A Marxist Analysis of the Election Campaign

(An introductory note: This is the first of a series of educational bulletins, whose purpose it will be to present a Marxist analysis of the issues facing the working class today. This bulletin will be divided into 2 sections: 1) a general consideration of the problem of the coming presidential election campaign. Appendix A is a bibliography for more detailed consideration of the subject.)

I. FARMER-LABORISM.

The revolutionary Marxist viewpoint towards a labor party is determined by the following considerations: does it play the progressive role of organizing the workers into an organization independent of the class enemy, with an active program, and independent working class representatives and candidates? In the pre-imperialist era of rising, expanding capitalism, when the bourgeoisie was in a position to yield concessions to the workers, as for instance in Britain, was able to offer this function to organized labor, organizing large masses of workers independently in the parliamentary movement for their immediate demand. However, in this era of declining, contracting, decaying capitalism of imperialism, when the contradictions of capitalism society are most acute, the workers are faced with such problems as war, Fascism, permanent unemployment, problems which can only be solved by an attack on the very foundations of society, by its revolutionary overthrow. However, the bourgeoisie cannot afford to grant further concessions to the workers, but must on the contrary withdraw those previously granted in order to safeguard its decreasing profits; so that even in the struggle for immediate demands, the workers must turn completely to the task of weakening the capitalists to direct mass action. In that period, when the tasks facing the workers force them inevitably towards a revolutionary orientation, without which those tasks cannot be solved, it becomes a matter of life or death for a revolutionary class to keep these large mass movements accurately bound to it. In achieving this and the ruling class, in all crucial situations, revives the invaluable aid of its servants, the trade union bureaucracies of the capitalist class. The chief method used for this purpose is—the labor party. Thus we see that the labor party serves the function of not separating the workers from the class enemy, but of channeling those movements into harmless, reformist, and not revolutionary directions. In the light of those considerations, Socialists cannot agitate for the formation or support of a labor or farmer-labor party, for this would mean to aid in duping the workers, to sow false illusions among them. Revolutionary Socialists consider it their duty together with the workers to break down the nature of reformism, to break away from that section of the labor party in the present epoch, and to agitate directly for a revolutionary party as the only party able to affect the political separation of the working class and to fulfill its ultimate and immediate interests.

But let us turn from abstract theory to concrete examples of modern labor politics, and we will find that they have come through for the capitalist class in every crucial situation. The British labor party was the labor party for the working class, and broke the 1926 general strike and the cross-class support of anti-socialist policies and movements of the British imperialists. The Wobbly Press sent in the National Guard in an attempt to break the Minnesotan truck drivers' strike in 1934. The New York American Labor Party was formed for the exact purpose of opposing the workers' votes for capitalist candidates. Nor is it purely accidental that all these labor parties have served the bourgeoisie so faithfully, for it was for this very purpose that they were formed, because in the present era of imperialism, the state apparatus attempts to achieve its ends within the framework of capitalist property relations and the capitalist state cannot and never will do otherwise. Therefore we say to those who condemn these as bad labor parties, and call for a "good," militant, class, mass labor party of struggle!, that they are harboring idle, futile dreams, divorced from all reality.

There is a labor or Farmer-labor Party already in existence, the attitude of Marxists toward it is determined by concrete conditions of the specific situation. By the attitude of the workers toward it, the nature of its class support, the state of the revolutionary party itself at the given time and place, etc. Tactics employed in relation to them may consist of outright agitation, critical support, or direct rivalry both in the parliamentary and other forms of activity. The third tactic is the only policy consistent with revolutionary Socialist integrity in the New York City municipal election campaign, where the LP has endorsed the candidacy of "All Street", the unprincipled capitalist demagogue—P. B. La Guardia.

II. THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

La Guardia was put into office by that section of the NY capitalist class that objected to the extravagant grant of Tammany Hall, because it raised real estate taxes, made city bonds insecure and generally cut into their profits. They needed some one who would run their affairs more efficiently, cut down their expenses, shift the burden further on to the backs of the workers, and