeal must consist rather of the endless repetition, but with infinite variety, of two or three simple and comprehensible themes. Nor are these arbitrarily posed, but instead project themselves as a direct response to the existent psychological moods and material aspirations of the masses.

To the unemployed, nothing is so important as jobs. To the employed, nothing matters so much as shorter hours, higher income and job security. No emotion is so persistent as the fear of war, expressed in the continued strong sentiment for "isolationism".

### Selective Demands

Our party must therefore concentrate its propaganda and activities in a fashion calculated to coincide directly with these very concrete moods and aspirations. Our Transitional program must not remain in the realm of abstract slogans, something to drag along by the tail as a concession to the "backwardness" of the masses. Instead, we must select those three or four concrete demands of immediate appeal from our Transitional program which must become the living heart of our program of action.

For the unemployed, this means an aggressive fight for the 20 billion dollar public works and housing program. For the employed, it means a fight for the 30 hour week—\$30 per week minimum wage plan. For the masses in general, it means a fight against the war danger in terms of the issues that are present underground, such as the popular referendum

on war and the defense of civil liberties.

### Class Struggle

In other words, we organize the fight against imperialism and fascism not on some remote "theoretical" plane, but by directly inciting the intensification of the class struggle and by compelling the pro-war forces, fascists and "isolationists" to expose their real roles in openly aligning themselves against the masses on concrete issues. A worker who cannot immediately comprehend the full implications of fascism, nevertheless will fight the fascists as enemies who oppose the fulfillment of his specific, if limited, aspirations.

This conception is particularly vital to the realization of that paramount slogan of our party, "Build the Workers Defense Guards". So long as many workers believe the fascists to be primarily concerned with "reds" and "Jews", they fail to understand the need for organized defense for themselves. Only as workers attack, will they appreciate the need for defense against fascist reprisals.

### Legislative Campaign

Our largely defensive skirmishes with the fascists, our generalized and theoretical anti-war campaign, our slow union penetration must now be supplemented by a concentrated party campaign of attack on a positive program. For this, we propose what may be termed a legislative campaign.

Focusing agitation and actions around three main issues directly geared to the moods of the masses, the party should now undertake an intensive drive directly upon the governmental agencies for the adoption of a three-point program, concretized into well-drafted bills, including the 20 billion dollar public works and the 30 hour-\$30 per week plans, and the popular referendum on war.

This type of activity is particularly adapted to the present political understanding of the workers who comprehend political battles in terms of legislative campaigns about popular bills. The Townsend movement is a striking demonstration of

the effectiveness of this type of activity. Our campaign, however, would be based on class-struggle methods.

**The Way To Do It**  
The manner in which such a legislative campaign might be conducted is as follows:

1. Three well-formulated bills shall be immediately drafted covering the three central points of our program.

2. The party shall then commence an intensive agitation campaign, locally and nationally, to popularize these bills, illuminating and describing them from every angle.

3. Every possible medium of propaganda, including the radio, must be utilized for this campaign. Three popular pamphlets, explaining each bill, must be issued. In addition, all local branches are to center their activities and propaganda around this campaign.

4. After a sufficient groundwork of popularization has been laid, the party shall then initiate a campaign of direct action upon city councils, county commissions and state legislatures for endorsement of these bills. Picket-lines, mass delegations and demonstrations shall be organized in the localities, all pointing toward a possible demonstration or mass delegation to Washington. As a supplement, but not substitute, for this action campaign, petition, post-card, and placard and sticker-posting sub-campaigns should be utilized. Wherever possible, our branches should engage in the local election campaigns on this program and a parallel one on local issues.

5. Coincident with the direct party actions, we shall attempt to secure all possible official trade-union support and actions on any or all of these bills.

### Members Will React

It will be argued that this program is beyond the material resources of the party. However, the idea that the initiation of such activity is dependent on the present state of the treasury is false. Rather, the finances of the party are dependent upon the initiation of such activity as a means of inspiring our members and sympathizers and, above all, of gaining the active support of wider strata of workers.

The ranks of the party, when moved by some inspiring immediate objective, have not been backward in fulfilling the material requirements of the

party. On the contrary, given the specific incentives, as the Twice-a-Week Appeal and International Aid campaigns demonstrated, our party has shown remarkable capacities for sacrifice and endeavor.

### Overhauling Leadership

To save the Twice-a-Week Appeal and realize a daily paper, to stabilize the finances of the party, what is needed precisely is a course of action which will lift the entire party out of the rut and routine. It must be a program which can be conducted independently of the limitations and uncertainties of the trade union movement, as a direct approach to the masses on the one hand, and on the other as a means of developing from the outside, as well as within, a bond of sympathy between us and the union ranks.

The successful conduct of this campaign at once implies the overhauling of the entire party apparatus in accordance with maximum efficiency and results. This must start with the national leadership and carry through to the smallest branch.

The national leadership is required to give to the lower ranks of the party the fullest and most explicit directives. In addition, the leadership must now become in the eyes of the masses the personification in action of our party and program. Hitherto, our national leaders have been unknown to the masses, indeed, are scarcely known to many of our members. While we do not subscribe to the "Leader" principle, we must recognize that ideas and movement are personified in the masses in the actions and personalities of men.

### Fresh Blood

Our leadership must begin to penetrate the hinterlands, to enter directly into the activities of the party everywhere in a personal sense. Speaking tours, radio addresses, and above all personal participation in the key actions and struggles which our program will invoke are an imperative obligation upon the national leadership.

Into this leadership, additional fresh blood must be infused as well, tested comrades who have the capacity, initiative and enthusiasm to reinvigorate the leadership, provide new ideas and creative stimulus and assume some of the burdens of technical responsibility which have been a dead-weight upon

our leadership in the past.

From the ranks, the party must now exact the highest discipline, responsibility and activity. We cannot tolerate laxness in dues payments, neglect of assignments, tardiness and absence, disorderly conduct of party functions and affairs. Above all, we cannot tolerate further the notion of first and second-class citizenship, those who can do the work and take the risks, and those who exempt themselves, for innumerable personal reasons, from "sticking their necks out". Comrades of the latter stripe must be made to understand that a revolutionary Marxist party is no Sunday school. Whoever joins us does so with full knowledge of the responsibilities and risks involved. We are determined to be a Party of Action. Whoever shuns such action signifies his desire to be quit of the party.

### Organizational Needs

The organizational implementation of this program, among other things, requires the following:

1. An immediate special joint organizational and press fund must be raised. This fund is merely for the initiation of the three-point campaign of action, which once started should be a means in itself for further finances. This fund should be used particularly to maintain an increased staff of full-time field-workers and organizers.

2. A national Propaganda and Publicity Department, working under the immediate supervision of the political center, should be established. This department should be composed of several comrades fully qualified by technical training as well as political experience.

In conclusion, we wish to make clear that in submitting these proposals we do so with no intent of offering some special magic key to the masses, but rather in the sense of suggesting some specific implementation to the conclusions arrived at in the proposed Political Resolution. We are concerned with the projection of an attitude within the party which will strip it of any inertia, root out inefficiency and smugness, destroy any lingering sectarianism or defeatism, thrust it into the living struggles of the masses and make our movement a veritable crusade for the liberation of the proletariat.

## On Translating the Party Program Into Practice

Submitted by a group of Los Angeles comrades: Steve Roberts, Paula Aragon, Minna Everett, Edith Mann, Max Heiner.

(Continued from last issue)

The Transitional Program was thoroughly discussed and passed by the party. To date it has suffered the fate of all other resolutions and programs of the party. The leadership failed to send directives or to initiate discussions in the various sections of the party which would have led to ways and means of applying the program.

We would like to give life to one of the most important points in the Transitional Program, that of "Expropriating the 60 Families", and suggest the following:

1. Agitation for the introduction of a bill in Congress calling for public ownership of the basic industries.

2. Demand that the government instead of pouring funds into the bankrupt railroads and maritime industry, for the profits of those in control, immediately foreclose on the loans and take these over subject to trade union control.

3. Campaign in the trade unions utilizing our slogans: "The Sliding Scale of Wages and Hours", "Opening of the Idle Factories", "Divulgence of Business Secrets and Records" to convince workers of necessity of Points 1 and 2.

It is not our intention in this document to analyze every phase of the party's work. The picture in the following fields: unemployment, Labor Party, national minorities, education, etc., is woeful and shows the same lamentable lacks. We have selected the above three major points of War, Trade Union Work, and Transitional Program, to illustrate our premise—the leadership is in the main responsible for the discrepancy between program and practice.

### Explanation

It is impossible to conclude that the leadership of our party fails to understand that its task is to initiate and direct the work of the party.

What, then, is the reason for the failure of the leadership to gear the party to its tasks—and failure to carry out the serious resolutions and program? It hasn't done so because it doesn't consider this the primary necessity; it has no faith in our ability to attract the workers of this country to its banner and lead them to victory. It has an orientation of its own and in that direction its attention is concentrated—its main hope is in SPLITTING THE COMMUNIST PARTY.

For ten years its major emphasis has been on anti-Stalinist propaganda. It has always found time, money, to initiate and direct activity when at stake was an issue with the C.P. When the C.I.O. was in full swing it published at least half-a-dozen pamphlets on the Moscow Trials without putting

out even one pamphlet on the trade union question. Such a perspective has led us up a blind alley. World shaking events, the defeats of the proletariat in Germany, Spain and other countries, the Moscow Trials, and countless articles and books (like Gide's), have caused thousands of workers to break with the C. P. But instead of coming to us the overwhelming majority became hopelessly disillusioned with the radical movement. We did not attract them because they were not interested in joining what they considered merely an anti-C.P. sect. They were interested in organizing the American working-class and when we appeared through our activity and propaganda to be unconcerned in the main with this problem, they were loath to join us.

Those who are interested in crushing our opposition to the leadership will readily accuse us of failing to see the importance of fighting the Stalinists. Such accusations are dishonest and we treat them as such. We do not think it pertinent to reiterate that Stalinism is deadly and that it is essential to put out propaganda exposing their role here and abroad. Our point is that active participation in the C.I.O. movement, sincere and self-sacrificing work among the working class, would have done more to convince the Stalinist workers that the trials were a frame-up than a thousand pamphlets on the subject.

Let our main attention be directed toward ourselves becoming the leader in the struggles of the workers; let our program and our actions become positive; let us address ourselves to the progressive and leftward moving workers who are still in the vast majority non-Stalinists. The leadership must break with its position of defeatism, its C. P. orientation. If not, it must be replaced. The specific talents of this or that individual are not sufficient to overshadow the incorrect perspective of these comrades. In any case their capabilities have not been utilized under the circumstances.

We have not been concerned here with the few successes which our party has had. In general these successes prove our contention that our party, given the correct orientation and direction, can make itself felt as a factor on the American scene. This convention must not content itself with a smug satisfaction and emphasis on the small successes; our task is to evaluate how far we have gone, what we have accomplished, and what can be reasonably done in the future. Only such a discussion and resultant action will make it possible for the party to emerge as the revolutionary party. A failure to do this, will mean that the present sentiment of the masses will be swept up by the fascists.

ful change," etc. are very frequently heard.

The confusion in party labels is so great that Coughlinites, our deadliest enemies, mistook us for the S.P. and in retaliation for driving them off the streets of downtown New York, June 10th attacked the befuddled Thomases, who didn't know what it was all about. If the Coughlinites, who had excellent reasons after Madison Square Garden and June 10th to find out exactly who their main enemy was, blundered, how much more must be the confusion created in the minds of the backward and even the advanced workers.

True, the disintegration of the S.P. will leave the field open to us and mistaken notions will gradually recede into the past, but war may break out any moment, and we may have little time to do a task which at best has many serious obstacles to overcome without being weighed down by the dead corpse of social reformism and Thomastie pacificist confusion.

The convention should therefore change the name of the party by dropping the word Socialist, and also change the name of the "Appeal" to "Labor Action" or some other suitable name.

Creates Confusion  
In day to day activity every comrade can cite instance upon instance where unnecessary confusion amongst the workers has been created by the present name of the party. Such remarks as, "They are Socialists and believe in peace-

Al Findly

Join the Socialist Workers Party

## A Point of View on the Labor Party Question

By F. X. FERRY, ROGER B. CROSS, MYRON CARLSON and IRVING KAPLAN

(Continued from last issue)

It is nothing but the muzzling of meaningless phrases—not believed by even those who present them—that we shall fructify the reformist labor party, that we shall do it more successfully than the revolutionary elements of the S.D.P. or the English Labor Party were able to do. It is not a fact that all revolutionary groupings were finally driven out of those labor parties when a crisis arose, as in 1914 and thereafter, driven out not with increased strength but at the cost of lost forces, because of the discouragement experienced by many a worker along the "bold, resolute and decisive" path in the labor party—as many here must be discouraged by our bold steps in supporting the Waldmans in New York and the candidates of the non-existent labor party in Chicago.

Of course the labor party supporters are not quite sure whether or not to acknowledge paternity if our fructification should not bear the expected fruit. While we unambiguously support the labor party movement in general and all its local manifestations, nevertheless the Socialist Workers Party "does not and will not, however, take upon itself any responsibility for this party." That may be a desire, but will not be a fact, at least not in the eyes of the workers, who just will not follow nor understand the position, and with inevitable logic will conclude that those who unambiguously support the labor movement should be held responsible for the party. This will be the case more particularly in a war crisis, when the labor party naturally, even congenitally, will support the unambiguous supporters of the labor party movement will be held responsible by the workers.

The majority resolution mistakes the facts in saying that "at the time of our national

convention we took insufficient account of the new developments in the labor movement, especially in their political aspects. . . . It is necessary now to reconsider the question and to make a radical change in our tactics in regard to the developing labor party movement." The convention was aware of the possibility that "the labor party development takes on a more radical form in appearance" (Draft Resolution I, p. 10), but even then the party agreed that all reformist parties, among them the labor party, "act in practice and in crisis as bulwarks of capitalism and enemies of the socialist revolution. Their false program and perspectives disorient the masses, turning them aside from revolutionary class struggle, and permit the forces of reaction to consolidate without effective opposition . . . the present labor party developments, however far they may be extended, . . . (are) the method for preventing the growth of independent class politics." (Draft Resolution II, p. 26, 27).

This analysis was and is correct, and if we shall step out in a manner "bold, resolute and decisive," to build or help build the labor party we shall, with or without our fructification, be held responsible for "the method for preventing the growth of independent class politics." It may be repeated with Crux that "we must not reckon by our prognosis of yesterday, but by the situation of today," which statement must be read with one of Trotsky that "under the pressure of the masses of the people, the bourgeoisie will take various steps to the left." This may be understood to say that the revolutionary party shall not become a handmaiden of the bourgeoisie in helping it to take such steps as the labor party, which is "from the point of view of the bureaucrats and the bourgeoisie, the method for preventing the growth of independent class politics."

The majority resolution, having been written some ten months ago, may today not be supported wholeheartedly by the authors themselves. It is hard to believe that the authors fail to see that our "bold and ment in absence of the labor party, an academic gesture of no great practical importance. This is, however, not the case, because of the workers who look for leadership, and whose confidence we surely do not inspire by such brilliant maneuvers as our referendum manifesto and our analysis of the labor party. The question is not academic because of the wise hooray-boys who did and will in the future hitch their wagon to the stars and fly after the labor party, be it a non-existent one, as soon as the new tactical turn is declared, as it was last summer.

Main Task Remains  
Our role, even assuming the existence of a labor party, and assuming, although under no circumstances admitting, the correctness of the majority resolution, is a hopeless one, the party being constituted as it is. The overwhelming majority of the party members being outside of the trade union movement, exert no influence, for better or for worse, in leading the workers. The convention decision as to working in the trade unions, "turning our faces toward the masses," is not carried out, because most of us never knew and never cared to learn how to work within and with the masses. Our duty was and still remains to make each party member an active worker in the trade unions, wherein the influence of our revolutionary program and tactics can be made felt. However, standing on the sidelines, out of earshot of the workers, and attempting to preach to them, is as useless as it is impossible.

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### ADDENDA TO THE RESOLUTION

By ROGER B. CROSS

The terms principle and tactic have long been the curse of our movement. The disastrous consequences of indiscriminately labelling certain precepts as fundamental, sacred and not to be questioned, thus leading to a rigidity utterly incompatible with the variegated tasks of a revolution, and on the other hand, the insufficient consideration given to the leadership's maneuvers on sometimes very important questions simply because they are called tactics, should be obvious. It is discouraging and disheartening to see the revolutionary movement so handicapped.

To preserve our flexibility and to protect ourselves from unscrupulous maneuvering, we should simply follow the rule that a program adopted by a Party Convention can only be changed by a device of like importance. The same test should be applied in any proposed action in a given situation, i.e., do they further us in our fight to achieve Socialism.

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## ON THE NAME OF THE PARTY

The 3rd International under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky took the name of Communist, discarding the accepted usage of Social Democrat and Socialist. This was done not only for the purpose of differentiation, but because "Socialist" had become a synonym for gradualism, class collaboration, social patriotism, and stank of renegacy and betrayal. How strongly the founders of the Revolutionary International felt on this question can be seen from the fact that they made the changing of the name a pre-requisite for admission into the 3rd International.

The passage of 20 years have only confirmed the perfidy and treachery of the so-called So-