

# Points of View on Issues Confronting the S.W.P. National Convention

## On the Tasks of the Convention And the Political Resolution

By HAL DRAPER

In his report for the P.C. in New York, Comrade Burnham proposed that our work in the next period be concentrated around campaign activity on six issues. These, he suggested, should be: war; jobs; democratic rights; fascism; the C. P.; and the labor party. This approach in my opinion is correct, and not in contradiction with our international or other tasks. In this article I wish to make some remarks on how these objectives can be implemented.

**War**  
The overshadowing task of this Convention, and of the Party in the next period, is preparation for the war. Is the Party geared to the needs of this preparatory period? No. Why not, and what must be done? This is the major pre-convention problem; the following remarks are intended as a contribution to this problem.

First, I think we must make a rectification in the direction of our agitation and propaganda on the war question. Up to now, 99 percent of it has been directed against the more-or-less open war-mongers: the policies of the Roosevelt administration, the collective-security advocates. Since this is in fact the actual policy of the U.S. government, it would be absurd to dispute the importance of this kind of attack. But consider: the great mass of the American people, and especially the workers, are not collective-security advocates, but in one form or another are under the influence of isolationist and pacifist ideology. Turning to the masses means turning to them, in large part. In fact, there is a smaller percentage of collective-security-ites among the masses generally, than there is among the "advanced" workers. In this I am not thinking about the professional isolationists and pacifists of the various leagues, but of the more naive and inarticulate sentiments of the man-in-the-street or the worker-in-the-shop.

Why have we devoted so little attention to this, the predominant mood of the masses? First, perhaps, because we have felt that, as against the collective security shouters, they are the lesser evil, not as dangerous, have a "more correct" position, etc. If it were merely a matter of intellectual conviction or passing a resolution, this might have some justification; but the question is rather one of mobilization to action along the class-struggle path. And it is not news for us to be told that the role of pacifism and isolationism is precisely that of a soporific, of a brake on militant action. Secondly, it is harder to come to grips with these strata—they are not as organized, not as represented by spokesmen in the public eye, less homogeneous. This is true, but what I am interested in here is to point out that there has been no deliberate effort to overcome these obstacles.

It is not enough to decide to pay attention to the naively anti-war masses. We must learn how to approach them. We do not know. We cannot approach them, by and large in the same way that we have attacked the collective-security-ites. This may be so with some varieties of pacifist-isolationists, but with others we must work to lead them from their present attitudes towards ours, not only on the basis of the proper propagandistic approach but also through action. This means training, and I shall return to this point.

**Organizational Preparation**  
The second point that has to be made with regard to preparation for war is of course organizational. Indisputable as it is, it is more than disquieting to realize that with war so near we have no organizational machine that would not be dislocated and ripped apart on the day that the government's M-day machine gets going—if not before. And of all our weaknesses, what can compare with this weakness in its importance? I have complete confidence that the Fourth Internationalist movement will stand out against the war more firmly than any movement in the history of the world—including the Russian Bolsheviks in 1914—in a political sense; but, to quote the Bible, what shall it profit us to gain the anti-war monopoly and lose our own organization?

I am aware that this task has been considered of the highest importance by both the membership and the party leadership—only nothing has been

done about it, not even some extremely elementary steps. The task of the national leadership in this period is not only to put the national office in order, but it is its responsibility to see to it that the local sections do likewise.

Aside from organizational machinery, our members are not individually prepared. One thing this means is training. Not training in understanding of our political program—I am taking this for granted—but training as propagandists under war conditions. We tend to rely too much today on individual comrades to act as our mouthpieces, speak for us at street corners, etc. Each of us will have to be our own mouthpiece, ourselves react to situations, etc., to a vastly larger extent under war conditions, with the best central machinery. What this points to is internal education and training for every rank-and-file party member.

**The Communist Party**  
It should be emphasized that the section on the C.P. in the political resolution represents a change, not merely a matter of emphasis. Perhaps not a change in policy for the party officially, but certainly a change in the defacto attitude of most party members. This change is overdue.

In understandable reaction against the tradition of the Trotskyist movement, and accompanying a healthy turn toward the masses, the comrades have obviously let C.P. work slide more than it should. To underline the point made in the resolution: since the foundation of the S.W.P., there has been no seriously organized C.P. work nationally or in any locality. In recent months a good beginning has been made in New York, that is all.

This is the elementary organizational conclusion from the resolution: national and local machinery, committees and directors, for this work!

**Party Organization**  
There is a good deal of loose talk about the party's being in an "organizational crisis". Alarmist as most of this is, there is no doubt that there is no political problem before the Convention which overshadows in importance the task of readying the party organization for its tasks in the next period.

I do not expect that this will receive its due share of attention at the Convention, because of lack of pre-convention preparation and the conditions under which a Convention is held. I would propose that this gap be filled by:

(1) Holding special conferences of the delegates during the Convention on specific organizational problems: C.P. work; educational and agit-prop work; etc. Whether this is feasible, of course, depends on the physical and time arrangements.

(2) Organizing the delegates, at the formal close of the Convention, into a special organizational conference, to consider organizational problems only. Such a gathering can be useful as a preparation for:

(3) Holding regional organizational conferences after the delegates return home, for discussion and exchange of ideas, etc., with N.C. members present at each one. The organizational end of war preparation should be an important aspect of these gatherings.

For the Convention itself, I should like to emphasize one proposal, which it seems to me puts the finger on an outstanding and continuing lack in our work.

There is not one comrade in the National Office whose task it is to oversee and direct and aid the organizational functioning of the local sections. Comrade Cannon, as the political secretary of the Party, cannot and should not be expected to fill this gap. This is especially important since in few localities have we a local organization which does not need constant aid and guidance and which can be independent of the center in this respect. The necessity of this is testified to once more by the eagerness with which comrades in the field grasp at organizational directives, advice, suggestions of any sort which come from the center.

**The Labor Party**  
It is with some regret that the largest section of this discussion article must be devoted to the labor party question, which Comrade Burnham proposes be one of the six issues to be headlined in our work. It is not a question of merely repeating the previous discussion; I wish to point out:

(1) That the labor party section of the political resolution sticks out of the document like a sore thumb and is completely out of place in our general view of our tasks.

(2) That the labor party position given in the political resolution is a departure from that put forward by the majority in the last discussion and adopted by referendum.

(3) That our experiences since the referendum serve to invalidate the majority line in that discussion.

This is the first Convention after the adoption of the labor party line by referendum. The party has a right to expect from the P.C., or at least from individual P.C. members, an attempt to draw up a balance-sheet of the 10 months or so that have intervened—a balance sheet of our work in the field, as well as of the development of the labor party movement. Both sides made predictions, put forward arguments that perhaps can now be more concretely tested, etc. In the absence of such a balance sheet by the P.C., I limit myself here to some cursory and preliminary remarks.

**A Side Dish?**  
I. The political resolution begins with the indisputable statement that "Every political, and economic and social issue is being more and more subordinated to the war preparations." And the resolution rightly links each one of the issues discussed to the present pre-war situation, shaping our line of attack into a rounded program revolving around the war question. That is, with the exception of the labor party section! Burnham's six points, for example:

"War is coming—Struggle against war!"  
"War is coming—Fight to preserve the workers' democratic rights! Fight against fascism!"  
"War is coming—Jobs, not battleships!"  
"War is coming—Fight the jingoes in the working class ranks, the C.P. above all!"  
"War is coming—Build a labor party!"

Try that on your street-corner speech. How does a labor party campaign fit into a rounded program of agitation and action against the war, or is it merely a side-dish with no connection with the rest of the menu?

**A Change in Line**  
II. The first two sentences of the labor party section read as follows: "During the past year, the sentiment among the workers for a labor party has remained inert, held back by Roosevelt, the labor bureaucrats and the Stalinists. Any extended general campaign on our part around the labor party slogan would have been on the whole academic, and our agitation on this issue has been largely, and correctly, confined to specific and local situations where it was relevant."

In these two sentences the P.C. manages to throw out of the window 90 percent of the argumentation they and their supporters used to justify the majority resolution 10 months ago. I allow a residue of 10 percent out of good-will.

Were we not told then that precisely because "Roosevelt, the labor bureaucrats and the Stalinists" were against the labor party that the revolutionists must throw themselves into a campaign to mobilize the workers over the heads of these gentlemen? Surely the P.C. knew in advance that these forces would seek to keep the workers from independent political action and confine any manifestations to "specific and local situations"?

When the then-minority counterposed fraction work within the labor party movement to the slogan "Form a labor party", we were asked the so-embarassing question: "If you agree to agitating for independent labor party candidates in "specific and local situations where it was relevant", like the Kennedy movement in Pennsylvania, does this not necessarily entail a campaign to link up these local situations into a national labor party?" We answered No. 10 months later, the P.C. answers: "No, it would be academic and irrelevant."

## Resolution of Houston Branch on Moving Nat'l Headquarters of Party

ADOPTED BY THE HOUSTON BRANCH OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY SUNDAY, MAY 28, 1939

WHEREAS our party is approaching a point where it must pass from a small nucleus making the important and difficult struggle for organizational existence to a political movement of wide influence;

AND WHEREAS it must realistically face the problem of winning the masses of American workers, farmers and middle class to its program, so as to envisage the seizure of power in the time of social crisis;

AND WHEREAS the party's press and activities tend to be colored by the problem of the city where national headquarters are located;

### Disgusted with S.P., Militant Joins Socialist Workers Party

Declaring his break with the decrepit Socialist Party, Oliver H. Williams of Fitchburg, Mass., joined the ranks of the Socialist Workers Party this week and called upon all militants still in the S.P. to follow him and continue the fight under the banner of the Fourth International.

Williams, who had been a member of the S.P. since 1934, voiced his disgust with the refusal of the S.P. leadership to break with the social-patriotic Second International, the phoney deals being conducted between the S.P. and the Old Guard, and the party's politics in the "Keep America Out of War Committee."

Williams declared that the Socialist Party remains lifeless and inactive in the face of the world crisis and that only the Socialist Workers Party has the bold revolutionary program that can offer any hope to the world proletariat in the threatening periods of war and reaction.

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"Snows of Yesteryear"  
What happens to the despairing cries that rose up from the majority's ranks and spokesmen to the effect that the labor party question was a life-and-death matter for the party, that the party could not go on "stewing in its own juice" and that a labor party campaign was the answer to our isolation?

Where is the argument that the labor party issue was "indissolubly" connected with the Transitional Program—or was a general campaign on the Transitional Program academic and irrelevant too?

Another question on the refrain, "Where are the snows of yesteryear?"—In the discussion, Comrade Crux argued that agitation for the labor party was imperatively demanded by the objective situation, and many and forceful were his remarks about basing our policy on the mood of the workers. For him it was a race against time to raise the political level of the workers—as it is—and the labor party slogan was to be a stout weapon to this end. If Comrade Crux's approach had anything in common with the P.C. position, what difference does it make whether Roosevelt, the labor bureaucrats and the Stalinists have worked to hold back the workers? All the more necessity for a stiff campaign!—As we pointed out then, all this is academic and irrelevant to the P.C.'s position.

What remains as the decisive justification for the labor party position we now have on our books?

**Transitional Program**  
In practice — to keep away from the academic and irrelevant—what has pushed the party forward in the last period?—In the discussion we pointed to the campaign around the

### Challenge Out

The first issue of the Twice-a-Month CHALLENGE OF YOUTH is off the press. Readers are urged to buy, read and help distribute the attractive newspaper of our youth organization.

AND WHEREAS the American workers do not yet recognize their own problems in the political atmosphere of New York City, but tend to regard New York with hostility, as a foreign place;

AND WHEREAS the longer the party stays in New York and depends upon the New York comrades to manage its various activities, the more difficult it will become to move and shift the party apparatus;

AND WHEREAS the natural and normal location for the national headquarters of any revolutionary American working class party would be in some industrial city of the middle west;

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the Socialist Workers Party National Office and publications be removed to some more suitable city.

**State of Labor Party**  
Is the labor party position a dead dog? No. No, says the resolution, is the time for a general campaign. What, is there a resurgence in the labor party movement? Well, answers the P.C. resolution carefully, "the organized intervention of labor in politics has continued and in some respects increased during this same year" during which labor party sentiment has remained inert; and the present situation is "raising or beginning to raise once more in the minds of the workers questions about political action." To begin with, to say the least, a far cry from the confident assertions in the 10-month old labor party resolution: "The workers have begun to turn in million-masses toward political action." "We can with sufficient assurance predict that the resistance of the bureaucracy (to the L.P. movement) will be broken. The movement in favor of a labor party will continue to grow," etc.

Comrade Burnham has kindly revealed to me what it means when it talks about the "continued" and "increased" intervention of labor in politics. According to him, the A.L.P. in New York "still continues"—"Very modestly put, "still continues"; the A.L.P. is actually in a state of suspended animation, which the hypodermic of the coming elections may or may not jerk it out of—

—There is the trade union campaign in Minnesota . . . which only underlines the bankruptcy of the F.L.P., and the

The labor party movement in America is already reaching the end of its blind alley. The P.C. takes the ebb for the flow.

**What to Do**  
The many comrades who said they wanted to "experiment" with the majority labor party position have had their noble experiment. Now what? (1) The political resolution must be given a realistic estimate of the labor party situation now and during the past year which corresponds with the facts.

(2) It must place the emphasis clearly on independent participation by the party in electoral campaigns, along the lines of the issues featured in the resolution, under the sign of the war question. We must utilize the elections and the parliamentary field to put ourselves before the masses as the anti-war party, tying ourselves to no social-patriotic political formations whatsoever. Section 23 should be rewritten from this point of view.

(3) Section 22 should be completely cut out of the resolution, to be replaced by a section in the spirit of point 1 above.

(4) This does in effect mean ditching the labor party thesis adopted in the last discussion. More than ever, I would propose its replacement by the Convention with the minority labor party resolution put before the party last year.

## Some Suggestions for Building The Party on a Mass Base

By WALTER SHIPMAN

**Suggestion No. 1:**  
If the leaders will lead—the party will follow.

Let them welcome criticism and ask for it and demand it and become alarmed when there is none.

Let them do things on time and start meetings on time, then make others do the same.

Let them be more tolerant. One tends to be intolerant towards a person whose opposition opinion we don't value. But it's just the opposition opinion which we should value and welcome. And we should not fear to change our minds.

Above all we should not fear to admit that we have changed our minds or even that we have made a mistake. When a political or other position is changed overnight there must be a good explanation. It is not merely to put the leadership on the spot. But unless that is done one begins to suspect that the leaders are more interested in their own record than in the party's welfare and that in fact they

### Crack Appeal Salesman at Work

Odd in Los Angeles, Calif., there is a star Appeal salesman.

This comrade sells an average of 12 papers per hour by working his way from house-to-house. He puts in an hour each day and in this way sells 60 papers per week.

Manny Fishler—the comrade we have in mind—understands that the job of selling the paper is a first-rate political task for all members of the Socialist Workers Party. The Appeal is the chief organizing weapon in the struggle against the War Deal and the growing fascist danger. It is our means of letting the American workers know why we oppose capitalism and what they can do about their situation.

Let's build up a crew of Manny Fishlers from coast to coast!

lower level of organizational form which the Minnesota workers have had to resort to for political action—

—There was the trade union campaign for Murphy in Michigan and Olsen in California . . . This certainly represents "continued" mobilization of labor behind capitalist politicians, but how is it "increased" participation as compared with the labor campaigns for Roosevelt, for Lehman, for LaGuardia, et al?

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consider themselves the party itself. And above all, it educates the membership wrongly. And of course the same mistake might be repeated or be not even discovered; and the leadership should have its actions clearly recorded so as to judge them.

Let them remember that the best teacher is by example. Let them, by example, imbue the ranks with the sacred necessity of speaking the truth and expressing their honest opinions and combat the feeling that the end permits one to hide things from or be unfair to opponent comrades. It will increase faith and trust in the leadership and also activity of the members 100 times more than state orders or disciplinary threats from above. The training in defending one's differences with one's friends also increases moral courage.

Let them go into the streets and sell Appeals and speak and hand out leaflets. They will learn a lot.

Let them not mistake "Bolshevik hardness" for petty bourgeois rudeness.

Let them develop new young leaders. Give them responsibility. Responsibility develops ability.

Then we may get somewhere.

**Suggestion No. 2:**

Print about one million (to begin with) leaflets every two weeks. Size about 6 x 9 inches in small newspaper type. The cost is about as much as two issues of the Appeal.

We stand on street corners and speak. Yet we doubt the effectiveness of the written word. This leaflet could have a small permanent masthead called "The Guide," or "The Light" or "The Truth," etc.

But the written word, just as the oral, may be effective, neutral or harmful. Two things must be taken into consideration: (1) There is a tendency among some comrades, especially some intellectuals and those not in contact with workers, to think workers' minds are simple and crude and superficial and dull. That tendency produces propaganda which exaggerates, hides unpleasant truths, uses rough language and slang words, believes workers are too tired or even too lazy to read many words, and spends too much time trying to convince the unemployed that unemployment causes suffering (something every worker sees himself) and how bad it is to be without money, etc. (The workers want a way out.)

An example of this attitude, I believe, is the leaflet put out for the Madison Sq. Nazi meeting. It was praised by many comrades as a fine example. It called the fascists scum and slime and filth. The words in themselves are the truth but they convince nobody. To convince the workers that the fascists are fascists and that fascists are the most brutal agents of big capital and to convince them that it is their moral right and duty to attack them physically, that is the thing. Those who preach socialism are wrong if they in their enthusiasm and hatred towards the class enemy exaggerate (exaggeration is really an untruth) or what is more important, seemingly exaggerate. It is better to understate and be conservative in this respect. We must raise the party's dignity. Using workers' language when among workers is one thing; using the same language in an official appeal to gain their confidence and support for an organization to lead their lives is another thing.

Just as the spoken word is used by good orators to raise the emotions by spurts of drama so can the written word. But here the second consideration enters: Very often comrades assigned to write up leaflets do so in a hurry and

are even careless. Imagine! Say if 2,000 leaflets are printed and only 100 workers read them then—15 minutes reading time X 100 equals 25 hours workers' time. A circular should be prepared ten times more carefully than a speech because you can write so much less, the receiver may take it home to his family, keep it as a record, and it reaches more people and above all more outside people who are naturally more critical. Every word, every phrase must be improved and studied when even a few thousand are printed.

Furthermore, a one or two million national leaflet coming out regular would probably be attacked and publicized by the newspapers, and the fascists and police would no doubt want to stop it—all of which would make workers more interested in what it says.

Also, it would increase the activity of the members, especially those isolated from the labor movement.

Some may say that the Socialist Labor Party did that. But the S.L.P. did little else—and besides they wrote very dry. These are critical times and workers will read. Each issue, with dramatic headline and content, could discuss one specific question in each issue, for instance: "War," "Coughlin," "The History of Capitalism," "Defend the Trade Unions!" "The Moral Right to Overthrow Capitalism," "Support the Auto (or any big struggle) Strike," "The Survival of the Fittest," "Revolution is Evolution," "When Force is Justified," "Demonstrate Against Relief Cuts—Don't Beg," "The Stalinists Are Traitors," "The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th Internationals," "Democracy," "What Is a Class?" "Progressive Trade Unionism," etc.

But where is the money coming from? One issue would cost about as much as two issues of the Appeal. It seems to me too much importance is given to the twice and now the 3 times a week Appeal. The 2 and 3 times will reach after all practically only the same circle of people. The arguments in favor of a good 8-page weekly are by no means exhausted. Besides if the whole country would be covered with such leaflets contributions would possibly pay for it. Besides if it's no good it can be stopped any time.

SENTENCE 3 FOR PLEADING CASE OF JOBLESS WORKERS

NEW YORK—Arrested in the 53rd Street relief bureau for protesting the dismissal of single men from the city's relief rolls, one woman and two men, members of Local 4 of the Unemployed and Project Workers Union, were sentenced to a total of 40 days in the Rikers Island workhouse by Judge Andrews of the New York County Magistrates Court on Wednesday, June 21.

After sentence had been pronounced by Judge Andrews, he remonstrated with his prisoners. "Remember," he told them, "That you are people who live off city funds." Defendant of the sage magistrate's advice, a member of the courtroom audience retorted, "So are you."

**Their Crime**  
The three convicted demonstrators, Rhoda Pearson, Meyer Drucker and N. Brown, were members of a committee of six who had gone to the 53rd Street relief bureau to plead the case of two young single men who, as a result of their dismissal from the relief rolls, face starvation. One of the young men is a member of a family of four whose only support is the father, now employed at thirteen dollars a week. The other young man has a group of brothers and sisters who are themselves on a near relief level and are unable to care for him.

Backed up by a large U.P. W.U. picket line outside the bureau, the committee of six went inside to state the case of their clients. Stalled by the bureau heads, the committee demanded that the two young men be reinstated on the rolls. The bureau heads answered by calling in the cops, who arrested the committee on a charge of disorderly conduct.

The arrest at the 53rd Street bureau is not an isolated incident. During the last two weeks twenty-six unemployed demonstrators have been arrested at various relief bureaus throughout the city on similar filmy charges.

**Just Out!**  
"THE TRUTH ABOUT KRONSTADT" by John G. Wright

New unpublished source-material in refutation of anti-Bolshevik slanders concerning the 1921 Kronstadt Rebellion. Mimeo, pamphlet, printed cover, 10 cents—7 cents in bundles of 10 or more—15 cents for single copies by mail. National Educational Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 116 University Pl., N.Y.C.