

# A Labor Party in the USA?

By Leon Trotsky

1. WHAT was my idea on the labour party in that statement? I stated that American politics will be Europeanized in the sense that the inevitable and imminent development of a party of the working class will totally change the political face of the United States. This is a commonplace for a Marxist. The question was not of a labor party in the specific British sense of that word but in the general European sense, without designating what form such a party would take or what phases it would go through. There was not the slightest necessity in that interview to enter into the internal tactical differences within the Communist ranks.

2. One can declare that even the general term "party of the working class" does not exclude a labour party in the British sense. Be that as it may. However, such an eventuality has nothing to do with a precise tactical question. We can admit hypothetically that the American trade-union bureaucracy will be forced, under certain historical conditions, to imitate the British trade-union bureaucracy in creating a kind of party based upon the trade unions. But that eventuality, which appears to me to be very problematical, does not constitute an aim for which the Communists must strive and on which one must concentrate the attention of the proletarian vanguard.

3. A long period of confusion in the Comintern led many people to forget a very simple but absolutely irrevocable principle: that a Marxist, a proletarian revolutionist, cannot present himself before the working class with two banners. He cannot say at a workers' meeting: "I have a ticket for a first-class party and another, cheaper ticket for the backward workers." If I am a Communist, I must fight for the Communist party.

4. One can say that under the American conditions a labor party in the British sense would be a progressive step, and by recognizing this and stating so, we ourselves, even though indirectly, help to establish such a party. But that is precisely the reason I will never assume the responsibility to affirm abstractly and dogmatically that the creation of a labor party would be a "progressive step" even in the United States, because I do not know under what circumstances, under what guidance, and for what purposes that party would be created. It seems to me more probable that especially in America, which does not possess any important traditions of independent political action by the working class (like Chartism in England, for example) and where the trade-union bureaucracy is more reactionary and corrupted than it was at the height of the British empire, the creation of a labour party could be provoked only by mighty revolutionary pressure from the working masses and by the growing threat of communism. It is absolutely clear that under these conditions the labor party would signify not a progressive step but a hindrance to the progressive evolution of the working class.

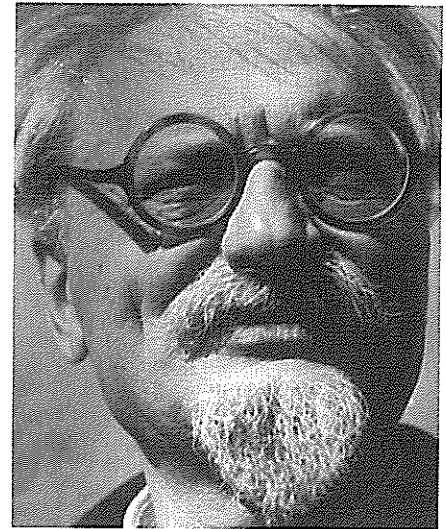
5. In what form the party of the working class will become a genuine mass party in the United

States in the immediate future we cannot prophesy, because the socialist and labor parties differ greatly in the various countries, even in Europe. In Belgium, for example, we see an intermediate sort of party arise. Certainly the phases of development of the proletarian party in America will be *sui generis*. We can only affirm with the greatest assurance: Especially since the United States, in the period from 1921 to 1924, has already had an important rehearsal in the creation of a labor or farmer-labor party, a resurrection of a similar movement cannot be a simple repetition of that experience, but a far more pregnant and more crystallized movement, either under the guidance of a revolutionary Communist party or under the guidance of reformist elements against a growing Communist party. And if even in 1921-24 the Communist Party did not find great possibilities for independent action inside the organization of an inchoate labor party, it would have less possibility in the new phase of an analogous movement.

6. One can imagine that the trade-union bureaucracy and its socialist and left-democratic advisers may show themselves to be more perspicacious and begin the formation of a labour party before the revolutionary movement becomes too threatening. In view of the groping empiricism and provincial narrowness of the American labor bureaucracy and the aristocracy of labor, such perspicacity seems very improbable. The failure of such an attempt in the past shows us that the bureaucracy, so tenacious in its immediate aims, is absolutely incapable of systematic political action on a great scale even in the interests of capitalist society. The bureaucracy must receive a blow on the skull before taking such a "radical" initiative. However, if the creation of a labor party would prevent, in a certain period, great successes of communism, our elementary duty must be, not to proclaim the progressiveness of the labor party, but its insufficiency, ambiguity, and limitedness, and its historical role as a hindrance to the proletarian revolution.

7. Must we join that labour party or remain outside? This is not a question of principle but of circumstances and possibilities. The question itself has arisen from the experience of the British Communists with the Labour Party, and that experience has served far more the Labour Party than the Communists. It is evident that the possibility of participating in a labor-party movement and of utilizing it would be greater in the period of its inception, that is, in the period when the party is not a party but an amorphous political mass movement. That we must participate in it at that time and with the greatest energy is without question; not to help form a labour party which will exclude us and fight against us, but to push the progressive elements of the movement more and more to the left by our activity and propaganda. I know this seems too simple for the great new school which searches everywhere for some method to jump over its feeble head.

8. To consider a labor party as an integrated series of united fronts signifies a misunderstanding of the notions both of the united front and of the party. The united front is deter-



mined by concrete circumstances, for concrete aims. The party is permanent. In a united front we leave our hands free to break with our temporary allies. In a common party with these allies we are bound by discipline and even by the fact of the party itself. The experience of the Kuomintang and of the Anglo-Russian Committee must be well understood. The strategic line dictated by the lack of a spirit of independence of the Communist party and by the desire to enter into the "big" party (Kuomintang, Labour Party) inevitably produced all the consequences of the opportunistic adaptation to the will of the allies and, through them, to that of the enemy. We must educate our cadres to believe in the invincibility of the Communist idea and in the future of the Communist party. The parallel struggle for another party inevitably produces in their minds a duality and turns them onto the road of opportunism.

9. The policy of the united front has not only its great advantages but its limits and its dangers as well. The united front, even in the form of temporary blocs, often impels one to opportunist deviations which are frequently fatal, as, for example, with Brandler in 1923. That danger becomes absolutely predominant in a situation in which the so-called Communist party becomes a part of a labor party created by the grace of the propaganda and action of the Communist party itself.

10. That the labour party can become an arena of successful struggle for us, and that the labor party, created as a barrier to communism, can under certain circumstances strengthen the Communist party, is true, but only under the condition that we consider the labour party not as "our" party but as an arena in which we are acting as an absolutely independent Communist party.

11. All the resolutions about the British Labour Party must be evaluated not as they were written before the experiences of the Comintern and the British Communist Party in that regard, but in the light of that experience. The attempt to apply them mechanically now, in 1932, to American conditions, is characteristic of the mind of the epigones and has nothing to do with Marxism and Leninism.

12. It is not necessary to say that the idea of a farmer-labor party is a treacherous mockery of Marxism.

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