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Trotskyism and the Labor Party

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Leon Trotsky wrote in 1938, “The Fourth International is now the only international organization which not only takes clearly into account the driving forces of the imperialist epoch but is armed with a system of transitional demands which are capable of uniting the masses for a revolutionary struggle for power” (from the foreword to “The Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International.”)

Under the heading “Objective Prerequisites for a Socialist Revolution” (from the “Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth Int'l.”), the founding Conference of the Fourth International discovered, “the economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be achieved under capitalism. Mankind's productive forces stagnate.” “Democratic regimes, as well as fascist, stagger on from one bankruptcy to another” (ibid).

Further, under the heading, “The Proletariat and its Leadership,” they continue, “The chief obstacle in the path of transforming the pre-revolutionary into a revolutionary state is the opportunist character of proletarian leadership: its petty-bourgeois cowardice before the big bourgeoisie and its perfidious connection with it even in its death agony.

“The multi-millioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machines” (ibid).

Under the heading, “The Minimum Program and the Transitional Program,” Trotskyism finds a bridge. “It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.” No less.

In the United States, the program of Trotskyism revolves around the propaganda for the organization of a Labor Party. It does not matter to Trotskyism that Labor Parties in the U.S., England, Germany (Weimar Republic, and before War I, under the Kaiser), France, Italy, etc., etc., which were and are the Parties of the 2nd International, prevent and have always prevented the “unity of the masses for the revolutionary struggle for power;” and seek to revive the “stagnating forces of production of capitalism,” and prop up staggering “democratic” regimes by fascist economic

measures (state capitalist nationalization). Labor Parties on a world scale are the obstacle, which is “the chief obstacle in the path of transforming the pre-revolutionary into a revolutionary state” (Stalinism included). The leaderships of Labor Parties, and their budding counterparts in the U.S. are the very ones who are characterized for their “petty-bourgeois cowardice before the big bourgeoisie and their perfidious connection with it even in its death agony.” The Labor Parties and their trade union leadership, with their conservative bureaucratic machines block the masses from taking the road to revolution again and again. The labor party therefore is not the bridge between “present demands and the socialist program of the revolution,” as the Trotskyites so glibly state, but, rather the bridge between the workers antagonism to the capitalist state, on the one hand, and the need of the capitalist state to recruit [?] in the support of the workers for its system of exploitation, for its wars, for its colonial oppression, through the labor party.

Trotskyism (Cannon and Shachtman) is well aware that the British Labor Party, for example, performs the duty of rescuing British Imperialism from its death agony, by centralizing production through nationalization, maneuvering by changing the juridical relation of the colonies and dominions to the mother oppressor (England), and demagogically propagandizing this as the millennium of freedom for the colonial oppressed. Trotskyism (Cannon & Shachtman) is well aware that the British Labor Party is busy preparing English Imperialism with its American partner, the U.S. Imperialism and their competitor, Russian Imperialism for Imperialist War III. Trotskyism is aware of the fact that the sum-total of the purposes of a Labor Party are, “preserve capitalism.”

Trotskyism (Cannon and Shachtman) know the petty treacherous character of labor parties in the U.S. The American Labor Party, for example, which began its existence by supporting the representative of big capital, Roosevelt, and to date supported a representative of smaller capital, Wallace, continually, makes deals between the Republican and Democratic ward heelers and their masters, and above all was a patriotic defender of the American Imperialism in War II. Now, under purely Stalinist tutelage it clings still to that part of the C.I.O. bureaucracy friendly to Russian Imperialism.

The same is essentially true of the Liberal Party, which is also a “Labor” party, but antagonistic to Russia, and friendly to Social Democracy, based on the Dubinsky-Hollander combination.

The Trotskyites also know that at a certain stage, Labor Partyism inevitably fuses directly with the bourgeoisie. A small illustration of that was the liquidation of the Wisconsin Farmer-Labor Federation in the Republican Party in 1948.

The Trotskyites are well aware of the facts therefore, that Labor Parties support, defend, and prop up, the capitalist economy; capitalist democracy; exploitation of the wage-workers; and Imperialist War.

Knowing all this, why do the Trotskyites (Cannon and Shachtman) advocate a Labor Party? The Trotskyites answer, “We are not sectarians; we cannot remain isolated; we must follow the mass movement.” Since, however, with the victory of Truman in the presidential elections, the Labor Party idea has been dumped by the more “radical” C.I.O. and A.F.L. Leaders for a more practical policy of integration in the Democratic Party, the masses are moving in that direction. We suggest that the Trotskyites abandon their Labor Party sectarianism and join the Democratic Party.

The more “scientific” and erudite among the Trotskyites answer: “There is a contradiction between the *objective* prerequisites for revolutionary and the *subjective*

immaturity of the American Workers." Therefore, what do the Trotskyites propose, a revolutionary vanguard party that shall at all costs, organize and agitate the working class for the revolutionary aims of socialism? Oh, no! The Trotskyites propose a Labor Party to harmonize with the *subjective* immaturity of the American worker. According to them this Labor Party, on a national, not a local scale, mind you, will be the vehicle through which the workers will go beyond capitalism and establish Socialism ("workers and farmers government").

In other words, they spread the lie that counter-revolution can be *reformed* into revolution (a la Labor Party). Trotskyism flies in the face of history and of present political reality.

We must characterize Trotskyism (both of the Cannon and Shachtman varieties) as an obstacle on the Road to Proletarian Revolution, because it advocates a political instrument whose only aim is to save a dying system, capitalism; because it does not paint the instrumentality of the Labor Party in its true light; because it (Trotskyism) is well informed on the treacherous role of labor parties; yet, because of a fatal political weakness (lack of understanding of the role of a revolutionary party and consequent fear of the tasks involved) fears isolation and passes to the opposite extreme, the policy of liquidation into the camp of the Capitalist Labor Front.

The program by contrast, of International Left Communism, is the only base upon which a revolutionary party and International can be constructed.