

NORMAN THOMAS AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY  
OF AMERICA, 1932-36

by

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## PREFACE

The writer has attempted to present in this work a history of the Socialist party of America from the presidential campaign of 1932 to that of 1936. In 1932 the prospects of the party appeared to be much brighter than they had been for many long years. In the presidential elections of 1936 the party's vote slumped precipitously. The four years that intervened saw the inauguration of the New Deal under the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the implementation of great schemes of national planning in the Soviet Union, the collapse of Social Democracy in Germany, the menacing growth of fascism in Europe and the development of incipient signs of it in the United States, the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy, and the outbreak of civil war in Spain. All those developments had their repercussions on the Socialist Party of America. They intensified factional struggles within the party based on personal and ideological differences. The conflicts among the various groups culminated in a split in May, 1936, that dealt a severe blow to such strength and effectiveness as the party possessed. The writer has tried to describe the inner-party conflicts during the period as well as the activities of the party in the political and economic spheres. Special attention is paid to the part played by Norman Thomas, the principal leader of the party, during the period covered by the study.

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## CHAPTER I

1932

It was a bleak year for most Americans.

A depression of unprecedented magnitude held the land in its vicious grip.

Over eleven and a half million Americans found themselves in a desperate plight--they were without jobs.<sup>1</sup>

Millions of other Americans, who were lucky enough to hold jobs, were afraid and disheartened. They were afraid of losing their jobs; they were troubled because their incomes were gravely lowered by cuts in wages and reduction in hours of work.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Estimate for October, 1932, by the American Federation of Labor. Cited in Harold U. Faulkner, American Economic History (New York, 1949), 651. The exact number of the unemployed could not be known because of the lack of comprehensive and accurate statistics. On this point see Russell A. Nixon and Paul A. Samuelson, "Estimates of Unemployment in the United States," Review of Economic Statistics (Cambridge, Mass.), XXII (August, 1940), 101-11. Estimates of unemployment made by the A. F. of L., the National Industrial Conference Board, the Alexander Hamilton Institute, and Robert Nathan for the President's Committee on Economic Security, showed variations because of differing definitions of "unemployment" and of deficiencies in the statistical material available. Nixon and Samuelson were of the view that the A. F. of L.'s method was "careful and thorough and results in an unemployment figure that is probably nearest to being the correct under the definitions adopted."

<sup>2</sup>The hourly wage rates of unskilled factory laborers declined 25 per cent between July, 1929, and July, 1933. Further, while unskilled laborers worked 51 hours per week in September, 1929, they averaged only 32.9 hours in March, 1933. Daniel Ahearn, Jr., The Wages of Farm and Factory Laborers 1914-1944 (New York, 1945), 156, 159.

The social and economic structure of capitalism, whose praise had been sung in joyous chorus by press, pulpit and platform during the "Prosperity Decade" of the 'twenties, stood revealed to many as decadent and decrepit. For long Americans had been taught to regard it with pride and to believe in the efficacy of "rugged individualism." That was found to be only too true since the depression hit the country. Life was indeed "rugged" for the man without a job.

It was an eerie and fantastic situation that prevailed in the "richest country of the world"--poverty in the midst of plenty. The textile industry, for instance, was reported to be sick because of overproduction, but thousands of Americans were without adequate clothing. In the fertile agricultural country around Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the unemployed were fed with bread that was often stale while farmers of the same area faced ruin owing to the big drop in the prices of wheat and eggs.<sup>3</sup>

In many cities across the land the destitute were reduced to the degradation of ransacking garbage cans in the hope of finding a few crumbs to eat.

Around the truck which was unloading garbage and other refuse were about thirty-five men, women

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<sup>3</sup>Some of these scenes of suffering were described by Norman Thomas in "This Crazy World," typescript, 1932, Norman Thomas Papers (New York Public Library, N. Y.).

and children. As soon as the truck pulled away from the pile, all of them started digging with sticks, some with their hands, grabbing bits of food and vegetables.<sup>4</sup>

That was a Chicago street scene in 1932. Meanwhile, in the rich farmlands of the Midwest, farmers talked of a strike because they could not get adequate prices in the market.

Skyscrapers rose high in the big cities of America, but in their shadow men slept with newspaper sheets serving as blankets. Some of those "vagrants" had, perhaps, helped in constructing those very edifices.

Unemployed men selling apples at a nickel apiece had been a common sight in the streets of many American cities. But by 1932 people were reported to be "sick of apples" and, if a pauper were presumptuous enough to offer apples for sale, he was in imminent peril of being jostled out by the forces of law and order. "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?" became the plaintive theme song of the hungry American.

The patterns of unemployment and wage cuts were not identical in the different sectors of the economy. Industrial wage-earners, farm workers and farmers were the hardest hit by the depression. Unskilled industrial laborers were the first to be laid off by factories, and they had very few opportunities to find new jobs. But even skilled workers were laid off by the score in some of the industries that were

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<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Dixon Wecter, The Age of the Great Depression (New York, 1948), 39-40.

particularly depressed. For instance, the durable goods and construction industries were severely hit by the depression and, as a result, a high incidence of unemployment prevailed among engineers and allied technicians.<sup>5</sup>

Over half a million farm laborers were without gainful employment. Many lost their jobs because unemployed workers from cities returned home to the family farm in order to eke out a living. Declining farm prices resulted in a drastic reduction of wages for those workers who managed to hang on to their jobs. The money wages of farm workers in 1932 were only about half of what they were in 1929.<sup>6</sup>

It was true that the depression brought along with it a reduction in the cost of living. But this fall was not sufficient to maintain the purchasing power of wage rates at the level that existed at the outset of the depression.<sup>7</sup>

Farmers were seriously hurt by the depression. Prices of farm products tumbled down to levels that had not been

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<sup>5</sup>"At the end of 1932 more than one tenth of the engineers were simultaneously unemployed; at one time or another between the beginning of 1930 and the end of 1934 more than one third of the engineers had some period of unemployment, and half of those who became unemployed were out of work for more than a year." Broadus Mitchell, Depression Decade (New York, 1947), 97.

<sup>6</sup>See Table on money wages, cost of living, and real wages of farm and factory laborers in Ahearn, Wages of Farm and Factory Laborers, 172.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

encountered over several decades. Wheat sold for 37 cents a bushel, a price lower than any to be found in the post-Civil War records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Cotton sold for 6.1 cents a pound, a price that equalled the previous low record set in of 1897. The prices of tobacco, cottonseed and potatoes slipped to levels that had never been known since the farm depression of the 1890's. There was hardly any farm product that escaped the price collapse.<sup>8</sup> Thousands of farmers went bankrupt and faced the threat of being evicted from their lands by foreclosures on mortgages.

Numerous middle class families were also injured by the business collapse. Nine million savings accounts were wiped out during the three years of the depression and in the same period 85,000 businesses failed, involving liabilities of \$4½ billions.<sup>9</sup> Another heart-rending element in the crisis was the frustration of young people who were just venturing forth into the world and meeting with crushing disappointments in their efforts to secure jobs. Equally poignant were the disabilities of the second class citizens of the United States--the Negroes. Even in normal times Negroes were often "last to be hired and first to be fired." It was doubly difficult for them not only to obtain jobs but in certain cases even to get relief on equal terms with the unemployed

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>9</sup> Wecter, Great Depression, 16.



whites.

To what extent did the depression affect the owners of non-landed capital? Many individuals who had engaged in imprudent speculation were financially ruined and there were a few cases of wealthy men who were overwhelmed by disaster. The "paper" wealth of owners of non-landed capital declined very much owing to the fall in the prices of securities.<sup>10</sup> The net profits of corporations also declined considerably. But, as many corporations had followed a policy of building up reserves for the protection of the stock and bond holders, "the cash income of the owners of American corporations... was maintained to a truly remarkable degree."<sup>11</sup>

Even a casual glance at the advertisements and the "society" columns of metropolitan newspapers for the year 1932 will show that the "Lords of Creation" and the gentlemen of property were not grievously injured by the depression.

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<sup>10</sup>According to the stock price averages compiled by Dow-Jones & Co., prices on 65 stocks that averaged \$125.43 in 1929 had fallen to \$26.82 in 1932. Cited in Mitchell, Depression Decade, 438.

<sup>11</sup>Paul H. Douglas, "Dividends Soar, Wages Drop," World Tomorrow (New York, N. Y.), XV (December 28, 1932), 611-12. "While dividend and interest payments did begin to fall off in 1932, wages declined still more. While wages in manufacturing for the nine months from January to September, 1932, averaged less than 43 per cent of their totals in 1926 and 1929, the dividend and interest payments were at a rate only five per cent below those of 1929 and 64 per cent above those of 1926. It should moreover be remembered that the fall in living costs made the gain in the real income of the stock and bondholders even greater than is indicated by the monetary figures alone."

There one finds the same gay tattle about diamonds and minks and yachts as in times when "normalcy" reigned over the land. Sometimes reports of the doings of the rich appeared in juxtaposition with stories of the hunger and distress of the unemployed, thus providing a touch of unintended irony. The Philadelphia Record, for instance, carried a report from the chairman of the Philadelphia County Relief Committee to the effect that tens of thousands of the city's unemployed could never get back to work because machinery had taken away their jobs. On the same day the newspaper reported the arrangements for a social gathering of millionaires. It was stated that two hundred and fifty leaders of America's business and industrial world would be entertained by Mr. Joseph E. Widener and would view his art collection, which was reputedly one of the finest in the country. The guests, it was stated, "comprise a social club consisting of millionaires who have winter homes in Miami Beach, or who visit Floridian waters in their palatial yachts." The rooms that contained the treasured works of art were touchingly described. One of them was devoted exclusively to French works.

An 18th century room of French works of art contains a celebrated Boucher tapestry, almost covering an entire wall, while Houdon busts, flowered Chinese vases and Louis XV chairs from the palace at Versailles recall the days of Madame Du Barry, her pet monkeys and the dissolute French king who once exclaimed, "After me, the deluge."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Cited in World Tomorrow, XV (November 9, 1932), 447.

Could traditional political processes avail in the face of the grave national emergency? There was a great deal of discussion on this issue in the dark days of 1932. The American Legion openly placed itself on record as having no confidence in the efficacy of "existing political methods" to solve the nation's critical problems.<sup>13</sup> The feeling appeared to be widespread that the crisis could not be overcome without firm, energetic and determined action on the part of the President and the Federal Government. That ominous word, "dictatorship," began to make its appearance in the columns of American journals. The Nation, for instance, ran a series of articles by various dignitaries under the caption, "If I were a Dictator." "Give Us a Demagogue," said Milton Mayer in an article in the Forum.<sup>14</sup> "Does America Need a Dictator?" asked the editor of the American Political Science Review in yet another disquisition.<sup>15</sup>

There were but few voices raised demanding the establishment of a dictatorship in the United States. Some observers looked enviously at Italy, where a "strong man" had kept order and had even made trains run on time. At least one United States Senator confessed in an unguarded moment that

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<sup>13</sup>Walter Lippmann, Interpretations 1931-1932 (New York, 1932), 30.

<sup>14</sup>Milton S. Mayer, "Give Us a Demagogue," Forum (Concord, N.H.), LXXXVIII (November, 1932), 274.

<sup>15</sup>Frederick A. Ogg, "Does America Need a Dictator?" Current History (New York, N.Y.), XXXVI (September, 1932), 641-48. The author answered the question in the negative.

an American Mussolini would not be bad medicine for the nation's malady. A popular historian expressed the view that the advent of an American Mussolini would not be in contradiction to American national character. "The United States with its sentimental devotion to leaders, its 'Teddies' and its 'Cals,' its love of efficiency and getting things done, looked towards Rome," said James Truslow Adams.<sup>16</sup> A prominent newspaper publisher announced that the time had come for the President of the United States to assume dictatorial powers and to rule the nation under martial law.<sup>17</sup> Ralph Adam Cram, a renowned architect, felt convinced that it was the duty of the President to be ready to act "outside the law" in order to save the nation.

Some of the men who talked in this fashion appeared to be impelled by the belief that the traditional methods of democratic government were ill-adapted to the task of leading the nation out of its state of economic and moral collapse.

They were converts to the idea of "strong" rule, but it was hardly clear what goal they expected such rule to achieve except the restoration of the status quo ante.

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<sup>16</sup>James Truslow Adams, "Shadow of Man on Horseback," Atlantic Monthly (Concord, N.H.), CXLIX (January, 1932), 10. Adams added, however, that he could not foretell what would happen in the United States "except that life goes on and on, and institutions forever change."

<sup>17</sup>Bernarr Macfadden in an editorial in Liberty. Quoted by Ogg, "Does America Need a Dictator?" Current History, XXXVI (September, 1932), 646.

There was another group of persons, influential in business and commercial circles, who also believed that the President should assume emergency powers. Owen D. Young made a suggestion to this effect in a commencement address at Notre Dame University. The chairman of the United States Chamber of Commerce, Julius E. Barnes, urged the creation of a high-powered Council of National Defence to serve as a sort of super-cabinet. Naturally enough the business leaders believed that they should be called upon to play an important role in such a super-cabinet. They asserted that they were primarily interested in helping to place the nation on its feet, but it was suspected by their critics that their principal objectives were to secure federal aid for themselves and to check the possible growth of radicalism in the country.

There were large numbers of Americans who were sickened by the failure of political and business leaders and who dreamed about the emergence of a new, resolute, and virtuous leadership that would lead the nation out of chaos by imposing a regime of enlightened austerity and discipline. Walter Lippmann, for instance, declared that the American people were anxiously awaiting new leaders of vision and determination.

They are looking for new leaders, for men who are truthful and resolute and eloquent in the conviction that the American destiny is to be free and magnanimous, rather than complacent and acquisitive; they are looking for leaders who will talk to the people ... about their duty, and about the sacrifices they must make, and about the discipline they must impose upon themselves, and about their responsibility to the world and to posterity, about all those things which make a people self-respecting, serene, and

confident. May they not look in vain.<sup>18</sup>

Would the hunger, the distress and the misery of countless thousands and their alleged dissatisfaction with old line political and economic leaders climax in a violent revolution in the United States? Heated were the discussions on this subject in Park Avenue apartments as well as in Greenwich Village gatherings of writers and "intellectuals."<sup>19</sup> To what extent the weary and dejected men on the breadlines contemplated recourse to the barricades and brickbats could never be known because few of them rushed into print with their innermost thoughts. But many others were prepared to do their thinking for them.

"The word revolution is heard at every hand," reported one scribe in an article in Harper's Magazine.<sup>20</sup> Elmer Davis was worried because "solid and sensible citizens" as distinct from the speakeasy intelligentsia were asking him whether a revolution was imminent.<sup>21</sup> Testifying before a Congressional Committee, a spokesman for the American Federation of Labor

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<sup>18</sup>Lippmann, Interpretations 1931-1932, 29.

<sup>19</sup>George Soule, "Are We Going to have a Revolution?" Harper's Magazine (New York, N.Y.), CLXV (August, 1932), 277.

<sup>20</sup>George R. Leighton, "And If the Revolution Comes," Harper's Magazine, CLXIV (March, 1932), 466.

<sup>21</sup>Elmer Davis, "The Collapse of Politics," Harper's Magazine, CLXV (September, 1932), 387.

declared that there was a possibility of a revolt among workers unless something tangible were done to relieve their distress.<sup>22</sup>

Creep, my ember! Blaze my brand!  
The end of all things is at hand.  
Idlers in the market place,  
Make an end to your disgrace!  
Here's a fair day's work for you,--  
To build a world all over new.

Thus did a fiery poetess exhort the "idlers" to action though no one could say with any certainty how many read and were inspired by that inflammatory appeal in the staid columns of the Atlantic Monthly.<sup>23</sup> Lloyd's of London announced that for the first time in their history they were selling riot and civil commotion insurance in quantity to American clients.<sup>24</sup> National Guard authorities in Illinois drew up elaborate instructions for the guidance of their men on how to disperse unruly mobs. The Guardsmen were to shoot "with full-charge ammunition and the battlesight."<sup>25</sup>

The proletariat, however, was obviously disinclined to act in the manner foretold by the apostles of revolution. The

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<sup>22</sup> Testimony of Edward F. McGrady before the Senate Manufactures Committee. American Federation of Labor Weekly News Service (Washington, D. C.), XXII (May 14, 1932), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Florence Converse, "Bread Line," Atlantic Monthly, CXLIX (January, 1932), 55.

<sup>24</sup> Wecter, Great Depression, 16.

<sup>25</sup> The headquarters of the 33rd Division of the Illinois National Guard secretly circulated a booklet entitled, "Emergency Plans for Domestic Disturbances." Excerpts from it were quoted by World Tomorrow, XV (April, 1932), 103.

nearest approaches to large-scale mass action during the year were the "siege" of Washington D. C. by the so-called Bonus Army, and the siege of Council Bluffs and Sioux City by angry Iowan farmers led by Miles Reno of the National Farmers' Holiday Association. Despite a few alarmistic reports, neither of them constituted a threat to the safety and security of established American institutions.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps few in the United States really believed that a revolutionary outbreak was imminent. Times were bad and life was drab and it was an exciting thing, especially for the "intellectuals," to talk about revolution.

As the unemployed and the underprivileged continued to show a remarkable lack of eagerness to stage a revolutionary drama for the benefit of sideline enthusiasts, many were the gibes that were thrown in their direction. How could the American who, when he lost his temper, fiddled with his radio and listened to the mouthings of Amos 'n Andy, ever be expected to start a revolution, asked George Sokolsky.

As long as every American believes that he has as many chances as John D. Rockefeller to become

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<sup>26</sup> For a good, brief account of the Bonus Army, see E. Francis Brown, "The Bonus Army Marches to Defeat," Current History, XXXVI (September, 1932), 684-88. The case of the veterans is explained in Walter Waters, B. E. F. : The Whole Story of the Bonus Army (New York, 1933). The view that Communists, hoodlums, and ex-convicts were dominant in the Bonus Army is expounded by Herbert Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, 4 vols. (New York, 1952), IV, 225-32.

On the farmers' "strike," see Wecter, Great Depression, 140.



a millionaire, to join a country club, and to get into the upper social brackets, he will not become a revolutionist. Hungry, he will pull in his belt. Annoyed, he will vote for a Democrat. Angry, he will demand beer. Despairing, he will telephone his Congressman....<sup>27</sup>

Why didn't the masses get out and do some thing instead of "bumming around" and blaming prohibition, asked another indignant parlor revolutionist. A third columnist immediately provided the answer--the American masses were hardly capable of intelligent thinking. "Personally, I don't think there is anything much going on in the minds of the masses of the American people because I think relatively few of them have minds," declared Frank R. Kent, with an air of finality.<sup>28</sup>

There were many writers who, while they did not desire to sound a call to arms, were still disgusted at what they believed to be the utter passivity of the masses. Walter Lippmann, for instance, castigated the American people for becoming "absurdly demoralized" and fatalistic. "We have looked upon our troubles," said he, "not as problems to be solved, but as so much bad weather in which the chief thing to do was to sit in front of the barometer and wait for a change in the wind."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>George Sokolsky, "Will Revolution Come?" Atlantic Monthly, CL (August, 1932), 191.

<sup>28</sup>Frank R. Kent in a symposium on "The Future of American Government," Forum, LXXXVII (May, 1932), 292.

<sup>29</sup>Lippmann, Interpretations 1931-1932, 6-7.

"No, I see no guillotines ahead," chuckled Hendrikk Willem Van Loon.

A nation brought up in fear of God, the Constitution and headwaiters will never dance a Carmagnole around a Tree of Liberty erected in front of the Union League Club. In the first place, the Constitution does not mention Trees of Liberty. In the second place, headwaiters would not think it quite the thing to do, and in the third place, God now being at the front with the Japanese and Chinese armies, He cannot be consulted, and without His sanction it would hardly be wise to take so deliberate a step.<sup>30</sup>

On the whole, however, the depression and the human suffering that it brought on made a powerful impact on a significant segment of the intellectuals--on the socially-conscious writers, teachers and clergymen. Many of them had harbored misgivings about the ethics and morality of America's "business civilization." They had recoiled from what they believed to be the unashamed hedonism and acquisitiveness fostered by such a way of life. The depression had, however, brought the "banksters" to their knees and the sight was one that bewildered some of the literati, made others anxiously look around for a "liberal" messiah in shining armour and gave yet others a sense of exhilaration and of power.

The first two categories of intellectuals were those who had not lost belief in the traditional social, economic and political institutions of the country. They recognized shortcomings in those institutions and were anxious to remedy

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<sup>30</sup>Hendrikk Willem Van Loon, "Speaking of Revolution....," Nation (New York, N.Y.), CXXXIII (December 2, 1931), 591.

them. But they were certainly not radicals nor did they envision basic and fundamental changes in American institutions. But there were the other groups of intellectuals who were affected differently by the depression. They felt that they had a mission to perform.

One couldn't help being exhilarated at the sudden unexpected collapse of that stupid gigantic fraud. It gave us a new sense of freedom; and it gave us a new sense of power to find ourselves carrying on while the bankers for a change were taking a beating.<sup>31</sup>

They were deeply incensed against the capitalistic system and dreamed of its being replaced by a more humane and just order of society. They felt that far reaching changes were needed in order to attain that objective. The tactics of "liberalism" and "progressivism" appeared to them to be futile and ineffective to the needs of the times. Liberalism, said Lincoln Steffens, had merely brought about the reform of the graft system and an improvement of the administration of rackets, "which have increased in number, power, value and efficiency."<sup>32</sup> Such men regarded the activities of the two major parties as cheap and misleading stunts to gather votes. They were sickened by the inane utterances of old-line politicians. Indicative of the mood of this segment of

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<sup>31</sup>Edmund Wilson, quoted by Granville Hicks, Where We Came Out (New York, 1954), 32.

<sup>32</sup>Lincoln Steffens, "Bankrupt Liberalism," New Republic (New York, N. Y.), LXX (February 17, 1932), 15.

intelligentsia was the slogan, Farewell to Reform.<sup>33</sup>

Criticisms of the social and economic order emanated also from gatherings of churchmen. The quadrennial conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Atlantic City in May, 1932, adopted the following resolution:

Confronted by the spectacle of the breakdown of our social and economic structure around the world, with its toll of human want and misery, it is clear that the Church must not acquiesce in the continuance of the present status. An economic order that produces privileged classes has proved itself incapable of performing the elementary duty of providing the whole population with the means of existence and growth.... The present industrial order is unchristian, unethical and anti-social because it is largely based on the profit-motive which is a direct appeal to selfishness. Selfishness is never morally right, never Christian, and eventually never benefits anybody.... The present calamity is becoming increasingly threatening, so that it makes imperative a reconstruction of our economic order.<sup>34</sup>

At the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America held in Colorado attempts were made to have resolutions adopted criticising the existing social and economic order. But these attempts were thwarted and a vague resolution was finally passed that exhorted churchmen to be active in the continuing fight against social abuses.

A Fellowship of Socialist Christians came into being under the leadership of Reinhold Niebuhr, Roswell P. Barnes and

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<sup>33</sup>Book title. John Chamberlain, Farewell to Reform (New York, 1932). Chamberlain felt that the pet political solutions of progressives had proved to be "weak reeds" because they had failed to comprehend the true nature of capitalism.

<sup>34</sup>"The Methodists Fall Back and Advance," World Tomorrow, XV (July, 1932), 199.

Buell G. Gallagher. These men believed that there was "an essential conflict between Christianity and the ethics of capitalistic individualism." They held that class struggle was a reality, and they declared their readiness to fight with militant non-violence against social and economic injustice.<sup>35</sup>

The Central Conference of American Rabbis declared that the capitalist order was "neither economically sound nor can it be morally sanctioned." The Rabbis advocated "immediate legislative action in the direction of changes whereby social control will place the instruments of production and distribution as well as the system of profits, increasingly within the power of society as a whole."<sup>36</sup>

A high dignitary of the Catholic Church, Bishop Urban J. Vehr, condemned the "system" that had permitted millions to go hungry and a few to control the wealth of the nation.<sup>37</sup>

An upsurge of radicalism was also noticeable among students of theological seminaries. The Union Theological Seminary of New York gave ample evidence of such a trend.

The radicalism of these segments of the intelligentsia and their militant condemnation of traditional social and economic institutions was a significant development in

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<sup>35</sup>"Fellowship of Socialist Christians," World Tomorrow, XV (February, 1932), 39.

<sup>36</sup>"We Salute the Rabbis!" World Tomorrow, XV (November 23, 1932), 486.

<sup>37</sup>Speech before a meeting of the Catholic Conference on Industrial Relations. American Federation of Labor Weekly News Service, XXII (May 14, 1932), 1.

American intellectual life. How long would such radicalism last? Would it take any tangible political form? Or would the intellectuals show themselves, as Trotsky had once warned, to be mere radishes--red on the outside and white inside? A cynical observer muttered that the American radishes would bleach promptly if ever the bond market went up.<sup>38</sup>

While radical writers turned to proletarian themes and preachers talked about the class struggle, there was one group of men who did not indicate any desire to subvert the capitalistic system or to reform it root and branch. Ironically enough these men were the leaders of the biggest organization of the proletariat--the American Federation of Labor. Steeped in the hoary tradition of "pure and simple" unionism, the labor bosses refused to be tainted with radicalism even when over twelve million of their fellow-countrymen were jobless and countless other endured drastic wage cuts. The A. F. of L. leaders denied the existence of any class struggle in the United States with a vigor and persistence that positively nauseated the brand new radicals. William Green, president of the A. F. of L., boasted that labor "has steadfastly refused to isolate itself from other groups of American citizens, to develop and emphasize class lines...."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>William C. White, "The Good Communist. Is This What the Newly-Become Radicals Want," Scribner's Magazine (New York, N. Y.), XCII (August, 1932), 91.

<sup>39</sup>American Federation of Labor Weekly News Service, XXII (May 7, 1932), 1.

Green and his associates advocated shorter working hours and an extensive program of public works and condemned "lay offs" and wage cuts. Beyond that they saw no need to depart from the traditional policies of their organization. Green did not envisage partisan political activity by the Federation, nor would he countenance for a moment the thought of an independent labor party functioning outside of and in opposition to the two established political parties.<sup>40</sup>

There was grumbling and criticism among the rank and file members of unions. One union official stated that seventy five per cent of the time in union meetings was taken up by the men cussin' those who had brought the country to such straits.<sup>41</sup> But headman Green kept close watch on his flock, and he offered them a time-honored prescription for curing their ills. 1932 was an election year, Green pointed out. Labor, he thundered, would strain every nerve to help elect its friends and to defeat its enemies. In this search for friend and foe, Green's attention was, as usual, focussed

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<sup>40</sup> Green made a guarded reference to this subject in a statement before the New Jersey Federation of Labor on September 8, 1932. "I believe when the time comes, if it does come, when the men and women of the great working class believe their best interests will be served by the organization of an independent political party, they will adopt that plan." Quoted in "Labor's Own Party--When?" World Tomorrow, XV (September 21, 1932), 268.

<sup>41</sup> Testimony of Edward P. McGrady before the Senate Manufactures Committee, American Federation of Labor Weekly News Service, XXII (May 14, 1932), p. 1.

exclusively on the Democratic and Republican parties. He did not choose to look beyond them, nor did he feel impelled to call for any basic changes in the social and economic system that the older parties espoused. To him the system was not at fault; it was only the evil enemies of labor who had contrived to bring on bad times. Father Green would place his imprimatur on the "friends," and if the American people were wise enough to elect them to office, all would be well.

1932 was an election year. The American people were to choose their rulers.

The Republicans, as the party in power, were worried that the people might blame them for the country's troubles and turn against them. The Democrats scented victory in the air and pressed hard for the kill.

Twelve and a half million Americans were jobless; hundreds of thousands of others were in distress. A vocal segment of the nation's literati was loudly critical of established institutions and parties.

But in 1932 hardly anybody expected a "third" political party to score a run-away victory in the national elections and secure a mandate from the people for a revolutionary reconstruction of society. There were many, however, who believed that owing to the extraordinary crisis to which the nation had been subjected, a considerable volume of "protest" votes might go to third parties.

The Socialist party of America was the most important



"third" party in the United States in 1932.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN 1932

In 1928 the Socialist nominee for the presidency of the United States of America polled a meager 267,835 votes. It was the lowest vote that the Socialist party had received since 1900. The political fortunes of American socialism appeared to have sunk to their nadir. Many observers expressed the view that the party had virtually reached the end of the road, and even the faithful were filled with forebodings.<sup>1</sup>

Several causes had contributed to the debacle of the Socialist party. It had begun to slip after 1912, when it reached the crest of its organizational strength. The party had 118,045 dues-paying members and polled 897,001 votes in the presidential election of that year.<sup>2</sup> But a former

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<sup>1</sup>For the origins of the Socialist party see Howard H. Quint, The Forging of American Socialism (Columbia, 1953). Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement 1897-1912 (New York, 1952), traces the history of the movement during the period 1897-1912. An important earlier work is that of Nathan Fine, Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States 1828-1928 (New York, 1928). A good brief account of the history of the Socialist and Communist parties is to be found in Daniel Bell, "Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Donald D. Egbert and Stow Persons (eds.), Socialism and American Life, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1952), I, 215-405.

<sup>2</sup>U. S. P. membership report 1900-1932, "Memorandum from the National Secretary to the National Executive Committee (N. E. C.), December 8, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party (Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.). See Appendix A.

professor from Princeton lured away from the fold many a fiery intellectual with his seductive talk about the New Freedom. The party's militant stand against the war, while resulting in the resignation of some prominent Socialists, won for it new and surprising support, particularly in northern industrial and foreign language centers.<sup>3</sup> But soon the full force of governmental repression was directed against it, and, in many places where the strong arm of the government was not evident, vigilante groups took upon themselves the task of demonstrating forcibly to the "Reds" how unwise it was for Americans to be "disloyal." Intimidation and persecution disorganized the machinery of the party in many states. Weakened as the party was as a result of its war-time vicissitudes, it was further shaken by the repercussions of a successful revolution in distant Russia. The party was rent in twain in 1919 after a fratricidal struggle. When the dust settled down following the expulsion of individuals and organizations advocating a "Bolshevik" course for the party, Socialist leaders found that their organization was virtually skeletonized. Membership tumbled down from 104,822 in 1919 to a mere 26,766 in 1920.<sup>4</sup>

The party's influence in the West and the South West ebbed away as the lot of the farmer began to improve steadily.

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<sup>3</sup>Bell, "Marxian Socialism," in Egbert and Persons (eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, 314.

<sup>4</sup>See Appendix A.

The Federal Reserve Act of 1913 and the Federal Farm Loan System of 1916 made credit available to the farmer on much easier terms than before. Farm incomes rose as food exports to Europe increased tremendously during the war. In Oklahoma, where the party had once received the highest percentage of a state vote, discovery of oil dealt a serious blow to the movement. "Hope of petroleum was for a time the farmer's dream and his Utopia."<sup>5</sup>

The precipitous decline in the party's strength after 1920, induced several Socialists to think in terms of a new orientation of the party's tactics. They scanned the horizon for the emergence of a new farmer-labor party of which their organization could be a component part. They felt that they had found at least a partial answer to their prayers in the third party sentiment that crystallized in support of the candidacy of Robert M. La Follette Sr., for the presidency of the United States. Socialists threw themselves with great enthusiasm in the La Follette campaign in 1924 and spared no efforts to advance the cause. The collapse of the La Follette movement soon after the election left many of them dispirited and discouraged. Their party had not merely failed to enhance its prestige and power by participating in the La Follette campaign but had actually been weakened organizationally. "In the years immediately following, it was a difficult,

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<sup>5</sup>Norman Thomas, America's Way Out (New York, 1931), 286.

often disheartening task to maintain a semblance of life in the dismembered, discouraged, and seemingly hopeless organization."<sup>6</sup>

With the advent of "Coolidge Prosperity," the situation in the country became even less conducive than before to the spread of the message of socialism. Party membership dropped down to 7,425 in 1927 and the presidential campaign of the following year attracted only 370 new members. The shrill prophecies of inevitable doom of capitalism from socialist Cassandras could hardly be heard amidst the din caused by the joyous hallelujas of the stock market operators. The Socialist party also lost three of its important leaders during those lean years. The beloved Eugene Victor Debs died in 1926. Tragic street accidents claimed the lives of Victor Berger and Meyer London in 1929.

American socialism was in a sad plight--its organization enfeebled, its ranks depleted and its coffers virtually empty.

The party had little support from organized labor. In a country where the belief was widely prevalent that a political boss was one who had the capacity to distribute loaves and fishes among his adherents, the average man, perhaps, looked askance at a party that not only could not offer him anything "tangible" but demanded a regular payment of dues. Most of the nation's intellectuals shunned the party.

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<sup>6</sup> Morris Hillquit, Loose Leaves from a Busy Life (New York, 1934), 323. Autobiography of a veteran Socialist leader.

Men of ambition could see little point in linking their fortunes to so frail a craft. The philosophy that had attracted men of intellect and action to the socialist parties of Europe did not prove to be a potent factor in the United States. It was simply not "smart" to be a socialist in the United States of America.

Nor did the Socialist party offer the ambitious man or woman a chance to exercise power--unrestrained power over a fellow human being. Love of power could be a potent factor influencing human action. An iron discipline, implicit obedience to dictates from above, and ruthless exaction of obedience from those below--these have a strange appeal to some men and women. But the Socialist party was hopelessly democratic! It was not a monolithic organization; it conducted its affairs in a democratic fashion; its leaders did not demand the right to dictate to the membership.

Socialism was regarded by many Americans as a foreign importation that was inimical to the nation's traditions of private enterprise and rugged individualism. The Socialist party itself "did sometimes talk with an accent" because of the large number of European immigrants in its ranks. In 1928 a little over 3,000 out of a total membership of 7,793 belonged to the foreign language federations affiliated to the party.<sup>7</sup> Indeed to a large extent the party's survival

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<sup>7</sup>For an account of the role of the foreign language federations, see Appendix B.

was due to the moral and material support of those organizations.

From the earliest days of the movement, many leaders believed that the party could not make any significant progress in the United States unless it was "Americanized." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, eyeing the infant socialist movement across the Atlantic, had stressed the need for the Americanization of the Socialist Labor party. Engels wrote to his friend, Friederich A. Sorge, that the most salutary development that could take place in the socialist movement in the United States would be the disappearance of the belligerent "alte Genossen" Germans who then dominated the S.L.P.<sup>8</sup> The problem of Americanization continued to plague the Socialist party, and the encouraging growth of the movement in the West gave rise to hopes that it was on the way to solution. Those hopes were frustrated and the party found itself very much dependent on the support of the foreign language groups. "In dozens and dozens of cities," reported the secretary of the Jewish Socialist Verband in 1932, "our groups were the only ones active in every phase of our party work. ...Many cities do not have any English-speaking branches, nor any other branches of the party, but a Yiddish speaking branch."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Correspondence 1846-1895 (New York, 1942), 467,502; cited by Quint, Forging of American Socialism, 35.

<sup>9</sup>Report of N. Chanin, secretary of the Jewish Socialist Verband, to the Seventeenth National Convention of the Socialist party, May 21, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

Many prominent Socialists belonging to the foreign language groups were far from happy about the situation. They realized that the degree of the party's dependence on such groups was neither healthy nor desirable. W. N. Reivo, secretary of the Finnish Federation, strongly put forth such a point of view.

We feel that the American element should direct and control the American labor movement in all its branches. No foreign element can be of great help to the Socialist party directly, but only by the propaganda it carries on among its own nationality. The time when the Socialist party was largely dominated by the foreign element is particularly the unhappiest time of the Party. However, it is for the American element to increase its membership so that it will stay in control.

The future of the Socialist party in America is in the native born stock. The days of the language federations are past. They will continue to live and function, but they should not be expected to become an active, virile element again.<sup>10</sup>

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Among the veterans who stood loyally by the party during the lean years of the late 'twenties, only a few were prominent enough to be known to non-socialists outside their

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<sup>10</sup> W. N. Reivo, "The Finnish Socialists in America," The March of Socialism: Journal of the Seventeenth National Convention of the Socialist Party (Milwaukee, 1932), 13.



respective states. The best known among the veterans was Morris Hillquit, national chairman of the party. Hillquit was not merely a dedicated Socialist but an outstanding lawyer, a widely read scholar and a gentleman. Charles Beard recorded that he had never known another man "who could hold so firmly to his convictions and yet confront the convictions of others with so little bitterness and intolerance. ...he was one of my few acquaintances in New York whom I would call truly 'civilized'--civilized in the wide range of his interest and knowledge and sympathies."<sup>11</sup>

Hillquit was born in Riga, capital of Latvia, on August 1, 1869.<sup>12</sup> His parents were German-speaking Jews. Riga was a cosmopolitan city bearing the imprint of German and Russian influences. Hillquit grew up to be "a bilingual and cosmopolitan, without any marked national traits." When he was 17, his family emigrated to the United States and Hillquit went to work in a shirt factory. Later he taught in an evening school and studied law in his leisure hours. After successfully completing the prescribed examinations, he entered the law school of New York University and was admitted to the bar in 1893.

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<sup>11</sup>Charles A. Beard, "The Noblest Traditions of Mankind," New Leader (New York, N. Y.), XVII (October 6, 1934), 13.

<sup>12</sup>Hillquit's autobiography, Loose Leaves from a Busy Life, does not give an adequate picture of the man and his work. The most comprehensive study of Hillquit's career is to be found in Robert W. Iversen, "Morris Hillquit: American Social Democrat" (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1951).

Within a few months after his arrival in the United States, Hillquit began to interest himself in the Socialist movement. He became a member of the Socialist Labor Party (S.L.P.), as soon as he reached the age of 18. His first political job was that of clerk at the party's office on a salary of four dollars a week. Abraham Cahan, an enterprising journalist, induced the youthful clerk to become his assistant in a new venture--a Yiddish newspaper known as the Arbeiter Zeitung. For a salary of five dollars a week, Hillquit served as "business manager, associate editor and official poet, under contract to furnish one inspirational poem per week."<sup>13</sup>

In 1888, Hillquit along with a few other Jewish members of the S.L.P., founded the United Hebrew Trades, an organization having as its objective the promotion of co-operation among Jewish trade unions and the dissemination of the Socialist message. He also played an important part in the organization of the garment workers and became the trusted counsellor of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. "He was," declared David Dubinsky, several years later, "the designer of our industrial policies, the pathfinder in our struggles, and the spiritual leader of our masses."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>William M. Feigenbaum, "A Story of Fifty Years of Devotion to Socialism," New Leader, XVII (October 6, 1934), 3, 20.

<sup>14</sup>David Dubinsky, "Morris Hillquit and Our International," New Leader, XVII (October 6, 1934), 16.

In the S.L.P. itself, Hillquit soon found himself in violent opposition to Daniel De Leon, its acknowledged leader. He took exception to De Leon's dictatorial manner and his advocacy of dual unionism. He led a group of insurgents out of the S.L.P. and, at a convention held in Indianapolis in 1901, his group merged with "the Social Democracy" led by Eugene Victor Debs to form the Socialist party of America. Hillquit's intellectual attainments, his forensic skill, and his competence as a lawyer soon made him one of the outstanding leaders of the new party. From 1904 he was its perennial delegate to international socialist conferences and he became intimately acquainted with the leading Socialists of Europe.

Committed as he was to the creed of social democracy, Hillquit vigorously fought the anarcho-syndicalist trends in the party represented by Big Bill Haywood, leader of the I.W.W. An attack of tuberculosis laid him low in 1912 and he was forced to spend a year in Bermuda and in Switzerland in order to regain his strength. Following the outbreak of the world war he took the lead in steering the party towards an anti-war stand. He was one of the authors of the anti-war resolution adopted by St. Louis convention of the party in 1917. His opposition to war made him an easy mark for political opponents when he ran for the office of mayor of New York City in the same year. It was perhaps, the most significant political campaign of his career. "It is the singular genius of Mr. Hillquit that he seeks at once to betray the land of his birth

and the land of his adoption," sneered the New York Times.<sup>15</sup> Theodore Roosevelt charged that the Socialist party was run by Germans as an annexe of the German autocracy. "Morris Hillquit," said the Colonel, "is pandering to treasonable and cowardly Americanism, to the pacifists, the pro-Germans, and the man who wishes Uncle Sam to negotiate an inconclusive peace. ...Yellow calls to yellow."<sup>16</sup> Unmindful of such abuse, Hillquit carried on a vigorous campaign and polled 145,332 votes, a five-fold increase over the Socialist vote in the mayoral election of 1913. Ten Socialists were elected to the State Assembly while seven won election to the Board of Aldermen. It was a heartening development for the party, but the strain of the campaign brought on a recurrence of Hillquit's old ailment.

Before long, however, Hillquit was busy defending the victims of the Espionage Act of 1917 which was used by the Wilson administration as a club to beat down Socialists and other radicals who were opposed to its war program. Failing health forced him to retire again to a health resort while dissensions mounted in the party, culminating in the split of August, 1919, and the elimination of the "Bolsheviks." Hillquit had hailed the Russian revolution with great

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<sup>15</sup>New York Times, November 2, 1917, quoted by Iversen, "Morris Hillquit," (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1951), 186.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Hillquit, Loose Leaves, 193.

enthusiasm but was soon repelled by the totalitarian implications of Leninism. His antipathy towards the Russian Bolsheviks increased with the passing of years and he became convinced that the ideology to which they subscribed was a travesty of socialism.

Hillquit threw himself with wholehearted energy in the campaign of Robert M. La Follette for the presidency in 1924. The disintegration of the forces that had backed the Wisconsin Senator left him considerably disillusioned. The deaths of Debs, London and Berger made him the principal leader of the party and, in 1929, he was elected national chairman. Hillquit was not conspicuously successful in his role of chairman of the party. His extensive legal practice and his poor health stood in the way of his devoting much time to the task of disseminating the socialist message outside New York. While his numerous treatises and articles made him the acknowledged theoretician of the party and won high praise from European socialist leaders, they did not have a significant impact on American readers. He was not a "popularizer" of the socialist philosophy, nor was he fitted to play the role of the popular leader. As long as Debs lived, the Indianan was the popular spokesman for the party, while Hillquit and Berger were recognized as its brains. Hillquit did not have the temperament or qualities that enabled some men to arouse popular enthusiasm. "...there was nothing of the prophet or popular leader in Morris Hillquit.

For that he was too aristocratic in his human passions. He was the sage behind the scenes, the Gray Eminence of the conference room."<sup>17</sup>

Increasingly in party circles as well as in the nation at large Norman Mattoon Thomas came to be looked upon as the most vigorous spokesman for American socialism. Thomas had been the party's standard bearer in the 1928 presidential campaign. Despite his low vote, he was widely regarded as the party's strongest political asset.

Thomas was born on November 20, 1884, in the town of Marion, Ohio. He was the eldest of six children. His father, Dr. Welling Evan Thomas, was a Presbyterian minister.

Dr. Thomas was an eloquent preacher in his church, but at home he conceded primacy to his wife, Emma Mattoon.<sup>18</sup> As a child Thomas was sickly and suffered from a variety of ailments. He was left-handed but his father made him write with his right hand.<sup>19</sup> In high school, Thomas proved to be a good

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<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Stolberg, Taylor's Progress (New York, 1944), 72-73. A history of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

<sup>18</sup> In an unpublished memoir that he wrote for his family in 1944, Thomas made the following comment about his background: "What a set-up for the modern psychologically-minded biographer or novelist. A study in revolt born of reaction from Presbyterian orthodoxy and the Victorian brand of Puritanism in a midwest setting. The only trouble is that this isn't what happened." Quoted in Bell, "Marxian Socialism," in Egbert and Persons, Socialism and American Life, I, 400.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. "I don't think," wrote Thomas, "that the faulty process was even responsible for my socialism. But I do suppose it added to my lack of manual skill."

student and was president of his class. While he took part in various sporting activities, the only distinction that he won was as the champion high kicker of the school. He also carried and sold the Marion Daily Star and knew the owner of the paper, Warren G. Harding.

In 1901, after Thomas graduated from high school, his family moved to Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Thomas entered Bucknell College, but his heart was set on Princeton. His desire was fulfilled when a relative came forward with an offer of financial help. Thomas made an excellent record at Princeton and took a few courses under Professor Woodrow Wilson. He was a member of the Glee Club and was also one of the ablest debaters on the campus.

From Princeton Thomas went to New York and obtained his first job as a settlement worker in a very poor neighborhood. He had an opportunity, during his two years of service, to observe the difficulties and sufferings of the underprivileged. After a trip around the world as a travelling companion to an invalid, Thomas became a worker on the staff of the Christ Church House in New York. There he met Frances Violet Stewart, who had come to organize a clinic for the treatment of tuberculosis. In 1910 they were married.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Unquestionably that has been the best thing for me personally that I ever did," Thomas wrote in an autobiographical sketch in 1932. Typescript, Thomas Papers. "The smartest action of my whole career," he exclaimed to the writer's wife in an interview in August, 1954, referring to his marriage.

Thomas entered the Union Theological Seminary and also became an assistant to Dr. Henry Van Dyke at the fashionable Brick Presbyterian Church on Fifth Avenue. Responding to a call for social service, Thomas gave up his position on the Brick Church after his graduation and became chairman of what was known as the American Parish on the upper East Side of New York. He was sponsored by a federation of churches and social agencies supported by the Presbyterian Church. Thomas also served as pastor of the East Harlem Presbyterian Church. His parish was "one of the most run-down sections" in New York City. For six years Thomas and his wife served the community and came to understand and sympathize with the immigrants of various nationalities who formed the bulk of the population in that section. It was during those years in the American Parish that Thomas "learned the tragedy of unemployment, of old age and sickness, and saw the corruption of a city government that existed for patronage and favors in taxation. He began to doubt the capacity of settlement work to touch the roots of these human tragedies."<sup>21</sup>

The young minister was not a socialist. He considered himself a progressive<sup>22</sup> and he was deeply influenced by the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch, an eloquent advocate of the

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<sup>21</sup> Devere Allen, Adventurous Americans (New York, 1932), 73. Allen was one of Thomas's trusted friends.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Thomas, A Socialist's Faith (New York, 1951), 17.



Christianization of the social and economic order.<sup>23</sup> It was the first world war that wrought his conversion to the gospel of socialism. Thomas was opposed to American entry into war "both on grounds of religion and of sound political judgment."<sup>24</sup> "God, I felt, was certainly not 'God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ' if his servants could only serve him and the cause of righteousness by the diabolic means of war."<sup>25</sup> The only political party that openly and vigorously opposed the war was the Socialist party and Thomas was drawn towards it. Morris Hillquit was then waging his mayoral campaign in New York City and Thomas wrote to him a letter of support. Some of his parishioners who had been disturbed by his outspoken pacifism, were shocked to learn of his support to the Socialist candidate. Thomas resigned his position in order to relieve

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<sup>23</sup> Rauschenbusch, who served for a long time as Professor of Church History in the Rochester Theological Seminary, "did more than any other single individual to bring the social message before the church." In one of his works, Christianizing the Social Order, he drew attention to the contradictions between the spirit of Christianity and the spirit of capitalism. "The most comprehensive and intensive act of love in which we could share," he wrote, "would be a collective action of the community to change the present organization of the economic life into a new order that would rest on the Christian principles of equal rights, democratic distribution of economic power, the supremacy of the common good, the law of mutual dependence and service, and the uninterrupted flow of good will throughout the human family." Quoted in Harry W. Laidler, Social-Economic Movements (New York, 1946), 732-33.

<sup>24</sup> Typescript autobiographical sketch by Thomas, 1932, Thomas Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Bell, "Marxian Socialism," in Egbert and Persons (eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, 400.

his church of any embarrassment on his account.

Thomas turned journalist and, in co-operation with a few friends, founded the World Tomorrow. During his four years of service as editor of the journal, he attracted considerable public notice by his bold and forthright articles. He was seriously perturbed by the violation of the civil rights of conscientious objectors and, along with Roger N. Baldwin, he was instrumental in founding the National Civil Liberties Bureau, out of which grew the American Civil Liberties Union. He saw Baldwin and his own brother, Evan Thomas, being thrown in jail for their refusal to register for the draft. Calamity struck his home when he lost the eldest of his six children and Mrs. Thomas became seriously ill.

In 1918 Thomas became a card-carrying member of the Socialist party of America. It was a time when many stalwarts like John Spargo, Charles Edward Russell, and William English Walling had turned against the party owing to its opposition to war. "What I like about Norman," said James Maurer, a veteran Socialist, "is that when the test came he did not run away like most of the intellectuals, but came out and stood shoulder to shoulder with those of us who were in the heat of the fight."<sup>26</sup> Thomas was warmly welcomed by the New York Socialists. He served as editor of the short-lived

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<sup>26</sup>Quoted in W. E. Woodward, "This is Norman Thomas," in The Intelligent Voter's Guide: Official 1928 Campaign Handbook of the Socialist Party (New York, 1928), 33.

Socialist daily, the New York Leader, and in 1922 he joined Harry W. Laidler in the task of building the League for Industrial Democracy, an organization that had grown out of the Inter-Collegiate Socialist Society founded by Upton Sinclair, Clarence Darrow and others in 1905.<sup>27</sup> He organized the Emergency Committee for Strikers' Relief and vigorously supported various strike actions. He was particularly active in helping the textile workers of Passaic, New Jersey, who were engaged in a bitter strike during 1926 and 1927. On one occasion Thomas was arrested while addressing the strikers and spent a night in the Bergen County jail.<sup>28</sup>

In 1924 Thomas was nominated as the Socialist party's candidate for the office of Governor of New York. He showed himself to be an excellent speaker and an outstanding campaigner. He was the party's nominee for an aldermanic seat in New York in 1927. When the time came for the selection of the party's nominee for the presidency in 1928, many veterans looked to Thomas as the best candidate that the party could offer. They felt that his impeccable "American" background would dispel charges that the party was run by foreign-born radicals. His courage and integrity were acknowledged even by political opponents of the party. His

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<sup>27</sup>For a brief account of the history of the L.I.D. and its association with the Socialist party, see Appendix C.

<sup>28</sup>For details of the incident see Woodward, "This is Norman Thomas," in Intelligent Voter's Guide, 51-54.

educational and clerical qualifications gave him access to middle class groups that usually fought shy of Socialist speakers. By his energetic and devoted activities in support of working people, Thomas injected a new spirit in the party.

After the campaign of 1928 Thomas became the most widely known Socialist in the land. He was in constant demand as a speaker and he travelled all over the country, carrying the message of the Socialist party. In 1932 his alma mater conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature. The citation described Thomas as a "valiant and distinguished son of Princeton," who, at the bidding of his conscience, "gave up a conventional form of ministry to his fellow men to become the fearless and upright advocate of change in the social order."

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There were many other men who had given the best years of their lives to the service of the Socialist party. They had remained loyal to the cause, sacrificing the political advancement that might have come to them if they had chosen to identify themselves with either of the two older parties.

In New York the party stalwarts included Abraham Cahan, B. Charney Vladeck, James Oneal, Algernon Lee, and Louis

Waldman. Cahan was the editor of the Jewish Daily Forward and wielded considerable influence among the Jewish workers of East Side. His radicalism had mellowed with age and he was inclined to be somewhat uncritical of the deficiencies of the labor unions in the needle trades with which he was closely associated. Cahan was virulently hostile towards the Soviet Union and to Communism in general.

Baruch Charney Vladeck, business manager of the Forward, was a different kind of a socialist. He had received his baptism of fire in the socialist movement in Russia and Poland. During his long years of service to the Socialist party in the United States, he had come to believe that socialism must be removed "out of its East Side milieu into America proper."<sup>29</sup> Vladeck was an effective debater and an even more effective fund raiser for the party. "Go to a socialist dinner and when you have eaten your way through the traditional tepid soup, broiled chicken, and brick ice-cream, if you find Baruch Charney Vladeck rising to preside over the speech-making, be prepared to give and give all but your carfare home, when the collectors come around. For the man can simply charm money out of the closest pressed wallets."<sup>29</sup>

James Oneal was the editor of the New Leader, the party's official organ. Oneal had been a member of the Social Democracy and was a delegate to the unity convention that

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<sup>29</sup>For a sympathetic account of the life of Vladeck, see Allen, Adventurous Americans (New York, 1932), 321-32.

that launched the Socialist party. He lived in Terra Haute, Indiana, till 1915 and was closely acquainted with Eugene Debs. He served later as state secretary of the party in Massachusetts. Oneal was appointed editor of the New Leader when it was launched in 1924. He was generally regarded as the historian of the party. Its school master was Algernon Lee, educational director of the Rand School of Social Science, an institution dedicated to "the systematic study of the Socialist philosophy and related subjects." Lee was credited with knowing his Karl Marx "to the last obscure comma."<sup>30</sup> Louis Waldman was an aggressive and vigorous Socialist and an able lawyer--a budding Hillquit, in the opinion of some party members.<sup>31</sup>

A Socialist of an entirely different cast from all these notabilities was Harry W. Laidler--a self-effacing scholar and a prolific writer on the history of socialism and problems of socialist policy. While still an under-graduate he participated in the founding of the Inter-Collegiate Socialist

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<sup>30</sup> McAlister Coleman, "Who are the Socialists?" World Tomorrow, XV (October 12, 1932), 348. For an account of the origin of the Rand School, see Hillquit, Loose Leaves, 62-67. For a sketch of Oneal's career, see New Leader, XVI (December 2, 1933), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Waldman himself shared that opinion. Asked if it was true that he was regarded as Hillquit's heir in the party, Waldman replied, "Perhaps that is so. It is for others to say." Waldman to the writer, March 2, 1954. For an account of Waldman's career, see his autobiographical work, Labor Lawyer (New York, 1944).

Society. After taking a law degree from the Brooklyn Law School and the Ph.D. degree from Columbia, Laidler plunged again into the socialist movement and was instrumental in the establishment of the League for Industrial Democracy. He was a close associate of Norman Thomas and the two dreamed about making the L.I.D. a great educational force in the nation.<sup>32</sup> The League was not under the control of the party and there were many non-socialists among its members. For that reason its activities were viewed with some suspicion by certain socialists, including Hillquit.

Others who were prominent in the councils of the party in New York were Jacob Fanken, Charles Solomon, August Claessens, Julius Gerber, W. M. Feigenbaum and Paul Blanshard.

In New Jersey the leading spokesman for the party was George Gosbel. In Connecticut such an honor belonged to Jasper McLevy, a practising roofer and a three-time president of the International Slate and Tile Roofers Union. Alfred Baker Lewis, scion of a wealthy family, and Albert Sprague Coolidge, a Harvard chemist, were the leading figures in the Socialist party of Massachusetts.

Outside New York City, the party was able to maintain

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<sup>32</sup>"And now there came to join him, on this collective adventure, the towering Thomas, to whose elbow Harry's head scarcely reaches. When you see them together, Thomas striding across a college campus or into a labor meeting, with Harry trotting along beside him, the physical contrast is amusing. But mentally they are a hand-in-glove affair, Thomas providing the emotional fire to Laidler's intellectual fuel." Woodward, "This is Norman Thomas," The Intelligent Voter's Guide, 41.

first Socialist to be elected to that body, Maurer served as strong bridgeheads, only in two other communities--the town of Reading in Pennsylvania and the city of Milwaukee in Wisconsin.

The Pennsylvania-Dutch community in Reading was converted to socialism principally due to the efforts of James H. Maurer, a veteran Socialist and labor leader.<sup>33</sup> Maurer had been associated with the Socialist party since its earliest days. His own conversion to socialism started with a lesson in economics that he received when he was a child of about ten years. Forced to work for pitifully low wages in order to contribute to the support of his family, little Jim found one day that his master had cut his wages in half while at the same time boosting the workload. "Well, Jimmie," said the boss when the lad pleaded for a raise, "if you don't like it, why don't you quit?"<sup>34</sup> Jim's schooling advanced a stage further when he witnessed a company of militia opening fire on a group of workers and civilians during a bitter strike in his home town. He joined the Knights of Labor and rose rapidly in the hierarchy. He was in turn a Greenbacker, Populist and Single Taxer before he found a congenial haven in the Socialist party. His energy and enthusiasm soon won for him a leading place in the councils of the party, and in 1910 the people of Reading elected him to the Pennsylvania legislature. (See Frederick I. Olson, "The Milwaukee Socialists," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1952).

<sup>33</sup> James H. Maurer, It Can Be Done (New York, 1938). An autobiography.

<sup>34</sup> W. M. Feigenbaum, "Jim Maurer, Leader of Men," Intelligent Voter's Guide, 64.



first Socialist to be elected to that body, Maurer served as a legislator for six years. In 1912 he was elected president of the Pennsylvania State Federation of Labor and held that position for a period of sixteen years before stepping down voluntarily in 1928. He served as running mate to Norman Thomas in the presidential election that year.

Among other prominent Socialists of Pennsylvania could be mentioned Darlington Hoopes and Lilith Wilson. Effective support was rendered to the efforts of these Socialists by Reading Labor Advocate.

The city of Milwaukee, where German-Americans were a potent political force, was the stronghold of the American Socialist party.<sup>35</sup> Victor Berger and Daniel Webster Hoan helped to keep the party in a healthy shape in that city. Hoan was first elected to that office in 1916 and won reelection continually since then. An effective administrator, he made Milwaukee one of the best managed towns in the nation. Hoan had plenty of drive and determination. He started life as a cook and resolved "to be the best cook ever."<sup>36</sup> In the process of accomplishing that objective he also put himself through college and law school and got elected as City

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<sup>35</sup>For a comprehensive study of the Socialist movement in Milwaukee, see Frederick I. Olson, "The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941," (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1952).

<sup>36</sup>Coleman, "Who are the Socialists?" World Tomorrow, XV (October 12, 1932), 348.

Attorney. He held that position for six years before becoming Mayor. Hoan was not a doctrinaire Marxist. To him socialism was a movement for the uplift of the common people, and his main interest lay in achieving that objective at least in a limited sphere by good municipal government.

Associated with Hoan in the Socialist movement in Wisconsin was Leo Krzycki, a Polish-American and a lithographer by trade. Krzycki was a veteran of numerous strikes including the steel strike of 1919, the coal strikes in Pennsylvania and Illinois and the textile strike in Passaic, New Jersey. He was a General Member of the Executive Board of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.

In Oklahoma, where the party had once been a strong force, Oscar Ameringer stood true to the cause.<sup>37</sup> He was, perhaps, one of the most colorful Socialists in the country. He occupied, said Carl Sandburg, "a supreme position in the American labor movement as a man of laughter, wit and satire."

When the going is good with the humorist Oscar Ameringer he is equal to the best of Artemus Ward and Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby. ...No other orator or platform man in American labor history has had this gift and used it so richly and refreshingly as Ameringer. ...Yet he is more often a man on fire over the injustice between man and man, over the chaos and darkness of so many human fates where he cannot be a silent witness....<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>See Oscar Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken (New York, 1940). A delightful autobiographical work.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., xvii. Carl Sandburg wrote a foreword to the Ameringer autobiography.

Ameringer published a sprightly Socialist journal, The American Guardian, in his home town of Oklahoma City. The journal was not under party control but it was the best medium for the propagation of the Socialist point of view in the West.

James D. Graham was the leading voice in the Socialist party of Montana. He was also the president of the State Federation of Labor. In Colorado, Carle Whitehead was the most prominent spokesman for the Socialist party.

The party organization was very weak on the West Coast. No national convention of the party had been held west of St. Louis, and even the National Executive Committee had never scheduled any of its meetings in that region.<sup>39</sup> Party leaders were unable to embark on any such project owing to financial difficulties.

George Kirkpatrick, William Busick, and John Packard were active in party work in California. Upton Sinclair, the novelist, was the best known Socialist in the region, but he did not interest himself in organizational work.

In 1929 Clarence Senior of Kansas was named as the National Secretary of the party. He was only twenty five years of age, but he soon showed himself to be an indefatigable worker and an able organizer. Senior joined the Socialist party in Kansas City when he was 16 years of age. Even though

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<sup>39</sup> The first meeting of the N.E.C. west of the Mississippi river was held in Los Angeles in the spring of 1930.

his party local disintegrated owing to the "Red scare," Senior continued his work for the party and the L.I.D. and became director of a workers' education organization in Cleveland. When he was drafted to serve as the party's secretary he had to grow a moustache to convince old timers that he was not a member of the Young People's Socialist League, the party's youth organization.<sup>40</sup>

These were the men who were prominent in the Socialist party as the 'twenties drew to a close. It was by no means a brilliant galaxy. But at least some of them were men of first rate ability. Hillquit and Thomas could compare favorably with the European socialist leaders of that period. Laidler was, perhaps, as well-informed a socialist as G. D. H. Cole of the British Labor party. Socialists like Waldman were not inferior to the average Labor M. P. or German Social Democratic deputy. It was, nevertheless, true that the Socialist party suffered from a paucity of competent leaders and organizers. It suffered even more from a paucity of followers. The Socialist generals had set for themselves the task of conquering a continent with a mere battalion of privates at their back. The forces that they opposed were vastly superior in numbers, equipment and resources.

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<sup>40</sup>Paul Porter, "Who's Who among the Rebels: Clarence Senior," Student Outlook (New York, N. Y.), I (March 1, 1933), 14.

Then came the crash! The citadels of American capitalism tottered as the nation slid down into the worst depression in its history.

To many socialists the onset of the depression seemed to confirm the predictions of Marx and Engels concerning the nature of capitalist society. They saw an unique opportunity opening before the party to propagate its message of social and economic reconstruction. Even old timers who had despaired of the party's prospects began to feel a little more optimistic.

But as the depression deepened and as tens of thousands of men and women became unemployed, the party registered no significant gains. From a total of 7,793 in 1928, party membership rose 9,560 in 1929, 9,736 in 1930, and 10,389 in 1931.<sup>41</sup> Many of the new members came from the ranks of the middle class intelligentsia--a group that was strikingly radicalized by the depression. Teachers, preachers and writers found their way into the ranks of the party and forthwith began to offer their prescriptions for building up the movement. Dozens of young men, freshly out of college, were appalled by the social misery caused by the depression and hoped to find an answer in socialism. Few were the proletarians that sought solace in socialism or communism. Their troubles and sufferings made them fearful and insecure.

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<sup>41</sup>Memorandum from the National Secretary to the N.E.C., December 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party. The N.E.C. held a meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, from December 9 to 11, 1932.

Within the party itself, the problems posed by the depression and by the entrance of several hundred new members occasioned new debates and controversies. Many of the newcomers were inclined to blame the party's old leadership for its weakness and lack of influence. An improvement in the party's performance in a few elections served only to increase their dissatisfaction. In the mayoral election in New York City in 1929 Thomas polled the highest vote ever received by a Socialist. In the same year the party won complete control of the City Council in Reading. In 1930 nine Socialists were elected to the Wisconsin state legislature and two to the Pennsylvania legislature. The party contested 40 per cent of the seats for the United States House of Representatives in twenty states and polled a total of 297,730 votes in 1930--an increase of 39,000 over the total for the whole country in 1928. Socialists also won a few minor offices in Wisconsin, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania in 1931.<sup>42</sup> All these gains were regarded as insignificant, and the debates among Socialists on strategy and tactics steadily grew in number and intensity.

There were some who believed that the party should attempt to broaden its base by allying itself with friendly groups and

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<sup>42</sup>Report of the National Secretary to the Seventeenth National Convention of the Socialist Party, May 21, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

individuals. They pointed to the effective work done by "independents" on behalf of the Socialist candidate during the mayoral election in New York City in 1929. Hillquit, however, did not share their enthusiasm. His experience with the La Follette movement had left him very suspicious of the any alliance with bourgeois radicals and "progressives." When John Haynes Holmes made an appeal at the New York State Convention of the party in 1929 for the formation of a "broad federation like the British Labor Party," Hillquit curtly told him to go out and organize a liberal party.<sup>43</sup>

The chairman's hostility towards collaboration with independent radicals was not shared by Thomas and many of his personal supporters. When an organization known as the League for Independent Political Action was formed with John Dewey as chairman, leading Socialists like Vladdock, Laidler, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Devere Allen accepted positions on its executive committee. Hillquit showed his displeasure by turning down the invitation of the executive secretary of the League for an official conference between the latter and the Socialist party. "This decision," said Hillquit, "must not be understood as a change of, or a deviation from the party's repeatedly expressed policy of readiness to cooperate with any bona fide labor party that may spring up in this country at any time in the future, but the members of our committee [the National Executive Committee of the party]

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<sup>43</sup>New York Times, December 9, 1929, p. 3.

feel that there is at this time no indication or promise of such a party."<sup>44</sup>

Hillquit's stand on the issue disappointed many Socialists who desired a broadening of the base of the party. As he persisted in his opposition during the months that followed, they began to feel that efforts should be made to remove him from the national chairmanship of the party.

Open criticism of Hillquit and his associates also proceeded from another group, composed mostly of young men, known as the Militants. The Militants developed out of a "ginger" group that came into being in New York after the election campaign in 1928. They obtained their name as a result of their oft-repeated demand for a militant program for the Socialist party. Among the members of the Militant group were Theodore Shapiro, Louis Stanley, Max Delson, Robert Delson, J. B. Matthews, Paul Porter, Amicus Most, Murray Baron, Jack Altman, and Paul Blanshard--all of New York; Franz Daniel of Philadelphia; Alfred Baker Lewis of Massachusetts; Maynard Krueger of Illinois; Powers Hapgood of Indiana; and Andrew and Hannah Biemiller. There were few proletarians in their ranks. Most of them had a middle class background, and many had college degrees. Disillusioned by the depression, they dreamed about the emergence of the Socialist party as a dynamic and disciplined organization

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<sup>44</sup>Hillquit to Howard Williams, quoted in Iversen, "Morris Hillquit," (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1951), 409-10.



dedicated to the task of a revolutionary reconstruction of American society.

"Socialism in our time" was the slogan of the Militants. Action was their watchword and they talked at great length about the need for action. Some of the Militants like Amicus Most and Murray Baron lived up to their talk by going out into the field and organizing unions and party locals in new territories. The strength of the Militants was principally concentrated in New York City but even there they constituted a minority in party organizations.

The Militants felt that Hillquit and other old Socialists had become tired radicals who could not formulate and carry out a fighting program of action. They believed that it was their special task to combat "reformism" and to set the party on the true revolutionary course of Marxism.<sup>45</sup> They charged that Hillquit and other "Old Guard" leaders, while paying lip-service to Marxism, had actually shown no inclination to remain true to its principal tenets. Instead of providing a revolutionary leadership to the proletariat, Hillquit and his like had lapsed into defeatism and "quietism." They had even tried to "soft-pedal" the basic doctrine of class struggle.

Socialist leaders like Hillquit had blunted the radicalism of the working class by supporting programs of social reform

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<sup>45</sup>Theodore Shapiro, "The 'Militant' Point of View," American Socialist Quarterly (New York, N.Y.), I (April, 1932), 29-37.

within the structure of the capitalist society, the Militants charged. Such reforms, according to them, could be neither lasting nor beneficial to the working class in the long run. The Militants had little regard for political democracy under capitalism.

Capitalist democracy can be viewed as a game between capital and labor in which the capitalist is at liberty to make the rules, count the points, or suspend the rules entirely. In comparatively normal times, that is, between crises or in those short intervals when the world is at peace the game can be indulged in by both classes with some degree of "sportsmanship."

But in time of war, widespread strikes, industrial crises, or the imminence of revolution, in short when the capitalist class is struggling for self-preservation, how often have we seen, particularly in our own generation, the suspension of the rules of this game, in whole or in part, and the substitution of a new set of rules--the rule of club, tooth and fang, the law that every ruling class invokes when threatened with the loss of power.<sup>46</sup>

The Socialist party, they held, should engage in a "relentless drive for political power" instead of meekly waiting for and accepting measures of social reform.

The Militants also called for a dynamic program of activity in the trade union field. They felt that the party should not stay on the sidelines while organized labor remained under the thumb of "reactionary" trade union bosses. The party should fight conservative union leaders relentlessly and carry the message of socialism to the rank and file of the trade union membership. Socialists should work vigorously within unions and also embark on a campaign to unionize workers

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 32-33.

in unorganized industries. The Militants charged that Hillquit and his group had not only failed to offer such a program but had, in effect, adopted a nonbelligerent attitude towards the A. F. of L. leadership.

In line with the "left-Socialists" in European countries, the Militants denounced the Socialist International. They also condemned the leadership of two of the most important constituent parties of the International--the Labor party of Great Britain and the Social Democratic party of Germany.

In their support of reactionary governments, in compromising alliances with non-revolutionary parties, in their attitude on the question of war, in their naive reliance on bourgeois "democratic" institutions, in their hostility to the Soviet Republic, Social Democratic parties manifest their reformism and block the way to the Socialist goal.<sup>47</sup>

The Militants enthusiastically "endorsed" the program of economic reconstruction that was being undertaken by the Soviet Union. They were angered by uncomplimentary appraisals of the theories and practices of Soviet leaders by men like Hillquit. "To crucify an entire nation on the cross of a theory--and a false one at that--is a form of social sadism not in keeping with the spirit of Socialist teachings," one Militant declared.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 36. This was almost as harsh a condemnation of Socialist leadership as the Communist theory of social fascism.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. See also A Militant Program for the Socialist Party of America (New York, 1931)--a pamphlet setting forth the Militant point of view. A defense of the Militant stand is contained in Franz E. Daniel, "The Militant Program for Socialism," New Leader, XIII (May 14, 1932), 9.

As the Militants intensified their propaganda within the party, Old Guard leaders became somewhat concerned. Some of them were genuinely worried that the activities of the Militants would promote factionalism and weaken the party. But the general attitude of the Old Guard towards the Militants was one of contempt and outright hostility. James Oneal declared that the Militants were a motley aggregation and that their attempt to pose as the left wing of the Socialist party was nothing short of comic.<sup>49</sup> Waldman made fun of their claim that they alone were loyal to Marxian tenets. "They glory in their purity, but hate to be reminded of their sterility," he declared.<sup>50</sup> Hillquit condemned the Militant criticism of the Labor and Socialist International and their support to the so-called "left-socialist" groups in Europe. Such "left" groups, Hillquit declared, were mere factions consisting of persons "who lack either the mental clarity or the moral courage to align themselves outright with the Communist movement."<sup>51</sup> In the columns of the New Leader angry letters were exchanged between the supporters of the rival points of view. There was open talk among party members that at the national convention of the party scheduled for May, 1932, the Militants

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<sup>49</sup>James Oneal, "Socialist Party and the Militant Program," New Leader, XIII (April 9, 1932), 5.

<sup>50</sup>Louis Waldman, "Marxians, Militants and Others," New Leader, XIII (January 16, 1932), 11.

<sup>51</sup>Morris Hillquit, "Socialist Principles and Tactics," New Leader, XIII (January 2, 1932).

would make common cause with those who were opposed to the Old Guard.

What did Norman Thomas feel about these cross-currents within the party?

Thomas did not share the rigid antagonism of Hillquit to the idea of working in alliance with bourgeois radicals and independents. While he believed that the time was not mature for attempting to bring about a labor party, he did envisage steady progress in that direction.

What I think is likely to happen is that sooner or later--and things move fast in America when they start--something like a mass movement of men and women who want an integrated program will come together in a socialistic party, by whatever name it may be called. ...In it I hope the present Socialist Party will have earned the right and power to be the leader and teacher. Some movement like this seems far more likely than that a great oak will grow out of the present Socialist Party. But I do not preclude the latter possibility.<sup>52</sup>

Thomas acknowledged that "the clouds which may break the drought over barren political fields are at present no bigger than a man's hand." He believed, however, that the strengthening of the Socialist party as well as of such organizations like the League for Independent Political Action and the Conference for Progressive Labor Action would hasten the emergence of a mass organization.

This attitude of Thomas was entirely satisfactory to the first group of Hillquit's critics. But the more doctrinaire among the Militants must have had a difficult time in convincing

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<sup>52</sup>Thomas, America's Way Out, 289-90.

themselves that Thomas was preferable to Hillquit.

Thomas fully shared the enthusiasm of the Militants for a vigorous program of action for the party, but he repudiated the idea that the proof of vigor lay either in the virulence of language directed against opponents or in rigid adherence to the words of Marx. He acknowledged the tremendous significance of Marx's work but emphasized that a blind proclamation of belief in Marxian concepts would not automatically lead to a solution of the world's troubles. Several factors of modern life like total war, technological advances, the rise of the managerial class, and developments in the science of psychology had been outside the range of speculation for Marx, Engels and their immediate colleagues. Therefore, said Thomas, little light could be expected from the "theologians, the talmudists, the pundits who pore over the Marxian word" in finding solutions to the extremely complex problems of the modern world. The Marxist seers, like other theologians, often tended to "interpret" Marx in such a way as to support their own nations and nostrums, he added.<sup>53</sup>

American socialism, he emphasized, should be ready to adapt itself to the changing requirements of modern times and should not degenerate into "dogmatic creedalism."<sup>54</sup>

In his attitude towards the Soviet Union, Thomas differed both from the Hillquit group and from the Militants. He did

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 133.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 150.

not share the hostility of the former nor the enthusiasm of the latter. He was impressed by the economic program and achievements of Russian Communism. The Soviet Union, he said, had shown that industrial planning was possible and that production could be undertaken for the benefit of the community rather than for personal profit. At the same time, Thomas expressed grave concern over the denial of civil liberties in the Soviet Union and regretted that Russian Communism was developing into a fanatical religion of the mass and the machine. A dictatorship--even an economically successful dictatorship--was too high a price to pay for striving towards the goal of economic justice, he declared.<sup>55</sup>

On the question of the party's attitude towards the American Federation of Labor, Thomas was much more cautious than the Militants. He sharply criticized the A. F. of L. leaders for their worship of "practical" policies, their neglect of the political education of the workers and their opposition to industrial unionism. He expressed regret that officials of "nominally socialist unions" had become badly inoculated with the virus of A. F. of L. "practical politics." On the need for a vigorous organizing campaign in unorganized industries Thomas was in full agreement with the Militants, but he hoped that such a program could be undertaken within the A. F. of L.

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 88.

Whether within the A. F. of L., as I hope, or independently there is bound to come an organizing campaign on industrial rather than craft lines.... To young men and women there is no finer challenge than to push this new unionism.<sup>56</sup>

Doctrinaire Militants were disturbed by Thomas's heresies on important points of Marxist dogma as well as by his moderation as regards issues on which they felt strongly. But even they could see that in his desire for an invigorated party, his advocacy of vigorous action in the trade union field and in his attitude towards the Soviet Union he was closer to their position than he was to Hillquit's. Many of them were also drawn by the genial personality of Thomas.

Thomas maintained friendly relations with the Militants, but he did not consider himself as one of them. He made it clear to them that, having served as the party's standard bearer, he desired to steer clear of cliques and factions within the party. Thomas did not, however, look with disfavor upon the Militants. He believed that the future of the party depended upon the quality and vigor of younger members. While he criticized them frankly whenever they approached him for advice, he was neither alarmed nor angry over their ebullience.

Thomas himself was not satisfied with the kind of leadership that Hillquit offered. Perhaps he was also eager to play a more active part in the higher councils of the party

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 277



under whose auspices he had run for the presidency of the United States. He was not even a member of the top policy-making body of the party--the National Executive Committee. The relations between him and Hillquit were correct but not intimate. As he envisaged a fighting campaign to build the Socialist party, Thomas was inclined to look on the National Chairman as a tired doctrinaire who had lapsed into a quasi-European approach to the problems of American socialism.<sup>57</sup> He found Hillquit difficult to work with and attributed it to his poor health. Further, Thomas did not share the veteran Socialist's antagonism towards the Soviet Union, which, he felt, savored of a sterile and querulous anticommunism.<sup>58</sup> In short, Thomas gradually came to believe that Hillquit had become "a brake rather than an engine."<sup>59</sup> He felt that it would be good for the party if Hillquit could be induced to step down from the national chairmanship and to remain as a member of the N.E.C.

Thomas's views influenced many party members who took their cue from him. They did not constitute an organized faction in the party, nor did Thomas seek to build a clique under his leadership. But they were sufficiently numerous to

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas to the writer, December 20, 1954.

<sup>58</sup> "In retrospect, I should have to admit that in 1932 he [Hillquit] was nearer right in his judgment of what was happening in Russia than I was and certainly than the Militants were." Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Thomas, August 13, 1954.

be referred to occasionally as "Thomasites."

The anti-Hillquit feeling among the Militants and the "Thomasites" was further intensified when it became known that the national chairman had agreed to serve as an attorney for a group of Russian refugees who were suing certain American oil interests in a New York court. The property of the refugees in Russia had been expropriated by the Soviet government and had later been leased to the American oil interests. The refugees had initiated legal proceedings against the American oil companies for an accounting of their profits and had retained Hillquit as their attorney. Party members learned of the matter from newspaper reports and many were angered when they read that Hillquit had questioned the legality and propriety of the nationalization of the property of the refugees by the Russian government.<sup>60</sup> Particularly vociferous were the Militants who asserted that it was highly improper for a Socialist to represent "White Guards" in a legal action against the Soviet Union. They also argued that it was absurd for a Socialist to attempt to make a case against nationalization. Hillquit met the attacks with stony silence. He would neither explain his position nor offer an apology. There was widespread demand that the chairman should withdraw from the legal proceedings and thereby avoid serious

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<sup>60</sup>Hillquit had acted as attorney in several similar cases involving Russian emigres in the United States. His action created uneasiness in the minds of some Socialists but no public attack was made on the chairman.

embarrassment to the party.<sup>61</sup>

Thomas, too, was disturbed by the development. Hillquit had not discussed with him either the principle or the "tactical effects" of his serving as a counsel in such a controversial case.<sup>62</sup> The incident, perhaps, served to reinforce Thomas's belief that there should be a change in the chairmanship of the party.

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Hillquit was not unaware of the developments within the party and the growing sentiment of hostility against his leadership. For long he refrained from directly answering the barrage of criticisms that had been directed at him; but with the convention fast approaching, he set forth his own position in terse and concise language in an article in the American Socialist Quarterly.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Hillquit ultimately withdrew from the case, but he did not volunteer any explanation. It would appear that he discussed the matter with Jacob Panken and that the latter advised him to withdraw from the case, "not because continuing the case was un-socialistic, unethical, anti-social or immoral but because it would pull the teeth out of the barking dogs at his coat-tail." Panken to Iversen, June 5, 1950, quoted in Iversen, "Morris Hillquit," (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1951), 407.

<sup>62</sup>Thomas to the writer, December 20, 1954.

<sup>63</sup>Morris Hillquit, "Problems Before the National Convention, American Socialist Quarterly, I (April, 1932), 3-13.

Hillquit admitted that "some fundamental differences of view" had developed within the Socialist party. He believed that the influx of new members during the previous two or three years was one of the principal reasons for the emergence of differences. "These younger members," said Hillquit, "with the natural impetuosity of recent converts have undertaken to re-examine all articles of the socialist faith and all principles of socialist policy, a very healthy and commendable procedure, which, however offers no guaranty against false or doubtful conclusions."<sup>64</sup>

The national chairman stated that new and unforeseen situations had arisen in Europe that had brought on controversial issues within the Socialist movement.<sup>65</sup> He emphasized that no useful purpose would be served if American socialists engaged in endless debates on European issues, and he particularly deplored the vehement criticisms that had been leveled against the leadership of the British Labour party and the German Social Democratic party.

What should be our attitude on these debatable policies of our sister parties in England and Germany?

It is obvious that the opinion of the individual

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 4-5. Hillquit listed the following as "new and unforeseen developments": the rise of democratic republics in Central Europe; the establishment of the Soviet government; the emergence of Communism; the rise of Fascism; Socialist participation in coalition governments in Central European countries; and all-Socialist minority governments in Britain and the Scandinavian countries.

American Socialists will be determined by the degree of their knowledge or ignorance of the intricate social, economic and political situations of the two countries, their own temperaments and readiness to judge, but it seems quite clear to me that our party as such is neither called upon nor qualified to pass judgement of approval or censure over the policies of foreign Socialist parties.<sup>66</sup>

Hillquit emphasized that the Socialist parties of Britain and Germany represented millions of organized workers and that their tactics had in the past been generally correct. If their tactics were wrong, the organized working classes of those countries could be depended upon to correct them.

"Neither by proved intellectual superiority nor by outstanding practical achievements have we, American Socialists, gained the right to judge our European comrades. Let us practice a little more the virtue of humility and attend a little closer to our own business."<sup>67</sup>

Hillquit was also sharply critical of the attitude of the Militants and their allies towards the Soviet Union. He questioned the wisdom of those who accepted uncritically "everything that comes out of Russia."

It goes without saying that all Socialists have the friendliest of feelings for the working people of Russia and that they ardently wish the Soviet government to succeed to the extent of developing into a genuine Socialist republic. But the practical question before us, the question incessantly asked of us by non-Socialists and calling for a clear and unambiguous answer, is what relation does the Soviet regime bear to our own social philosophy and ideal. Does it or does

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

it not represent the realization in whole or in part of what we are striving to bring about in the United States and, if not, wherein does it differ from our social ideal?

The Soviet regime is a political as well as an economic system. It represents a consistent and organized effort of a highly centralized government in an economically backward country to build up public industries by compulsory decrees, and presupposes a political and economical dictatorship that brooks no opposition and dissension and is maintained by force and terror. <sup>68</sup>

Hillquit emphasized that the Soviet system was a far cry from the ideal society that democratic socialists envisaged. "Our social ideal," he declared, "is a co-operative commonwealth in which government and industries alike will be administered by public officials and agencies freely chosen by the people and at all times responsible and accountable to them." Any denials of the "vital differences between the Socialist ideal and the Russian realities" could only serve to increase confusion in party ranks and to create false impressions outside, he added.

Hillquit declared that he favored recognition of the Soviet Union by the United States as well as the maintenance of untrammelled economic intercourse between the two nations. He made it clear that he would oppose any attempt to overthrow the Soviet regime by foreign economic, political or military pressure. But he warned his fellow socialists that while Russia was a vitally important subject, "it has only a remote

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

bearing on the practical tasks of American Socialism and does not justify any serious division in our ranks."<sup>69</sup>

Hillquit also expressed his opposition to the Militant approach towards organized labor and the A. F. of L. He said that while the political, social and economic views of the A. F. of L. were reactionary, any attempt on the part of the Socialist party to set up dual unions would be doomed to futility. Pointing to the failure of such attempts in the past, he asserted that the Socialist party could not hope for success till it had overcome "the indifference, lack of class-consciousness and low level of political and social education of the masses themselves."

The political immaturity of the American worker is the chief obstacle in the path of Socialist progress. To educate him is the main Socialist task. Difficult and even hopeless as the task may at times seem, there is no other way.

Our efforts must be directed to the rank and file of the unions, wherever we can reach them. ...Constructive criticism of their leadership and methods in a kindly and friendly spirit may at times be necessary and helpful, but mere personal antagonism and supercilious schoolmastering will only hurt our cause.<sup>70</sup>

It must be said to Hillquit's credit that, despite considerable provocation, he did not vilify his opponents. He did not even take official cognizance of factional groups within the party. Nor did he have recourse to emotional

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 12.



appeals to the membership of the party, drawing attention to his own long service to the cause. The old Socialist's pride was, perhaps, deeply hurt. He was shocked by the virulence of the attacks against him for his part in acting as an attorney for the Russian refugee group. The man who, in his own prime, had challenged the redoubtable Daniel De Leon, was mortified to learn that plans were afoot to oust him from the national chairmanship of the party in whose service he had labored all his life. But Hillquit never lacked courage. He determined to stand his ground and fight.

Hillquit knew that he could count on the support of many veteran Socialists in New York as well as in the country at large. He had the powerful backing of Cahan of the Jewish Daily Forward and had close relations with the leaders of the foreign language federations affiliated with the party. In New York itself, Algernon Lee, James Oneal, Charles Solomon, Jacob Panken, and Louis Waldman were ranged on his side. These men were angered by the activities of the Militants. "This trend...had to be fought--and without silk gloves," wrote Waldman.<sup>71</sup>

As the date for the national convention approached, it became generally known among party members that the name of Daniel Hoan, Mayor of Milwaukee, would be offered for the national chairmanship of the party in opposition to Hillquit.

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<sup>71</sup>Waldman, Labor Lawyer, 195.



It was also believed that the Militants would back Hoan and that Norman Thomas would lend him his personal support. The large Wisconsin delegation was expected to throw its support to its "native son."

Hoan was, perhaps, not altogether happy with the role of David assigned to him. But he finally agreed to make the race after representations from a number of friends, including B. Charney Vladeck, manager of the Jewish Daily Forward.<sup>72</sup> Hoan had his own reasons for disliking the national chairman. As a member of the N.E.C. he resented the dominant role exercised in that body by Hillquit. He believed that Hillquit had little appreciation of the practical problems connected with party organization. Hoan was also suspicious of "New York," and firmly believed that the Old Guard leaders of New York should be made to realize that the Socialist party was not their personal property.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Hoan told an interviewer on October 24, 1949, that it was B. Charney Vladeck, manager of the Forward, who urged him to run against Hillquit. Olson, "Milwaukee Socialists," (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), 508.

<sup>73</sup> Hoan gave those reasons in a letter that he wrote in 1935. Hoan to Feigenbaum, February 26, 1935, Thomas Papers.

CHAPTER III  
SEEDS OF DISCORD

The Seventeenth National Convention of the Socialist party of America was called to order at 10.30 a.m on Saturday, May 21, 1932, by Clarence Senior, National Secretary. The venue was the municipal auditorium in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Two hundred and fifty three delegates had gathered for the conclave. Almost half of them had entered the party since its last convention in 1928. They were, in many cases, strangers to one another and to the older party members.<sup>1</sup>

Messages of greetings to the assembled delegates came from the socialist parties of many countries. Otto Wells, chairman of the Social Democratic party of Germany, wrote that European socialists would be greatly heartened if a strong and influential socialist movement could take firm root in the United States.<sup>2</sup> George Lansbury conveyed fraternal greetings on behalf of the Labor party of Great Britain.

"You have always, comrades, and with admirable perseverance made strong efforts to build in the United States a solid Socialist party bound up with the other sections of the International," declared a message from Emil Vandervelde, president

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Levinson, "Labor Turns to Politics," Nation, CXXXIV (June 8, 1932), 648. See also Levinson, "The Socialist Party Convention Day by Day," New Leader, XIII (May 28, 1932), 6, 7; James Oneal, "All Eyes on Milwaukee," New Leader, XIII (May 21, 1932), 1.

<sup>2</sup>March of Socialism, 15.

of the Labor and Socialist International.<sup>3</sup>

There was an air of tenseness among the delegates because of reports that they had heard about the impending fight to oust the National Chairman of the party. Long before the opening of the convention caucuses were held in various hotel rooms.<sup>4</sup> The Militants, who were making their first appearance at a national convention, held closed door meetings, causing worry and anxiety in the Hillquit camp. The ominous word "split" was also occasionally mentioned.

The first important item on the agenda of the convention was the keynote speech by Hillquit. The chairman made a vigorous and skillful address. What America needed, he declared, was not a "few threadbare patches on the outworn and tattered ...garment of the capitalist system," but "a radically remodeled, new, sane and equitable social and economic order." The Democratic and Republican parties were an organic part of the old order and could not be expected to emerge out of their habit of "political stand-pattism." Nor was there any room for encouragement in middle-class liberalism or progressivism--"a confused agglomeration of superficial political views, radical in phrases and gesture, but without definite program, without organization and without power or will to act." Communism with its "dogmatic creed, sectarian

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>4</sup>McAlister Coleman, "Can Socialists Come Back?" New Republic, LXXI (June 29, 1932), 183.

organization, spectacular antics and destructive tactics" could offer no real remedy to the nation's ills.

Socialism alone offers a reasonable and effective way out to the American people and, above all, to the American workers. Never has its message been more convincing and compelling than at this time of our tragic economic breakdown. The Socialist prospects and opportunities have never been brighter and we propose to take advantage of them in the coming campaign and thereafter.<sup>5</sup>

Hillquit concluded his address with a ringing call for a declaration of war against the two major parties as well as the capitalist system itself--"a war along the whole line, without truce or compromise, a war to the finish."

The delegates applauded the chairman's appeal for war against the capitalist parties and forthwith began to get themselves into shape for the task by embarking on a series of civil wars.

Before the fire works commenced, the convention unanimously nominated Norman Thomas and James Maurer as the party's candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency of the United States.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>New York Times, May 22, 1932, Sec. I, p. 3. See also "Hillquit's Convention Keynote Address," New Leader, XIII (May 28, 1932), 5.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas was nominated by Louis Waldman. The latter recorded in his memoirs that Thomas and his supporters had requested him to perform that task. "This I gladly did, though I knew that from the point-of-view of the Thomas supporters this request was just a political move, because to a certain degree I bridged the ideological differences between the militants and the Old Guard." Labor Lawyer, 197. Available evidence does not indicate, however, that the nomination of Thomas would have encountered obstacles if some one other than Waldman had placed his name before the Convention.

The first major clash occurred on the subject of a resolution defining the attitude of the party towards the Soviet Union. The agenda committee headed by Hillquit placed a resolution before the convention which, while favoring diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union, drew attention to the totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime and sought to draw a clear line between socialism and communism. The resolution also gave a qualified endorsement to some aspects of the Russian economic program. "To the extent that the economic regime of Soviet Russia eliminates the profit motive in industry and seeks to introduce a unified system of planned production for public use, we heartily support it, and commend it to the emulation of other nations," it declared.

Such left-handed endorsement of the Soviet Union was hardly acceptable to the Militants who immediately offered a substitute. Paul Blanshard presented their resolution which declared that workers were watching the "Soviet Experiment" with great interest and that its success would give an immense impetus to their acceptance of socialism. The Socialist party, the Blanshard resolution added, while not supporting all the policies of the Soviet government, endorsed the efforts being made in Russia to create the foundations of a socialist society.

Two other substitute resolutions were offered, sponsored respectively by Bela Low of New York and Charles Solomon, Louis Waldman, and B. C. Vladeck.

and An acrimonious debate took place in the course of which there were some heated exchanges. Norman Thomas lent his support to the Blanshard resolution and criticized the Hillquit group for being unduly hostile towards the Soviet Union. Hillquit retorted by asserting that it would be absurd for American Socialists to assume responsibility for everything done by the Russian communists. Thomas' views were carried and the

The first vote of the convention was taken in order to decide which among the resolutions should be chosen to serve as the basis for further discussion. It was a crucial vote because it gave some indication of the support that the Militants could muster for their other objectives. When the poll was completed it was found that the delegates had voted as follows: agenda committee 93; Waldman-Solomon-Vladeck 26; Bela Low 14; Blanshard 11.

The Militants were elated by what they considered to be a significant victory but they had reckoned without Thomas. He did not share the unbounded enthusiasm that the Militants seemed to have for the Soviet Union. When the debate on the Blanshard resolution began, Thomas offered three amendments. Much to the chagrin of some of the Militants, the Thomas amendments sought to make it clear that the Socialist party took note of the success of the Soviet Union in the economic sphere, that it endorsed the efforts of the Soviet government to create the economic foundations of a socialist society, and that it demanded the freeing of all political prisoners

and the restoration of civil liberties in Russia. The amendments he proposed represented his own views on the Soviet Union at that time. He was prepared to support the program of economic reconstruction that the Soviet Union was undertaking but he had grave doubts about the political implications of Soviet communism, especially the fate of civil liberties.

The amendments offered by Thomas were carried and the Blanshard resolution, as amended, was adopted by a vote of 107 to 62.<sup>7</sup>

The convention was rocked by angry speeches as the fight began over selecting a national chairman for the party. The anti-Hillquit elements supported a move to vest the National Executive Committee with the power to choose the national chairman. Encouraged by their initial success, they hoped to win a majority on the N.E.C. and oust Hillquit without a frontal encounter with him; but spokesman for the Hillquit group denounced the proposal as an attempt to "slaughter" their leader behind closed doors.<sup>8</sup> As tension mounted on the convention floor, Waldman moved for a recess of 30 minutes but was voted down. James Maurer then proposed the name of Morris Hillquit for the national chairmanship. William Quick

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<sup>7</sup> Incomplete minutes of the Seventeenth National Convention of the Socialist party, May 21-24, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>8</sup> New York Times, May 24, 1932, p. 3.



of Wisconsin forthwith nominated Daniel Hoan, and the battle was on in real earnest.

The anti-Hillquit forces had dreamed for weeks about the final showdown, but when the decisive moment arrived they opened their attack with small arms fire, and their advance column walked right into a booby trap. William Quick, who first took the stand in order to call for Hillquit's removal, was hardly the person to rouse the convention by either force of oratory or cogency of argument. Quick declared that what the party needed was "less mouthwork, more footwork." He said that the cause of socialism could not be strengthened by theoretical treatises but only by concrete achievements. Calling attention to Hoan's creditable record in Milwaukee, Quick held that the Mayor's election as national chairman would mean a much-needed American orientation for the socialist party.

The bumbling speech of William Quick gave the strategists of the Hillquit camp the opening they sorely needed for a powerful counter-offensive. Charles Solomon and Louis Waldman jumped into the fray and denounced the attack on Hillquit as inspired by the spirit of antisemitism and antagonism to the foreign born. It was a first-rate tactical move, and Solomon and Waldman spared no device of oratory in order to drive their case home.<sup>9</sup> They seemed to make a deep impression on many

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<sup>9</sup>Waldman, Labor Lawyer, 199.



uncommitted delegates.

E. Charney Vladensk, influential Jewish Socialist and manager of the Jewish Daily Forward, supported the Hoan candidacy "unfortunate," but he felt that spokesmen for the Hillquit and repudiated the charges that the move against Hillquit was inspired by antisemitic motives.

them an antisemitic coloring. But once the race issue was raised, he thought that further controversy should be reduced to the minimum even if it meant Hillquit's re-election. His speech, therefore, was not intended to be an oratorical effort aimed at swinging the convention against the national chairman.

Thomas expressed regret that the word "Americanism" had been loosely used in the debate. "We all want an American party, in the sense that we should concentrate our attention on the American scene," Thomas said. Hoan, he added, was free from the controversies that existed among New York Socialists.

services to the party were outstanding and geographically he was well located for the work that needed to be done. Thomas emphasized that the only issue before the delegates was a decision on which of two nominees was better fitted to discharge the responsibilities of the national chairmanship of the party. He confessed that he, personally, was hardly in a comfortable position but that his own preference was for Daniel Hoan. He disliked Abraham Cahon, who supported Hillquit.

Bill Quick...made an unfortunate speech which could easily be misinterpreted as pro-American in an anti-foreign or anti-semitic sense. Quick assured me, I believe sincerely, that he had no such intention. ...Once the anti-semitic issue was raised, even though unjustly, I was inclined to think it best that Hillquit won." Thomas to the writer, December 20, 1954.

<sup>11</sup>New York Times, May 24, 1932, p. 3.

E. Charney Vladeck, influential Jewish Socialist and manager of the Jewish Daily Forward, supported the Hoan candidacy and repudiated the charges that the move against Hillquit was inspired by antisemitic motives.<sup>12</sup>

But Jacob Panken of New York repeated the accusation and denounced "the unjustified attempt to crucify Hillquit." "I say to you, comrades, we shall not permit it." Joseph Sharts condemned Vladeck for being insensitive to an issue that should be of vital concern to a Jew. "If I had been a Jew instead of a Gentile, it seems to me that the merest intimation that my birth would interfere with my leadership of a party would have brought me at once to the side of my people."<sup>13</sup>

Hillquit then made a powerful speech, accepting the nomination. The delegates listened in silence as the little New Yorker tore into his critics with words sharp as a stiletto. He began by declaring that he had no personal ambition to prolong his tenure as national chairman of the party. The duties of the chairman, he said, consisted merely in presiding over the national committee.

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<sup>12</sup>Waldman asserted that Vladeck opposed Hillquit because he disliked Abraham Cahan, who supported Hillquit. Labor Lawyer, 198. It is however, open to doubt whether Vladeck's decision was purely due to the cause ascribed by Waldman. According to Norman Thomas, Vladeck decided to oppose Hillquit because he felt that the latter was not in good health and that he was difficult to work with. Thomas to the writer, December 20, 1954.

<sup>13</sup>New York Times, May 24, 1932, p. 3.

The question is, am I worthy of your confidence or should I rightly be demoted to the ranks.

The opposition against me arises from the fact that I stand for the common, garden variety of socialism. There are three other brands in this convention--all three opposed to me.

There are the militants, well-meaning, immature, effervescent people, who will settle down in time, but who for the moment are wild, untamed and dangerous.

And there are the Socialists of the opposite camp who do not want socialism to be a working class movement. They look to college men and the white-collar elements. They too are opposed to me.

And there is the practical kind of socialist--like the ones here in Milwaukee--who believe in building modern sewers and showing results right away. That is not my kind of socialism. These three have united in an unholy alliance against me and...what I and my comrades in New York have stood for years.

Hillquit charged that the opposition to him was influenced by racial considerations. "I am here to charge that efforts have been made to introduce the issue and not in this floor alone. I know the issue of Americanism. I have known it for many years." Hillquit said that he owed an apology to the delegates for having been born abroad, being a Jew and living in New York--"a very unpopular place." But, he declared belligerently, he would not quit under fire.

On the one issue raised here, the issue of my fitness as a socialist, I am not going to quit. I do not care whether you defeat me or not, but on the one question of principle which you have forced upon me I am ready to meet you. As a challenge, as a matter of principle, I accept the renomination for the national chairmanship.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

There was rousing applause for the old Socialist as he left the podium. The masterful oratory of Hillquit had brought many a waverer to his side.

The presiding officer, George Roewer of Massachusetts, called upon Mayor Hoan to deliver his acceptance speech. Hoan declined the invitation.

The delegates then proceeded to vote and Hillquit emerged as the winner by a narrow margin. One hundred and five delegates representing a party membership of 7,526 voted in favor of his re-election while eighty representing a membership of 6,984 supported Hoan.<sup>15</sup>

The anti-Hillquit forces staged a rally when voting began for the election of members to the National Executive Committee. Two separate lists were offered to the delegates, and when the votes were counted it was found that all seven on the Thomas list and six out of ten in that of the Hillquit group had won election to the committee. Three names appeared on both lists. The members of the new N.E.C. were Morris Hillquit, Albert Sprague Coolidge, James D. Graham, Daniel Hoan, Powers Hapgood, Darlington Hoopes, Leo Krzycki, Jasper McLevy, John Packard, Norman Thomas, and Clarence Senior. In the new committee only Graham and McLevy could be described as partisans of Hillquit.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid. See also James Oneal, "Hillquit Again National Chairman," New Leader, XIII (May 28, 1932), 7.

The question of the policy that the party should follow in the trade union field occasioned another heated debate. The Militants, though shaken by their defeat in their bid to unseat Hillquit, were ready with a resolution embodying their views on the subject. Arthur McDowell of Pennsylvania introduced the Militant resolution that called inter alia for the appointment of competent field organizers to stimulate the unionization of unorganized industrial workers. The task was to be "carried on in co-operation with such sincere labor groups as are now or will be so engaged."<sup>16</sup> The resolution favored the establishment of a national committee to coordinate and carry out the activities of the party in the labor field. Powers Hapgood of Indiana and Paul Blanshard were among those who spoke in favor of the resolution.

Many old timers bitterly assailed the resolution and asserted that the Militants' proposal would commit the party to dual unionism. They hearkened back to the old days in the 1880's and 1890's and even delved into the history of the German working class movement in order to show the danger of impetuous action in the trade union field.<sup>17</sup> The Socialist party would go the way of the S.L.P. and deteriorate into a narrow, sectarian group if the Militant program was adopted,

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<sup>16</sup> For the text of the McDowell resolution see Jack Kaye, "The Socialist Convention," Labor Age (New York, N. Y.), XXI (July, 1932), 16-17.

<sup>17</sup> Levinson, "Labor Turns to Politics," Nation, CXXXIV (June 8, 1932), 648-50.

they warned.<sup>18</sup>

The McDowell resolution was put to vote and was rejected by the convention by a narrow margin.

The convention then adopted by a vote of 82 to 62 the resolution on trade union policy offered on behalf of the agenda committee by James Oneal. It incorporated some of the features of the Militant proposal and instructed the N.E.C. to create a permanent labor committee to direct the activities of party members in the trade union field, to raise and administer relief funds for strikers, to prepare suitable literature for use in labor unions, and to spread the socialist message among them. The resolution also exhorted Socialists to participate actively in the affairs of their respective trade unions and to work unceasingly for their democratization. It called for friendly relations between the Socialist party and the A. F. of L.

What is desired is a friendly cooperation based upon mutual understanding, and this cannot be obtained by any form of coercion, intrigue or assertion of power by one over the other. In all their work in the unions socialists should observe the highest standards of ethics and thus set an example of idealism for others to emulate, never striving to drive the workers to policies which they do not understand, but to win them by argument to loyal service in the union.<sup>19</sup>

The party was thus committed to continue its traditional policy towards the A. F. of L. and the angry outbursts of the

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<sup>18</sup> Harry W. Laidler, "The Socialists Meet," New Republic, LXXI (June 8, 1932), 96.

<sup>19</sup> New York Times, May 25, 1932, p. 3.

Militants proved to be unavailing.

Another lively debate was provoked when an Illinois delegate suggested the insertion of the words "class struggle" in application forms for membership in the party. The proposed change would have required a belief in class struggle as a condition for party membership. Hillquit opposed it, and a Militant chieftain, Paul Blanshard, sided with him, much to the disgust of many of colleagues. The Hillquit's motion that the application form should merely state, "I, the undersigned, apply for membership in the Socialist party," was adopted by a very close vote of 68 to 66.

The convention then considered the party's platform for the political campaign that lay ahead. Heywood Broun and Oscar Ameringer submitted a 250-word platform, but it was rejected as too sketchy. A comprehensive document prepared by Harry W. Laidler was then taken up for examination. There was a significant measure of agreement among the delegates on the platform, and debates were occasioned only on two issues.<sup>20</sup>

A delegate from California offered a clause advocating confiscation of property. Thomas denounced the proposal and warned that he would not serve as the party's standard bearer if it was adopted by the convention. The motion was decisively

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<sup>20</sup>A detailed discussion of the platform is not undertaken at this point. Norman Thomas's exposition of the various planks of the platform is described in Chapter IV. For the text of the platform, see Appendix D.

defeated by a vote of 166 to 14.<sup>21</sup> With all the controversial issues finally disposed off, a spirited discussion took place on the question of the party's attitude to the prohibition issue. Familiar factional lines disappeared as the "Wets" and "Drys" entered the fray.<sup>22</sup> The platform committee had sought to ignore the whole question as unimportant in a time of crisis, but its counsel was overruled. George Goebel of New Jersey was the aggressive spokesman for the "Drys," and he demanded that the Socialist platform should include a statement to the effect that the prohibition issue was a "red herring" dragged into the election campaign by the capitalist parties in order to deflect the attention of the masses from social injustices. Brown and Ameringer were the most active supporters of a repeal plank. Their proposal was finally adopted by a small majority. The plank demanded the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, nationalization of the liquor industry, and the grant of option to states to maintain prohibition within their borders. There were, however, enough "Drys" among the delegates to sustain a demand for a referendum of the party membership on the Prohibition issue.

<sup>21</sup> The report of the Milwaukee convention and its antecedents was reprinted in New York Times, May 23, 1932, B. 7. A divergent version

<sup>22</sup> In commenting on the debate on the Prohibition issue, Harry W. Laidler stated that various points of view were "frankly discussed." "Third Party Possibilities," North American Review (Boston, Mass.), CCXXXIV (September, 1932), 219-20. However, Joseph Shaplen, special correspondent of the New York Times, reported that the session became "a scene of wild confusion when the liquor issue was brought forth." May 25, 1932, p. 3.



With all the controversial issues finally disposed off, party leaders turned their attention to the task of applying soothing salves to the wounds that had been inflicted during the course of angry debates. Thomas and Hillquit made vigorous speeches stressing the importance of harmony and unity among members of the party. "The Socialists have every occasion to be pleased with the work of the convention just closed," Hillquit declared. "It has been a rather stormy gathering, but that is neither unusual nor alarming," he added.<sup>23</sup> The chairman asserted that on essential points--the convention had been unanimous. Both he and Thomas emphasized that the election campaign represented a great challenge and a unparalleled opportunity to the party to develop into a strong and vital political force in the United States.

On that cheery note the curtain descended on the Seventeenth National Convention of the Socialist party of America.

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The story of the Milwaukee convention and its antecedents was recounted several years later in widely divergent terms by two prominent leaders who had belonged to the Hillquit camp.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

In his autobiography, Labor Lawyer, published in 1944, Louis Waldman gave a version in which he attempted to argue that the move to oust Hillquit from the national chairmanship of the party was conceived and masterminded by the Communists. According to him, the Communists wanted to get rid of Hillquit in order to obtain complete control of the Socialist party and, as part of their plan of action, they infiltrated the ranks of the Militants.<sup>24</sup> Waldman also recounted that he had heard "ugly rumors" to the effect that "in basements, halls, and other meeting places" young socialists had been engaged in military drill, "occasionally with rifles."<sup>25</sup> He also alleged that a "totalitarian tendency" had begun to grow among the Socialist youth, evidenced by the use of uniforms, salutes, banners, slogans, and demonstrations, and that some party leaders had given tacit endorsement to such a trend. "Among

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<sup>24</sup>While the militants may or may not have been contented with fiery speeches and political postures, the Communists who had infiltrated into their ranks were callous realists who knew that Thomas's espousal of 'militancy' was not enough. They knew that unless they controlled the party machinery in its entirety their tenure of power in the Socialist Party was at best a shaky one. It therefore became necessary, from the Communist point of view, to concentrate, as they always do, all fire on the head man, who then was Morris Hillquit. The plan was to defeat him for re-election as National Chairman at the 1932 Milwaukee convention and to elect a pliable politician--Daniel Hoan, then Mayor of Milwaukee--in his place. After that, they reasoned, the rest would be easy. When the time of the convention arrived they had their delegates pretty well lined up." Labor Lawyer, 196.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 195.

these, I painfully record, was Norman Thomas."<sup>26</sup>

Waldman's account gave a somewhat sinister coloring to the developments in the party at the time of the Milwaukee convention. It was true enough that some adolescents in the Young People's Socialist League--the party's youth organization --wore blue shirts and gave the clenched fist salute. But they were, perhaps, no more dangerous at that time than the boy scouts with their khaki uniforms and their distinctive salute. Yet on that slender basis Waldman wove a mysterious tale, involving secret rifle drills and Communist machinations that came within an ace of capturing the party--with Norman Thomas playing the role of an unwitting dupe of the forces of evil. But neither Waldman nor Hillquit nor any of their close associates made charges of such a nature before the convention or during the course of the angry debates at the convention. Indeed, writing in the New Leader in January 1932, Waldman ridiculed the Militants as "the off-spring of mere liberalism."<sup>27</sup>

James Oneal, editor of the New Leader, was a close associate of Waldman and an adherent of Hillquit. In 1935, Oneal wrote a pamphlet, Some Pages of Party History, in which he denounced Thomas and the Militants and justified the stand of the group of which he and Waldman were the leading

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 194-95.

<sup>27</sup> Waldman, "Marxians, Militants and Others," New Leader XIII (January 16, 1932), 11.

spokesmen.<sup>28</sup> There was no reference in the pamphlet to the kind of accusations that Waldman chose to make in 1944. Oneal obviously did not hear any "ugly rumors" of young socialists drilling with rifles. Nor did he make the charge that Communists had infiltrated the Militant group and had engineered the "plot" to remove Hillquit from the chairmanship. Oneal was certainly not the person to cover up any story of Communist machinations.<sup>29</sup> In fact, Oneal's account of the Militants and their objectives in 1932 was totally different from that of Waldman. Oneal asserted that the Militants were nothing but reformists. They had been active in the League for Independent Political Action and their goal was a third party in alliance with bourgeois liberals. "The militants had one thing in common, a resentment that the Old Guard had blocked their maneuvers for a coalition with liberals and progressives," he added.<sup>30</sup>

Oneal wrote again on the subject in 1947--three years after the publication of Waldman's recollections. Even then he did not state that the Communists had infiltrated the Militant group and had led the attempt to remove Hillquit.

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<sup>28</sup> James Oneal, Some Pages of Party History (New York, 1935 ).

<sup>29</sup> Oneal had written a book on American Communism in 1927 and was known to be a bitter foe of the Communist party. A revised and enlarged edition of his book was published in 1947. James Oneal and G. A. Warner, American Communism (New York, 1947).

<sup>30</sup> Oneal, Some Pages of Party History, 11.

He merely asserted that a pamphlet published by the Militants "was critical of the Old Guard and revealed the impact of Russia on its authors."<sup>31</sup>

What did the Communist party itself say about the Militants in 1932? In an article in the Daily Worker shortly before the Milwaukee convention, J. Stachel, a leading Communist, dismissed the Militants as "the ministers and intellectuals, middle class elements that in 1928 and 1929 led in the praise of organized capitalism...."<sup>32</sup>

Conflicting opinions have also been expressed on whether the attack on Hillquit at the convention was inspired by antisemitic and nativist considerations. Hillquit's supporters maintained that such was the case, and Waldman reiterated the accusation in his memoirs. But they did not make it clear either at the convention or later who among their critics was the culprit and what evidence they had to support their contention. All that Waldman recorded in his memoirs was that the Militants were hard hit "as a result of the propaganda which had been spread by some in their midst who advanced the idea that it might be more advisable to elect an 'American' as National Chairman, in place of Hillquit, who

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<sup>31</sup> ONeal and Warner, American Communism, 287-88

<sup>32</sup> J. Stachel, "Before the Conventions of our Enemies: 'Left' Proposals at the Socialist Party Convention," Daily Worker, May 11, 1932, p. 4. See also I. Amter, "The Socialist Party--Socialist in Name, but Social-Fascist in Deeds," Daily Worker, June 4, 1932, p. 6. A slanted account of the convention.

was a Jew."<sup>33</sup>

William Quick, who made the speech that Thomas considered "unfortunate," told him later that his words had been twisted by the opposition and that he was not actuated by antisemitism. Thomas himself felt that the Hillquit group made unfair use of a dangerous and "phoney" issue.

Jacob Panken, a vigorous Hillquit partisan, who had defended him during the convention debate, wrote to a correspondent in 1950 denying that there was any "intentional anti-semitism" on the part of Hillquit's critics.<sup>34</sup>

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Despite the semblance of unity and harmony that prevailed during the closing stages of the Milwaukee convention, it was clear to most of the delegates that serious divisions had come to exist among their ranks and that bitter conflicts were in store for the future.

Chairman Hillquit was gravely offended by the criticisms that had been leveled against him. Thenceforward he was increasingly suspicious of those who had opposed his re-election and deeply distrusted their motives and activities. His lieutenants, like Waldman and Oneal, made up their minds

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<sup>33</sup>Waldman, Labor Lawyer, 199.

<sup>34</sup>Panken to Iversen, July 29, 1950, quoted in Iversen, "Morris Hillquit," 414.

to strengthen their own faction within the party in order meet any future challenge from the Militants and their allies.

The Militants, on the other hand, were sorely disappointed by the very limited success that had attended their efforts. They were by no means inclined to put an end to their efforts to combat the "Old Guard" at every turn. Some of the Militants were not satisfied with the support they had received from Thomas.

The smoldering antagonism between the two groups was again demonstrated at the New York State convention of the party held in July, 1932. At that meeting, the Militants concentrated their attack on Louis Waldman but were unable to prevent his re-election as State Chairman and his nomination as the party's gubernatorial candidate.

Thomas himself was soon so busily engaged in campaign activities that he had little time or energy left for anything else. However, the growing coolness of the Hillquit group towards him did not serve to heal the breach that had been brought to light at the Milwaukee convention. Thomas was also repelled by what he believed to be the hide-bound outlook and intransigence of the "Old Guard."

But as the campaign got into high gear and as optimistic predictions began to be made about a record Socialist vote, party leaders and members set aside factional antagonism and strove with great energy to advance the cause. During the period between the convention and the national elections, no

less than 503 new locals and branches of the party were organized. By the end of the year 5,000 new members had come into the party. It was a very heartening development in comparison with the campaign year of 1928, when the party had gained a paltry 368 members, and 1924, when it actually suffered a loss in membership of 530.<sup>35</sup>

Into the national office of the party in Chicago poured a stream of letters--many of them from workers, employed and unemployed. Interest in the party's progress was also expressed in numerous letters from white collar elements, notably students, teachers, and ministers. There were, perhaps, a few letters from wealthy well-wishers of the party. The only communication that could be recognized easily as falling in the last category was that from Frederick Vanderbilt Field.<sup>36</sup> There were hundreds of requests for campaign "literature" from all parts of the country. The national office made a brisk sale of a series of pamphlets known as the Little Library of Socialism. A pair of book-ends bearing the likeness of Eugene Debs was given away with each Little Library and proved a very strong inducement. A leaflet for which there was heavy demand was one that contained Edward Bellamy's The Parable of the Water Tank. Party branches placed orders for thousands

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<sup>35</sup>Memorandum from the National Secretary to the N.E.C., December 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party. Between January 1 and May 20, 1932, one hundred and thirty seven new locals were organized.

<sup>36</sup>Field to Edward Levinson, July 13, 1932, ibid. No contribution was promised by Field in his letter.



of copies of another leaflet entitled The Most Frequent  
Objections to Socialism Answered.

There was a resurgence of enthusiasm among many old-timers who had remained loyal to the party through the lean years of the 'twenties. A party member from Charleston, South Carolina, wrote: "1932 is a golden opportunity. not one member should fail to give to his party until it hurts. Yes even until it bleeds."<sup>37</sup> An enthusiast of a different kind from Rhode Island wrote a confidential letter to the national secretary informing him that he had the answer to the party's financial problems. He was prepared to offer the party, for a very small consideration, an invention that could easily bring in a hundred thousand to a million dollars.

Among young party members there was a spirit of vigor and buoyancy.

No more bumming  
Socialism's coming  
Give your vote for better days  
And when the old crowd's out  
We'll gather round and all shout  
For our own flag's scarlet blaze  
In the future there's a crimson morning  
We'll see it dawning  
And that just means success and happiness  
Oh, we'll come through, men  
With the help of you, men  
Give your vote for better days.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup>S. V. Kennison to Senior, n.d., 1932, ibid.

<sup>38</sup>The song, published by the Socialist party of Boston, was entitled "Socialism's Coming," and was set to the tune, "Have a Little Faith in Me."

## CHAPTER IV

### SOUND AND FURY IN THE POLITICAL ARENA

The year 1932 witnessed an extraordinary mushrooming of "third parties" in the United States. By the middle of the year, twenty-six such parties had proclaimed their readiness to shoulder the task of saving the nation.<sup>1</sup> Many of them were localized "panacea" movements with little following in the nation at large. They were, in a sense, products of the anxious times through which the nation was passing, but their activities often served as an amusing diversion in the political arena. In no way did any of them represent a challenge to the Socialist party's position as the principal "third party" in the country. The Socialist party's claim to speak in the name of the working class was sharply disputed by the Socialist Labor party (S.L.P.), and the Communist party. Indeed, the Communists made the Socialist party their main target during the entire campaign. The attention of the nation was, however, mainly focussed on the contest between the Republican and Democratic parties. A noteworthy feature of the campaign was the rejection of the policies and programs of the two major parties by a significant segment of the intelligentsia. The dissenters regarded the measures advocated by the candidates of the older parties as entirely

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<sup>1</sup>R. V. Peel and T. C. Donnelly, The 1932 Campaign (New York, 1935), 201.

inadequate to lift the nation out of the depression.

At least one of the parties that took part in the campaign regarded the depression as a matter of secondary importance. It was the Prohibition party.

The Prohibition forces, angered by the betrayal of the holy cause by both the major parties, mustered strong at their convention in Indianapolis. They were eager to have Senator Borah as their Presidential candidate, but the wary Idahoan was not willing to accept the honor. The convention's choice then fell on the Georgia Cyclone, the Rolling Chair Evangelist, the honorable William David Upshaw. The Cyclone showed forthwith that he meant business by challenging Herbert Hoover to a public debate at any time and at any place.<sup>2</sup>

Father James Cox, a Pittsburgh priest with a Ph.D. degree, who had led a hunger march to the national capital in the winter of 1931, announced the founding of the Jobless party and designated himself as its candidate for the presidency of the United States. His platform called for the expenditure of billions of dollars by the Federal government and a "mighty army, navy and air force."<sup>3</sup> At a solemn inaugural function the reverend gentleman exhorted his followers to wear distinctive blue shirts and to dedicate themselves to the mothers

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<sup>2</sup> On this subject see an interesting article by James Oneal, "Messiah vs. Messiah vs. Messiah," American Mercury (New York, N. Y.), XXVII (October, 1932), 177-183.

<sup>3</sup> New York Times, August 17, 1932, p. 2.

of America. Father Cox then set out on an European tour and was received in audience by the Pope himself. To an enquiring Roman newspaper editor the Father vouchsafed the information that he would receive at least seventeen million votes in the Presidential election and, with characteristic generosity, invited the journalist to have lunch with him at the White House.<sup>4</sup>

A prophet of a different hue was the founder of the Liberty party, William H. (Coin) Harvey. "Coin" modestly acknowledged himself to be a financial wizard and, as proof, he cited his two great works in economics. In 1896 he had published a pamphlet entitled Coin's Financial School which had sold a million copies. And in 1930 he had given mankind the essence of his wisdom in an opus styled unostentatiously as The Book. Therein Harvey traced the "satanic reign" of usury from the days of Adam and Eve. As a campaign handbook for the Liberty party, he proposed to reprint a chapter from the volume "with pictures of Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Luther, Calvin and Edward III" suitable for being "tacked on the walls of every home."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>New York Times, July 17, 1932, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Oneal, "Messiah vs. Messiah vs. Messiah," American Mercury, XXVII (October, 1932), 178. Father Cox and Harvey joined forces for a while but split on the issue of who was to be the presidential candidate. After various exciting adventures, Cox announced that he would step aside from the contest in favor of Roosevelt.

Harvey's platform advocated government ownership of banks and a new monetary system without metallic standards.

Colonel Frank E. Webb of San Francisco got himself nominated as the presidential candidate of the "Farmer-Labor Party"<sup>6</sup> with Jacob S. Coxey of Ohio as his running mate. But trouble soon developed between the two and Webb was unceremoniously dumped by the Coxey forces. Undaunted by that upset, the colonel immediately organized another political convention, launched a new "Liberty Party," drew up the shortest platform in history (103 words), and allowed himself to be drafted as the presidential nominee of the party.<sup>7</sup>

Among other political "parties" that were not fortunate enough to have their activities chronicled adequately in the newspapers were the Progressive, Independent, Independent Republican, Independence, American, Law Preservation, Jacksonian, Berks Independent, Enforcement Allies, Citizens, Peoples, Security, Independent Liberty, Labor and National parties.<sup>8</sup>

The Socialist Labor party was a small organization dedicated to the cult of ~~cult of~~ De Leonism. The faithful gathered at a convention in New York, and, with a speed that might well have stirred the envy of "bosses" in other political parties, nominated Verne L. Reynolds as their candidate for

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<sup>6</sup>The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party did not recognize the Webb-Coxey organization.

<sup>7</sup>Peel and Donnelly, 1932 Campaign, 206.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 201.

the presidency. Reynolds was the owner of an advertising agency in New York City but his earlier work as a steam fitter entitled him to claim proletarian credentials. The nominee fervently exhorted the thirty-three delegates present at the convention to go forth to the four corners of the land and swell the ranks of the party with recruits from the working class.<sup>9</sup>

The S.L.P. platform envisaged collective ownership and control of industries to be attained by the incorporation of national industrial unions into "One Big Union."<sup>10</sup> Party spokesmen as well as their official organ, the Weekly People, claimed that the S.L.P. program was the only true revolutionary path for the proletariat and vehemently denounced the "reformism" of the Socialist party.

The Communists held their convention in Chicago and re-nominated William Zebulon Foster for President. A sympathetic writer has preserved for posterity a description of the stirring scene of Foster accepting the nomination. The awed scribe reported that the delegates of the American working class, silent as a glacier, strained forward in their chairs, hanging on every word as Foster declared that "before long a Communist will stand at the head of the American government,

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<sup>9</sup>New York Times, May 2, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>See Sidney Hertzberg, "Political Dissent in 1932," Current History, XXXVII (November, 1932), 161-166.

a Soviet government."<sup>11</sup> Bourgeois newspapermen sitting at the press table shivered as the great revolutionary uttered those "powerful, prophetic words."

Foster held that the only salvation for the American working class was through a revolutionary overturn of capitalist institutions. He did not explain how such a result was to be brought about, but he outlined six slogans as "immediate demands" of the party. The demands, he declared, corresponded to "the most urgent necessities of the toiling masses." He listed them as unemployment and social insurance, emergency relief to farmers, an end to wage cuts, equal rights and self-determination for Negroes, and opposition to "imperialist war" and to "capitalist terror."<sup>12</sup>

Foster painted for the benefit of the American people a picture of his apocalyptic vision of what conditions would be like after the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the Communist party. The dictatorship of the proletariat would be established and a system of county, state and national soviets would come into being. There would be prosperity for the farmer and abundance for the worker. Women would be liberated from their shackles, and a new life of culture would open up for children. Social disabilities based upon

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph North, "The Communists Nominate," New Masses (New York, N. Y.), VIII (July, 1932), 4. A melodramatic and highly emotional narrative.

<sup>12</sup> William Z.

Foster, Toward Soviet America (New York, 1932), 247-248.

race and creed would forever be eliminated. All these tasks would be accomplished by a wise and benevolent government that would be in the hands of a Central Executive Committee. Among the functions of the C. E. C. would be the direction and control of the Supreme Court. All courts would, of course, be strictly class-courts and would unceasingly war against the class enemies of the toilers. The Democratic, Republican, and Socialist parties would be "liquidated," and special courts would be appointed to deal with counter-revolutionaries.

"Parasites" like capitalists, landlords, clericals and other non-producers would be disenfranchised, and the "pest" of lawyers would be eliminated. Among other excrescences that would be speedily abolished would be "political props of the bourgeois rule including chambers of commerce, employers' associations, rotary clubs, American Legion, Y. M. C. A., and such fraternal orders as the Masons, Odd Fellows, Elks, Knights of Columbus, etc."<sup>13</sup> And the Communist leader gave his solemn pledge that God would be banished from the laboratories as well as from the schools.<sup>14</sup>

Such was the policy and program that the Communist party proclaimed in 1932. An impressive array of "intellectuals"

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 268-343.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in Kirby Page, "Socialism Versus Communism," World Tomorrow, XV (September 14, 1932), 259.



publicly announced their support to the party's nominee.<sup>15</sup> Many of them did so probably because they were tremendously impressed by reports of the progress made by the Soviet Union and its claims not only to have abolished unemployment but to have provided a more meaningful life to the common people than capitalism had offered. These intellectuals were overwrought by the depression and they came to believe that the Communists were the only people who had the will to apply basic and drastic remedies. "Nobody in the world proposes anything basic and real except the Communists," declared Lincoln Steffens.<sup>16</sup> Some of them looked upon Communism as the only means of bringing about a quick and efficacious remedy to the social and economic injustices which they hated fervently.

What the hell are you then?

I am a Communist.

What's that?

Well, just now it means I want free food for every farmer that can't pay for it, free milk for the babies, free rent, and if we can't get free food, I'm for going and taking it.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>John Dos Passós, Theodore Dreiser, Waldo Frank, Edmund Wilson, Lincoln Steffens, Malcolm Cowley, Granville Hicks, Lewis Mumford, Matthew Josephson, Sherwood Anderson, Clifton Fadiman, Winifred Chappell, Lester Cohen, Sidney Howard, Alfred Kreyborg and Samuel Ornitz were among those who "came out" for Foster and Ford.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted by Hicks, Where We Came Out, 36.

<sup>17</sup>New Masses, VIII (September, 1932), 24.

Thus spoke the youthful hero in a short story written by a young Communist writer named Whittaker Chambers.

The Socialist party and its leaders were subjected to vicious slander and misrepresentation by the Communists. Following in servile fashion the theory of "social fascism" adumbrated by the Comintern, American Communists concentrated their main fire against Socialists and labor union leaders.<sup>18</sup> The Socialist party, declared Foster, was "a maid-of-all-work for the capitalist class," and would always stab the working class in the back. It was "an insidious menace" which "must be broken." Hillquit and Norman Thomas were arch social-fascists, darlings of the Mellons and Morgans, instigators of war, sworn enemies of the laboring men, and upholders of

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<sup>18</sup> For the background of the Comintern's enunciation of the theory of social fascism, see Franz Borkenau, European Communism (London, 1953), 50-80; Adolf Sturmthal, The Tragedy of European Labor 1918-1939 (New York, 1943), 92-94; Hugh Seton-Watson, From Lenin to Malenkov (New York, 1953), 99-110; and Sidney Hook, "The Fallacy of the Theory of Social Fascism," Modern Monthly (New York, N. Y.), VIII (July, 1934), 342-52.

According to Sturmthal, it was Zinoviev who first coined the term "social fascist." As early as 1924 he had written that "The International Social Democracy has now become a wing of fascism." Shortly afterwards, Stalin declared that "Fascism is a fighting organization of the bourgeoisie dependent upon the active support of Social Democracy. Objectively, Social Democracy is the moderate wing of fascism." Tragedy of European Labor, 93. The eleventh plenum of the Comintern held in 1931 gave the doctrine its seal of approval by denouncing the German Social Democratic leaders as "social fascists."

Jim Crowism.<sup>19</sup>

During this period the Communist party was following the Comintern line of "united front from below" in respect of the Socialist party. The line merely meant that Communists should strive to spread disaffection among the rank and file membership of the Socialist party by keeping an unceasing barrage against Socialist leaders. The Communists went to the extent of accusing Hillquit and Thomas of Jim Crowism as part of their propaganda campaign in favor of self-determination for the Negro "nation" and the creation of a Negro Republic in the so-called Black Belt in the South.<sup>20</sup> Here again the Communists took their cue from certain oracular pronouncements of Lenin and Stalin on the question of nationalities and from

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<sup>19</sup>The following are examples of the kind of attacks that were made against the Socialist party and its leaders in the Communist newspaper, Daily Worker, during 1932: "Socialists and Police Attack Philadelphia Jobless," February 11, 1932, p. 2; Jack Stachel, "The Socialists and Musteites--An Active Force in War Preparations," April 4, 1932, p. 4; H. M. Wicks, "Heywood Brown's Defense of the Naval Lynch Gang," May 20, 1932, p. 4; H. M. Wicks, "The Socialist Party Gets Behind the War Drive," May 28, 1932, p. 8; "Bosses Consciously Building Up Norman Thomas," October 3, 1932, p. 1; C. A. Hathaway, "Thomas and Foster--'Pious Pleading vs. Class Struggle,'" October 26, 1932, p. 4; Bill Dunne, "Thomas--A Gesture to Workers, a Pledge to the Capitalists," November 3, 1932, p. 4; "How Hillquit Tricked Labor Paper Out of \$200 in 1914-17," November 4, 1932, p. 3; and James S. Allen, "Socialist Party 'Theoreticians' Justify Slavery of Negroes," November 11, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>On the question of Negroes and the Communist party, the following works are very useful: Wilson Record, The Negro and the Communist Party (Chapel Hill, 1951). William A. Nolan, Communism Versus the Negro (Chicago, 1951).

the directives of the Comintern.

The "intellectuals" who supported the Communist ticket in 1932 obviously paid little attention to such activities carried on by the Communist party. Indeed some of them had all the zeal of new converts and demonstrated their devotion to the "revolutionary" cause by vigorous denunciation of the Socialists. Granville Hicks, for instance, declared that the Socialist party was merely "the third party of capitalism" and that Norman Thomas "actually offers himself to the ruling class as an instrument for the preservation of the existing order."<sup>21</sup> Matthew Josephson caricatured Norman Thomas as a perfect example of the tribe of "Goo-Goos."<sup>22</sup>

The unceasing Communist exhortation to the faithful during the campaign was that the destruction of the Socialist party was the essential step towards realization of proletarian victory. "They are the final hurdle which the working-class must leap, the final weakness which must be cut out, like a cancer, before the workers can take power."<sup>23</sup>

The antics of the self-annointed Messiahs provided a

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<sup>21</sup>Symposium, "How I Shall Vote," Forum, LXXXVIII (November, 1932), p. 258.

<sup>22</sup>Matthew Josephson, "Norman Thomas, "The Enraptured Socialist," New Republic, LXXI (August, 1932), 335. Josephson borrowed the term "Goo-Goos" from Lincoln Steffens who used it as a contraction for "Good Government Boys."

<sup>23</sup>Statement by Communist writer, Michael Gold, quoted in Kirby Page, "Socialism Versus Communism," World Tomorrow, XV (September 14, 1932), 259. Gold included pacifists in his indictment.

a touch of comic relief in the grim months of 1932. But some observers noted a real element of "political degradation" in the way in which the two major political parties--Republican and Democratic--battled for the plums of office.

One issue attracted considerable attention in the conventions of the two parties--repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. The deliberations at the conventions appeared to have little relation to the harsh realities of the depression. Walter Lippmann noted the "total absence of any evidence of economic insurgency" at the Republican convention and felt that the delegates were proceeding on the assumption that "nothing important is to be decided here except the manner in which the party will take note of the popular revulsion against the Eighteenth Amendment."<sup>24</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard found the situation no different in the Democratic convention: "the question of beer and booze outranked everything else. That was what the delegates wanted settled. They did not give a tinker's damn for anything else."<sup>25</sup> Elmer Davis likened the spectacle to "a historical pageant performed in the crater of a volcano whose subterranean rumblings were audible to every one but the performers."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lippmann, Interpretations 1931-1932, 286-87.

<sup>25</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard, "The Democratic Trough at Chicago," Nation, CXXXV (July 13, 1932), 26.

<sup>26</sup> Davis, "Collapse of Politics," Harper's Magazine, CLXIV (September, 1932), 386.

A pall of approaching defeat overhung the uninspiring Republican convention that renominated Hoover and Curtis. The Democrats, on the other hand, were more buoyant and hopeful at their Chicago conclave. They felt that they had a winning issue with their demand for an outright repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. And many of them were confident that in their candidate, Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt, they had a winning man.<sup>27</sup>

The Democratic and Republican nominees did not differ radically in their basic approach to what should be done about the depression. They believed it to be axiomatic that unemployment relief was a matter to be handled by charitable institutions and institutions at the local level and that governmental intervention should take place only as a last resort.<sup>28</sup> Both spoke of charity as the "American way" of dealing with human want. Roosevelt fervently called upon individuals, societies, and churches to practice "actual charity--actual love of their neighbor--to an extent greater than at any time in the past."

Let us who have jobs or money or shelter for ourselves and our own families share with the less

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<sup>27</sup> Hoover asserted years later that he had no hope of getting re-elected in 1932 but that he undertook the campaign because he felt that it was his duty to fight it out to the end. Memoirs, III, 218.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 56. For a statement of Roosevelt's views, see The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 13 vols. (New York, 1938-1950), I, 851.

fortunate. Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day of 1932 will take on an added significance of a higher American ideal of social justice.<sup>29</sup>

Both Hoover and Roosevelt, however, proclaimed that if conditions warranted it, they would not hesitate to use every resource of the Federal government for the relief of distress. Neither of them apparently felt that such a point had been reached in the fall of 1932. Hoover's mind was tranquil on that score. His Surgeon-General had assured him that the general health of the American people was at a higher level than ever before in the history of the United States. "No such record could be established if the nation's unemployed were starving and without shelter," Hoover declared.<sup>30</sup> Roosevelt asserted that his own measures of unemployment relief were a "model" to other states in the Union. At that time, in New York City alone, over half a million were dependent on charity for maintaining body and soul together.<sup>31</sup>

Neither Hoover nor Roosevelt offered any comprehensive program for putting men back to work. The President claimed credit for having spent two billion dollars for public works,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 795.

<sup>30</sup>Hoover, Memoirs, III, 311.

<sup>31</sup>This figure was given in a nationwide radio speech over the CBS network by Harvey D. Gibson, chairman of the Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee, New York Times, October 11, 1932, p. 19.



a sum, according to him, "greater than the whole expenditure during the previous thirty years, including the Panama Canal."<sup>32</sup> The Governor put forth a variety of conflicting and contradictory statements. He talked of putting several thousands of the unemployed to work in afforestation, flood prevention, and waterway projects. He added, however, that public works should be considered from the point of view of the ability of the Treasury to pay for them.<sup>33</sup> He did not see much scope for financing public works out of current revenues, and, if bonds were to be issued for the purpose, he would take care that they would be for "self-sustaining projects" only.

The Governor did not explain how he could reconcile even such a watered-down proposal for fighting unemployment with his oft-repeated "pledge and promise" to prune down Federal expenditure and to balance the budget. A balanced budget, Roosevelt announced, was "the one sound foundation of permanent recovery."<sup>34</sup> He taunted Hoover for having failed to achieve so vital an objective and added that the President's "extravagance and improvidence" and his "highly undesirable" fiscal policies had placed the country on the road to bankruptcy. Reduction of governmental expenditure, thundered the Democratic

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<sup>32</sup> Hoover, Memoirs, III, 311.

<sup>33</sup> Public Papers of FDR, I, 794.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 806.



nominee, was "one of the most important issues of the campaign." He emphasized that he was in complete agreement with the Democratic platform, which had called for a twenty-five per cent reduction in Federal expenditure, and proclaimed that no man could enter his cabinet unless he gave an unqualified pledge to carry out the economy plank.<sup>35</sup>

Roosevelt, however, provided for an escape clause. He stated that he would not hesitate to increase taxes if such an action was needed to keep the people from starvation. He did not make it clear what kind of taxes he would increase. He dangled before the public the tempting prospect of "several hundred millions of dollars a year" flowing out of a Federal tax on beer, which presumably would help balance the budget. The Governor also made occasional references to the need "to restore the purchasing power of the people"<sup>36</sup> but did not volunteer any information on how that "vital and basic" objective could fit in with the rest of his program.

There were other "issues" on which much air was expended by the two candidates. Hoover stood firm in his support of the tariff legislation enacted during his term of office. Roosevelt, after roaring like a lion against the "Grundy tariffs," gradually modified his position and started talking

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 809. For some interesting comments on this speech see Samuel I. Rosenman, Working With Roosevelt (New York, 1952), 86. According to Rosenman, the Governor made the speech without adequate discussion and consideration.

<sup>36</sup> Public Papers of FDR., I, 853.

about the just needs of the farmers, the fair requirements of industry, and the "Yankee tradition of good old-fashioned trading" that would characterize his own proposal for reciprocal tariffs. The Governor avoided any discussion of foreign policy. He had even expressed his opposition to American entry into the League of Nations in what looked like a bid to win the benediction of Mr. William Randolph Hearst.<sup>37</sup>

Both Hoover and Roosevelt denounced the money changers and speculators who had gambled away the nation's prosperity. Hoover had opposed stock market speculation, but he had made a fortune as an international promoter par excellence before his "retirement" in 1916.<sup>38</sup> Roosevelt had a record of speculation right up to his election as Governor of New York.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> According to Raymond Moley, the Governor avoided taking issue with Hoover on foreign policy because he was in general agreement with the latter's conduct of foreign relations. Raymond Moley, "Reappraising Hoover," Newsweek (New York, N. Y.), XXXI, (June 14, 1948), 100. Hoover cited this statement with obvious satisfaction in his Memoirs, III, 236. foot note.

<sup>38</sup> For a list of Hoover's business connections from 1897 to 1916, see Peel and Donnelly, 1932 Campaign, 238-240.

<sup>39</sup> A very interesting description of this aspect of Roosevelt's career can be found in Frank Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Ordeal (Boston, 1954), 138-159. Freidel gives instances of how Roosevelt "risked money recklessly, again and again" in his business ventures and how he "could not resist the temptation to dabble incessantly in promotions of all sorts." According to Freidel, the only significance of such "business experiences" was the indication they gave of "Roosevelt's willingness to undertake risky ventures in the adventurous climate of the 1920's." Ibid., 151. If a Roosevelt does it, it is a joyous adventure.

Hoover made a reference to the contradiction in Roosevelt's  
(continued on next page)

As the campaign gathered momentum it was increasingly evident that Hoover was no match for the Hyde Park contender.<sup>40</sup> Roosevelt captured the imagination of millions of Americans who had come to dislike Hoover intensely and who clamored for a change. His patrician background, his bold struggle against a crippling ailment, his much-publicized record as Governor, and his geniality and warmth were other factors that swung many to his support. He had the knack of being able to phrase even a conservative and orthodox statement in such a way as to make it appear to be the fresh product of a progressive mind. At the same time, his call for "bold, persistent experimentation" struck a responsive chord in the hearts of millions of his countrymen to whom he appeared to be the best answer to the nation's need for a strong man at the helm. Roosevelt was extremely careful not to say or do anything that might endanger his growing popularity. "You have got to get the votes first--then you can do the good

39 (continued)

denunciation of "bad foreign loans" and the latter's own earlier activities in the promotion of such foreign securities. "The Governor as a private promoter for profit during the boom of 1928 believed and practiced what the Governor, as Presidential candidate, now denounces as immoral and the cause of our calamities." Memoirs, III, 254.

<sup>40</sup>As early as June, 1932, bets were placed with odds three to five against Hoover. By October betting odds on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange were two to one in favor of Roosevelt, rising to five to one by the beginning of November and seven to one on election eve. New York Times, October 4, p. 15; November 8, p. 3.

work," the Governor told his close friend, Rosenman.<sup>41</sup>

Many "liberals" and "progressives" hailed Roosevelt as the one hope for saving the United States. But a vocal segment of the intelligentsia refused to be carried off its feet by the Roosevelt magic. John Dewey noted with sorrow the flight of many intellectuals to the camp of a man whose liberalism was open to doubt.<sup>42</sup> Elmer Davis observed with some scorn that the Governor was a specialist in voicing generalities with which none could quarrel. "But what they mean, if anything, is known only to Franklin D. Roosevelt and his God," he added.<sup>43</sup> The columnist, Heywood Brown, reported, after listening to a speech made by Roosevelt early in 1932, that it was "a meal of parsnips and fine words. To be sure, there is a little chestnut stuffing."<sup>44</sup>

As the weeks rolled by during the campaign, a lot of Americans seemed to acquire a growing taste for parsnips and fine words--with a little chestnut stuffing.

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<sup>41</sup>Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt, 30. H. L. Mencken thus described the Governor's deep interest in furthering his own career: "He is... loaded with enlightened self-interest to the nozzle, and may be trusted even in the gravest emergency, to remember assiduously that there is such a fellow in the world as Franklin Delano Roosevelt." American Mercury, XXVII (November, 1932), 381.

<sup>42</sup>John Dewey, "Prospects for a Third Party," New Republic, LXXI (July 27, 1932), 280.

<sup>43</sup>Davis, "Collapse of Politics," Harper's Magazine, CLXIV (September, 1932), 389.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in Peel and Donnelly, 1932 Campaign, 189.

Neither the Democratic nor the Republican nominee made any reference to the Socialist party during the campaign. Perhaps they deemed it too insignificant a factor to be accorded the honor of being noticed. Hoover, however, hinted darkly that the election of his opponent might bring on the horrors of a collectivist economy. One of Roosevelt's supporters, John W. Davis--himself an unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidate in 1924--accused Hoover of having "followed the road to socialism at a rate never equaled in time of peace by any of his predecessors."<sup>45</sup> Thus the two major parties vied with each other in order to show that they regarded socialism with becoming horror.

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<sup>45</sup>John W. Davis, "Why I am a Democrat," New York Times, October 30, 1932, Sec. II, p. 2.

CHAPTER V  
A GALLANT CAMPAIGN

Socialist leaders looked upon the election campaign as a great challenge and an opportunity for the political education of the masses. For the duration of the campaign internal bickerings and squabbles were almost forgotten as they went to work in order to win a large vote for the party. Not even the most optimistic and imaginative among them could have dreamed of a Socialist victory in the elections. Many hoped, however, that a period of steadily growing strength lay ahead of the party. Among the rank and file membership of the party there was tremendous excitement and high expectation that the Socialist ticket would receive a record vote.

The party set up candidates for 171 House and 16 Senate seats.<sup>1</sup> National chairman Hillquit, despite his poor health, made a spirited bid for the mayoralty of New York City.<sup>2</sup> But the limelight was focussed on the campaign that was waged

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<sup>1</sup>In 1932 the Socialist party was on the ballot on all the states except Florida, Idaho, Oklahoma and Nevada. Thomas drew pointed attention to Governor Roosevelt's silence about the denial of political rights to minority groups in those states. "In the Democratic states of Louisiana, Florida and Oklahoma the Socialists and other minority groups have been kept off the ballot by outrageous laws or interpretations of laws against which Governor Roosevelt, in whose behalf these betrayals of representative government have been engineered, has refused to protest." Speech over the CBS network, Milwaukee, Wis., November 7, 1932, Thomas Papers.

<sup>2</sup>This was to be the veteran Socialist's last electoral campaign.

by the party's presidential candidate, Norman Thomas. According to many informed observers, it was one of the most arduous campaigns that the Socialist party had ever engaged in.<sup>3</sup>

Norman Thomas asserted that there was no vital difference between the Democratic and Republican parties. The contest between them was a "shocking farce between parties divided by no principle and equally without program."<sup>4</sup> They were merely "two bottles with different labels and both empty of any medicine for the sickness of our times."<sup>5</sup> Thomas charged that both the parties were "owned and financed by Wall Street."<sup>6</sup> It was because of the sad American habit of always voting against something that a comparatively small group representing the "owning class" could perpetuate its power by offering its second puppet if people became tired of its first puppet. "If you don't like our Ike, try our Mike," was the slogan of

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<sup>3</sup> Peel and Donnelly are hardly fair in their appraisal of the Socialist campaign: "The Socialist tactics were almost entirely limited to ridicule of the two major parties and their capitalist leaders. Constructive proposals were referred to, but not much use was made of them in the addresses to the people." 1932 Campaign, 210. This statement is incorrect as an evaluation of the campaign speeches of Norman Thomas. The only reference the authors make to a political speech by Thomas is to his Columbus, Ohio, address wherein he advocated a capital levy.

<sup>4</sup> Speech over the CBS network, June 10, 1932. Thomas Papers.

<sup>5</sup> Radio speech from Madison, Wis., September 25, 1932, ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Speech at Syracuse, N. Y. November 3, 1932, ibid.

the owning class, Thomas declared.

It was, of course, not true that all the important figures in the two political parties were "owned" by Wall Street, and the Socialist leader was guilty of exaggeration and oversimplification if he sought to give such an impression. It was nevertheless true that the two parties were recipients of considerable financial aid from the great giants of corporate enterprise. While the Democrats often tried to call their opponents the party of Big Business, it was clear to any one who cared to see that an imposing array of financial and industrial magnates was lined up in support of Roosevelt. Owen Young gave Roosevelt his unqualified endorsement, and Bernard Baruch proclaimed that neither large nor small business need fear the Governor. The New York Times derided the clumsy efforts of Republican orators to depict Roosevelt as a dangerous radical and assured the world that there could be no possible doubt about the Governor's "bred-in-the-bone American traditions" and his complete dedication to the "preservation of our national institutions."<sup>7</sup>

Thomas and other Socialist leaders were very vigorous in challenging the attempts of Democratic campaigners to present Roosevelt as an enemy of Wall Street. Thomas declared that Roosevelt "did not lift his little finger" to control Wall

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<sup>7</sup>Editorial. New York Times, September 7, 1932, p. 18.



Street while he was Governor of New York.<sup>8</sup> In a speech at Providence, Rhode Island, the Socialist leader flung this question at Roosevelt:

Will you state specifically when you or your party officially called on the administration to check the Wall Street boom and what specifically you advised the administration?

What did you do as Governor of New York after January 21, 1929, to bring Wall Street to terms?<sup>9</sup>

Roosevelt, in fact, had done very little in that direction.

Thomas also charged that Roosevelt was closely allied with Democratic city bosses like Frank Hague of New Jersey.<sup>10</sup> He ridiculed the Governor's "field general," Jim Farley, as one who had brought to politics "the lack of principle and

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<sup>8</sup>Typescript, "Degradation of Political Action in America," October, 1932, Thomas Papers.

<sup>9</sup>Speech at Providence, Rhode Island. New York Times, August 22, 1932, p. 2. Walter Lippmann characterized as "preposterous" the widespread feeling in the South and the West that Wall Street feared Roosevelt and added that "if any Western Progressive thinks that the Governor has challenged directly or indirectly the wealth concentrated in New York City, he is mightily mistaken." Interpretations 1931-1932, 261.

<sup>10</sup>Hague sternly rebuked Republicans for presuming to accuse the Democratic leadership of radicalism. Talking to reporters on his return from a European trip he declared, "The Republicans can't hang radicalism on us and make it stick. Radicalism died with Bryan. All our leaders are conservative. ...the national committee of which I have been a member for fifteen years is conservative. And ours is a party of the interests and industries. ...To be against business would be to be against the working man." World Tomorrow, XV (October 12, 1932), 341. Boss Hague arranged a giant rally for Roosevelt in Jersey City and shared the platform with the candidate.

the low sense of strategy of the phoney prize fight game."<sup>11</sup>  
 The Socialist leader asserted that Roosevelt had "groveled before Tammany"<sup>12</sup> and had remained a silent spectator while scandals involving Mayor James Walker of New York and his Tammany cronies were being brought into the open. Thomas emphasized that Roosevelt had chosen to move in the matter only when it became politically advantageous to do so.<sup>13</sup>

Thomas did not spare Hoover for his election-eve fraternization with some Republican "bosses" and cited as an example the apparent cordiality between the President and William Vare of Philadelphia.

Thus, President Hoover in Philadelphia, having shaken hands with Boss Bill Vare, praised the ideals

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<sup>11</sup> News release issued by the League for Industrial Democracy, July 5, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>12</sup> Speech over the CBS network, July 13, 1932. Thomas Papers.

<sup>13</sup> For reasons best known to himself, Roosevelt remained impassive in the face of a growing mass of evidence against corrupt officials. He sharply rebuked John Haynes Holmes and Rabbi Stephen Wise when they requested him to remove such officials. Roosevelt's friends tried to explain away his inaction by claiming that he felt that he had a judicial duty to perform and, therefore, held himself aloof till all the evidence was in.

"It is well known in New York," reported Walter Lippmann, "...that Governor Roosevelt had to be forced into assisting the exposure of corruption of New York City. It is well known in New York that, through his patronage he has supported the present powers in Tammany Hall. It is well known that his policy has been to offend Tammany just as little as he dared in the face of the fact that an investigation of Tammany had finally to be undertaken. ...I do say that on his record these last three years he will fight Tammany only if and when he decides it is safe and profitable to do so."  
Interpretations 1931-1932, 262.

of William Penn, and having been introduced by that foe of all civil liberty, that enemy of decent unemployment relief, Mayor Humpy Moore, spoke of "the privilege of coming in contact with the earliest springs of American traditions and strong spiritual fortresses of American institutions..."<sup>14</sup>

The Socialist leader assailed the platforms of the two major parties and the campaign issues as posed by their respective nominees. The Republican platform, he declared, was nothing but a wordy and badly written endorsement of the program of Herbert Hoover. "That program is opportunistic, confused, only sure of one thing, and that, its devotion to private profit."<sup>15</sup> Hoover's own record spoke so loud that the American people found it difficult to hear what he had been trying to tell them during the campaign. What the President had offered the nation was virtually a defense of the capitalist approach to the crisis.<sup>16</sup> Thomas went on to point out that while Hoover preached the virtues of "rugged individualism" he had actually "put the government more extensively in business than any ruler of any western nation" by his measures relating to tariffs, the Farm Board, and Reconstruction Finance Corporation. But the purpose for which Hoover put government in business, the Socialist charged, was "always for the sake of the business man in the hope that if the

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<sup>14</sup>Speech at Syracuse, New York, November 3, 1932, Thomas Papers.

<sup>15</sup>Speech over the CBS network, July 13, 1932, ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Speech over WEVD, NYC., August 12, 1932, ibid.

business man prospers something may splash over to the farmer and to the worker."<sup>17</sup> The class nature of American government was clearly shown by its readiness to administer oxygen to banks and railroads while remaining reluctant to offer food to the unemployed by means of work, and if necessary, direct aid.<sup>18</sup> "The difference between socialists and Mr. Hoover," Thomas declared, "is not a question of collectivism versus no government in business. It is a question of the kind of collectivism, and for whose benefit government shall act--the profit takers or the workers; speculators or consumers."<sup>19</sup>

The Socialist standard bearer argued that the Democratic party was an incongruous assemblage of incompatible elements.

The Democratic party today is not the party of Thomas Jefferson or Andrew Jackson. It is the party of that great foe of liberty and labor, former Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, chief author of this year's platform, of Vincent Astor who has endorsed Roosevelt, of Tammany Hall, of the Southern reactionaries, foes of labor legislation, foes of Negro rights, authors of poll tax laws to keep even white workers from voting. ...An angel from heaven couldn't reform that party. And Roosevelt

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<sup>17</sup>Radio speech over the NBC network from Madison, Wis., September 25, 1932, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>*New York Times*, February 28, 1932, Sec. I, p.7.

<sup>19</sup>Speech over WEVD, NYC., August 12, 1932, Thomas Papers.

is no such angel!<sup>20</sup>

Thomas called the Governor "an admirable gentleman" who was wandering about like an amiable political Santa Claus" promising to be all things to all men.<sup>21</sup> He charged that Roosevelt had no political philosophy or program except a great desire to hold office.

Political beneficiary at Chicago of Tammany's opposition, he has heretofore groveled before Tammany. Blessed by Senator Norris as the foe of monopoly, he has within the last two years completely dropped his fight for adequate regulation, to say nothing of ownership of the power trust in his own state. Hailed as a friend of the poor, his record on unemployment relief in New York State is the record of a man who has availed himself of every excuse to do next to nothing. Months ago he renounced his former belief in the League of Nations virtually at the behest of Mr. William Randolph Hearst. ...What price progressivism, if any sort of progressivism can be satisfied by such a party, such a platform--yes, or such a candidate.<sup>22</sup>

Thomas also criticized the policies and program of the Communist party. On no occasion, however, did he stoop to the kind of personal abuse that Communist speakers constantly flung at him. He even acknowledged that the Communists were

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<sup>20</sup> Radio speech, September 3, 1932, *ibid.* Another person who denounced the Democratic party in stronger terms has lived to become a leading luminary of that party. "We need one conservative party," he declared, "but we do not need and should not long endure having two such parties. The Democratic Party is the chief obstacle in the way of a third party of the farmers, wage-earners and white-collared workers developing on American soil, and its destruction would be one of the best things that could happen in our political life." The writer was Paul H. Douglas, "Who are the Democrats," *World Tomorrow*, XV (September 28, 1932), 303.

<sup>21</sup> Typescript, October, 1932, Thomas Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Speech over the CBS network, July 13, 1932, *ibid.*

"sincere and determined," but warned that their acceptance of the inevitability of violent revolution and the necessity for dictatorship would merely serve to strengthen the hands of the "menacing Fascist movement in America." Thomas was sharply critical of the dual unionism fostered by the Communist party as well as of their propaganda in favor of self-determination for Negroes in the so-called Black Belt.<sup>23</sup> He also condemned the Communist party for harping about a revolution in the indefinite future while, at the same time, demonstrating an incapacity to present a comprehensive program of relief to the victims of the depression.<sup>24</sup>

Thomas expounded in numerous speeches and articles his own views on the immediate measures that could be undertaken to lead the country out of the depression. The Socialist leader saw the misery and human waste involved in mass unemployment and advocated speedy and adequate action to relieve distress. He emphasized that such action would be the most effective means of reviving business. In the measures for unemployment relief that he espoused Thomas showed himself far ahead in economic thinking of the other contenders for the presidency and also of most European socialist

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> News release from the League for Industrial Democracy, July 5, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

leaders.<sup>25</sup> ?

"Unemployment relief is far more important than balancing any budget," Thomas emphasized repeatedly.<sup>26</sup> "Repeal Unemployment" was the Socialist slogan for the entire campaign. Thomas felt that the full resources of the nation should be mobilized to fight unemployment. Why should "leaders" and even the people be more ready and willing to call for an all-out effort in case of a shooting war with a foreign foe and remain passive and quiescent in the face of an eroding, wasting, sickness of unemployment? War on unemployment--that was one war that Thomas could approve of wholeheartedly. "The first thing I'd do if I were President," he told a reporter, "would be to declare war--it would be a war against poverty."<sup>27</sup>

The Socialist leader vehemently repudiated the view that unemployment relief was primarily a local problem and that

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<sup>25</sup> Many important socialist leaders of Europe and Great Britain clung to orthodoxy in respect of fiscal and financial measures for combating the depression. A noteworthy exception was provided by the leadership of the Social Democratic Party of Sweden. On this point, see Sturmthal, Tragedy of European Labor, 98-175. For an account of the financial orthodoxy of the second Labor government in Britain, see G. D. H. Cole, A Short History of the British Working Class Movement (London, 1948), 430-437; and C. R. Attlee, As It Happened (London, 1954), 72-74.

<sup>26</sup> Speech over the CBS network, June 10, 1932, Thomas Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in an article written by W. E. Woodward during the 1932 campaign. Typescript, ibid.

charity was the American way of tackling it. He emphasized that only the Federal government with its extensive fiscal powers could adequately undertake the task. "We socialists say that the first thing to do is to subsidize consumption," Thomas declared.<sup>28</sup> If all else failed, the Federal government should undertake a program of direct money subsidies to unemployed consumers.

We would ...subsidize consumers or consumption instead of subsidizing producers or production as we have done so long by tariffs. I think we should soon discover that the surest way to start up industry was by giving fathers and mothers enough to begin to purchase the things they sorely needed for their children.<sup>29</sup>

Thomas thus clearly realized the importance of the consumption function as a vital factor influencing the level of employment. He also suggested that nation's economy would benefit by a "wisely controlled inflation of currency and credit." He advocated such a course because he was afraid that worsening conditions might bring on a clamor for inflation and result in a wild inflationary orgy that would hurt the poorer classes most. Thomas was afraid that the chaos of such an uncontrolled inflation might, in turn, bring on a movement for a "strong man"--a dictator to restore order and stability. It was because of these fears as well as because of his realization of its possibilities for reviving the economy that

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<sup>28</sup>Speech during the 1932 campaign, undated, *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Speech over WOR, NYC., September 18, 1932. *ibid.*



Thomas advocated "wisely controlled inflation of currency and credit."

Thomas called for a ten billion dollar program of public works. Thousands of men, he said, could be put to work in reforestation, slum-clearance, provision of new housing, road building, soil conservation and rural electrification. Such work would create social wealth, and, in the process of creating it, would overcome unemployment. Thomas particularly stressed the urgent need for adequate housing for Americans and urged the creation of a Public Housing Corporation with a three billion dollar budget to tackle the task of banishing "those rookeries which are nurseries of disease and vice and enemies of those children who, we are told so often, are the real wealth of America."<sup>30</sup>

Thomas condemned those who, in the name of economy, called for a reduction of socially important expenditure. Such men assiduously tried to effect savings in postal stamps and stationery while the life of the nation itself was in jeopardy, he added.<sup>31</sup> Nor did the Socialist nominee agree with Hoover and Roosevelt in holding that there was little scope for an increase in taxation. Thomas urged a steep increase in income and inheritance taxation in the upper brackets and an

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<sup>30</sup>Typescript, undated, ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Thomas paraphrased a sarcastic statement that H. G. Wells had made about Asquith.

end to all talk of a sales tax. He derided Roosevelt's rosy picture of easy millions flowing out of a Federal tax on beer and emphasized that it was comic to imply that the people could drink themselves out of the depression.

In his rejection of the ideal of a balanced budget at all costs, his opposition to false economy, his advocacy of a massive program of public works and even of consumer subsidies, Norman Thomas displayed a grasp of the implications of fiscal policy that was superior to that of the other candidates. Economists of the Keynesian persuasion were preaching such remedies and popularizers like Stuart Chase had been attempting to explain them to the public. Old line politicians, however, found it very difficult to extricate themselves from traditional notions concerning business cycles.

In one line of economic thinking, however, Thomas was not on firm ground. In numerous speeches he referred to "the staggering burden of unproductive debt which has been so potent a cause of our misery."<sup>32</sup> Neither of the two older parties had "cried out in warning" against the growth of the debt and the burden of interest payments. Thomas believed that the country would be economically in better health if

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<sup>32</sup>Speech over WEVD, NYC., August 12, 1932; Speech over WOR, NYC., September 18, 1932, Thomas Papers.

the national debt were wiped out.<sup>33</sup>

Towards the end of the campaign, Thomas put forth a suggestion for a capital levy to wipe out the national debt. He argued that since much of the debt had been contracted as a result of the World War into which the "owning class" had put the country, the fairest way of liquidating them would be through steeper income and inheritance taxation and by a capital levy. Outlining his proposals in a speech before an enthusiastic crowd in Columbus, Ohio, the Socialist leader asserted that a capital levy would be a just and practicable method of reducing the burden of debt and would, at the same time, constitute a step forward toward the ultimate goal of

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<sup>33</sup>The Socialist was, perhaps, influenced to some extent by alarmistic works about the evil of national debts, particularly by Lawrence Dennis's Is Capitalism Doomed? (New York, 1932); and Kuno Renatus's The Twelfth Hour of Capitalism (New York, 1932). In a review of Dennis's book, Thomas called it "a slashing and brilliant attack on the banker's notion of international finance," and, while repudiating the author's inference that war might be a way out of the crisis, he held that the book contained "good ammunition for the socialist." His summary of the main argument of the book was "that we are being ruined by the crazy way in which we have piled up debts and compounded interest by fresh loans. Now the day of reckoning has come. We cannot forever encourage prosperity by borrowing and lending more money." Thomas described Renatus's work "one of the most lucid bits of analysis of the present depression I have ever seen." Renatus placed the main responsibility for the depression on unproductive war debts. Thomas, however, criticized both the writers for their oversimplification and failure to take note of important factors that had contributed to bring on the depression. World Tomorrow, XV (June, 1932), 186.

socialization.<sup>34</sup> He said that a capital levy with the exemption limit fixed at \$250,000 could yield a revenue of 36 to 44 billion dollars. Such an amount would take care of the national debt, unemployment relief and a considerable part of municipal and farm debts.<sup>35</sup>

The impost, declared Thomas, would be levied only once-- on individuals, not corporations, on total net wealth, not capitalized income. It would be heavily graduated, but the exact rate would be determined after careful study. Assessment would follow the procedure of the inheritance tax. Payment could be by cash, government bonds, or approved securities of corporations. Bonds paid in could be cancelled; cash could be used to purchase or retire bonds; securities could be sold gradually in the open market or, in certain cases, held by the government as a step toward gaining control of the industry. The levy could thus be "a surgical operation to cut out a cancer of debt that threatens us with destruction. Nay more. It can be one orderly way of hastening the transfer of natural resources, public utilities and great monopolies to social ownership."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>The New York Times published the full text of the speech and carried a critical editorial. October 21, 1932, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup>The principal adviser to Norman Thomas on this issue was Maynard Krueger, a "Militant" Socialist and a member of the Department of Economics, Chicago University.

<sup>36</sup>New York Times, October 21, 1932, p. 14.

A capital levy was no novel idea but governments had been deterred from imposing it owing to administrative difficulties in collection and its alleged confiscatory implications. Some critics alleged that Thomas offered his proposal for a capital levy so late in the campaign in order to pacify "fire brands" within his own party.<sup>37</sup> The New York Times felt very much hurt that a fine gentleman like Mr. Thomas should advocate a course "so incautious, ill-founded, misleading and inflammatory."<sup>38</sup>

Thomas realized that the implementation of any radical legislation like a capital levy that would threaten property rights would encounter constitutional difficulties. The Socialist party, he declared, would work for a constitutional amendment affirmatively giving Congress power to enact economic and social legislation. Thomas sharply criticized the role of the Supreme Court and held that it had done "more damage

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas informed the writer that he did not purposely wait till the end of the campaign for putting forth his demand for a capital levy. He had asked Maynard Krueger to send him material on a capital levy "of which I was at the time ready to be a strong advocate." "I never did get all that I wanted but I did get some material and so I spoke at Columbus. ... I should have said more on the subject and earlier, if I had gotten the material which I thought I ought to have had." Thomas added that in his advocacy of the capital levy he was influenced by the writings of the British Socialist, Hugh Dalton. Thomas to the writer, January 17, 1955.

<sup>38</sup> "Open Season on Promises," New York Times, October 22, 1932, p. 14.

to social progress in America than any Congress."<sup>39</sup> The Socialist called for an end to the power of the Supreme Court "to enact its social prejudices into law under the guise of interpreting the Constitution."<sup>40</sup>

Thomas and other Socialist speakers urged laboring men not to vote for the "capitalist parties." "Voting with the Mellons and Astors and Raskobs is scabbing at the ballot box. Labor weakens its own cause everywhere by collaborating with the bosses at the polls."<sup>41</sup> They stressed labor's need for its own political party as it needed its own unions, and asserted that the Socialist party had consistently championed the case of the working men and women. Thomas argued that even on the old principle of rewarding friends and punishing enemies, labor should endorse the Socialist ticket.

In numerous speeches Norman Thomas expounded the demands for labor legislation contained in the Socialist platform. He called for the six-hour day and the five-day week without a reduction of wages; a comprehensive system of free public employment agencies; a compulsory system of unemployment compensation with adequate benefits, based on contributions by the government and by employers; old age pensions for persons

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<sup>39</sup>Speech at Morristown, New Jersey; New York Times, October 29, 1932, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. See also speech at Syracuse, New York, Thomas Papers.

<sup>41</sup>Radio speech, September 3, 1932, ibid.

sixty years of age and over; health and maternity insurance; improved systems of workmen's compensation and accident insurance; the abolition of child labor; and adequate minimum wage laws. He advocated the passage of a "Workers's Right" amendment to the Constitution in order to empower Congress to undertake these and other measures for the welfare of the workers of the land.

The Socialist candidate was much less clear in his approach to the problems of the farmers. In one of his few references to the crisis in agriculture, Thomas declared that his program "includes the creation of a Federal marketing agency for the purchase and marketing of agricultural products, the socialization of federal land banks and the extension by these banks of long term credit to farmers at low rates of interest."<sup>42</sup> He also called for governmental operation of the farm machinery industry and urged the creation of state, regional, and national land utilization boards to eliminate improper use of land.<sup>43</sup>

Thomas discussed at length his views on a proper foreign policy for the United States. He criticized the two major parties for side-stepping the issue and described their behavior as "characteristic of the degradation of political

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<sup>42</sup>Speech over the CBS network, July 13, 1932, *ibid.* Thomas told the writer that he had spoken to many farmers, "but never got big audiences or very much help from farm leaders." Thomas to the writer, January 17, 1955.

<sup>43</sup>Speech at Sioux City, Iowa, *New York Times*, August 30, 1932, p. 6.

democracy in America." He said that the attitude of the old parties was ostrich-like towards Russia, moralistic towards Japan, vague and fearful over foreign debts, and imperialistic in Latin America.<sup>44</sup>

The Socialist leader outlined a six-point "immediate" program for a sound foreign policy aimed at promoting international peace. The very first plank of his program was a demand for the diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union. Even though he described it as the "first and foremost" objective of his program, Thomas was hardly enthusiastic in his endorsement of the Soviet Union. He based his case for diplomatic recognition squarely on the ground that common sense dictated the official acceptance on the part of the United States government that the Soviet Union was actually in existence.

To put the case on the lowest terms, if I found myself in a room with a bear and had neither desire nor power to kill the bear, I should try to get along with the bear. The last thing I would do would be to kick it occasionally in the ribs--ala Hamilton Fish--and say, "Bear, I don't recognize you."<sup>45</sup>

Thomas urged that the United States should take the lead in calling for a world economic conference to consider problems of world trade and disarmament. He was specially anxious that the United States should set an example by accepting a

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<sup>44</sup>Speech in Boston, Mass., October 29, 1932, Thomas Papers.

<sup>45</sup>Speech during the campaign of 1932, undated, ibid.



"large dose" of disarmament, even if an international agreement on the subject was not reached. The Socialist leader urged that the United States should put an end to the trade in weapons, munitions and materials of war, including loans to belligerent nations. He said that he would not favor a complete embargo, at least as a first resort, even against an aggressor.

"Short of a complete embargo or blockade would be an embargo on arms, the principal materials of war, and loans. That emphatically I should favor. In most cases the question of right and wrong is so far from clear that this embargo on the means of strife should be the rule of the United States as belligerents on both sides."<sup>46</sup>

The Socialist nominee forcefully called for an end to imperialism on the part of the United States. Americans, he said, could ill afford to denounce Japanese militarists while Marines were occupying Haiti and Nicaragua. Even though he conceded that some improvement had taken place under the Hoover administration, he derided the propaganda that Marine rule was really a blessing in disguise to backward Haiti and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Thomas consistently adhered to this point of view except in the case of the Spanish Civil War. On this issue Thomas obviously felt that right was clearly on the side of the Loyalists.

Thomas appeared to subscribe fully to the view that the machinations of munition makers and international financiers had led the United States into the World War. The Socialist leader believed that it was an unnecessary war and that the United States could have served the cause of peace better if she had stayed aloof.

and Nicaragua. "Help to our weaker neighbors in sanitation and education does not require us to shoot a number of them first," Thomas declared. He urged the granting of autonomy to Puerto Rico and the setting of a definite and early date for Filipino freedom.

While both the Republican and Democratic nominees had pledged themselves to oppose any cancellation of the debts owed to the United States by European countries, Thomas advocated outright cancellation in order to free the American people "from the tremendous burden of psychological ill will and trade handicaps which the debts have imposed."<sup>47</sup> He asserted that President Hoover lost a fine opportunity to exercise real leadership by using the war debts as a bargaining counter to promote disarmament and world peace.

Thomas also voiced misgivings about militarism in the United States. He charged the two major parties with being "thoroughly militaristic in outlook." He declared that Hoover had actually increased American commitments to armaments and imperialism and that Roosevelt was being heralded by his supporters as a marine-minded politician.<sup>48</sup>

The Socialist expressed the view that the one place where

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<sup>47</sup>Speech over WEVD, NYC., August 12, 1932, ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Communication from Thomas to the annual meeting of the National Council for Prevention of War. Thomas criticized the Council for practising a "false neutrality" towards the two old parties. Ibid.

economy in expenditure was necessary and desirable was in the military establishment of the United States. He also urged the elimination of military training from educational institutions because, while it did not train students to become good soldiers, it did instill a "dangerous acceptance of militarism among the youth of America."

Thomas favored American entry into both the League of Nations and the World Court, but he expressed his misgivings about the League as it was then constituted. The League, he said, should be transformed from an organization of imperialist powers to a "democratic assemblage representative of the common people of the world."<sup>49</sup> Ever fearful of his country being forced into a foreign war, Thomas urged that the United States enter the League on the definite stipulation that she would not be "dragged into war to enforce peace."

Fervent opposition to war and an intense desire to keep his country out of foreign wars was repeatedly voiced by Thomas in numerous speeches, letters, articles, and pamphlets. He had, however, a gloomy foreboding that there was little chance of the United States keeping out of any future large-scale war. He urged a constitutional amendment in order to grant voters of the nation "the direct power to vote on the declaration of war."<sup>50</sup> He also clung to the old Socialist hope of a general strike of the workers to prevent war.

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<sup>49</sup>Speech over the CBS network, July 13, 1932, ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Speech at Morristown, N. J., New York Times, October 29, 1932, p. 10.

"With all my heart," he declared, "I favor resolute opposition to war and always I work for such an agreement among the workers of all nations as may block war by a general strike. I believe that young men who let it be known that they cannot be thrown by politicians like so many pawns into fratricidal homicide as part of our hope for peace."<sup>51</sup>

Thomas was fearful that extreme nationalism would be used "by a decadent capitalism as a convenient opiate to drug exploited workers." A capitalism gone nationalist, he warned, might seek a way out of the depression through war.

The very poverty of the world lessens resistance to war, heightens the strife for markets, and creates almost a positive desire for large scale war as a sure means of inflating a sadly deflated domestic economy. (Preferably, of course, others should do the fighting and we the provisioning or financing of fighters for an ample profit!)<sup>52</sup>

Thomas rejected proposals for planning under capitalism, advocated by Swope, George Seule, Walter Lippmann and others, holding that they were merely intended to salvage a useless

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<sup>51</sup>Speech delivered during the campaign, undated, Thomas Papers.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid. The anonymous author of "Topics of the Times," wrote that Thomas was very unkind in imputing such evil intentions to capitalism. "Mr. Thomas is really unkind when he suggests that capitalism may need another 'good war' to keep it going. Why should the capitalists be crazy enough to want it after what the last war did to them? As to the facts, it is the capitalists, the bankers, the 'Money Power,' that are today clamoring for international understanding, for leagues, for conferences, for a reign of reason. All the wars are in primitive China, in Bolivia and Paraguay, in Columbia and Peru, and in the mouth of anti-capitalistic Fascists." New York Times, September 21, 1932, p. 20.

and harmful wreck. He declared that what was needed was not merely a plan but a purpose. He would accept nothing less than the purpose of "a co-operative commonwealth" that only Socialism could usher in. Without socialization of "those natural resources which no man made and those aggregations now owned by absentee owners" no economic plan could be expected to benefit the community of "workers with hand and brain."

It is this transfer of natural resources, the great means of production, the banking system, the public utilities from private to public hands, which is the vital issue of our time. ... There is a defeatist sentiment among us which says that we cannot collectively manage our own business. We can, if we have the right ideals, if we rid our souls of the curse of racketeering bred by the low standards of the acquisitive society. ... We can manage our affairs if we will let engineers work for society as they now work for absentee owners.<sup>53</sup>

Thomas and other Socialist spokesmen consistently held that the responsibility for the nation's troubles could not be laid on an individual like President Hoover or on a political assembly like Congress. The real villain was the capitalistic system--"a nasty stinking wreck," as Jim Maurer called it.<sup>54</sup> Hillquit declared that a system responsible for recurring "insane and inhuman" depressions had no right to survive.<sup>55</sup> Few were the Socialists who gave capitalism an even chance for survival. Thomas proclaimed that the

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<sup>53</sup>Speech over the NBC network, Madison, Wis., November 7, 1932, Thomas Papers.

<sup>54</sup>Time (New York, N.Y.), XX (November 7, 1932), 15.

<sup>55</sup>New York Times, November 4, 1932, p. 16.

sands in the hour-glass were running very low for the "gamblers' civilization" of capitalism.<sup>56</sup>

Today another system draws near its predestined end. How soon that end will be I do not attempt to say. The nature of that end and the quality of the change we can work out rests with us.<sup>57</sup>

Workers of hand and brain, Thomas declared, should cast aside their lethargy and apathy and organize for political action. The Socialist party would be the most efficacious instrument for such action because it alone stood for social ownership and planned production for use.

Why vote Socialist? For the sake of yourselves and your children, for the sake of the whole company of workers with hand and brain, of every race and creed and clime, and the future of mankind.

Why vote Socialist? For the redemption of political action from the depredation of old-party politics and its use as a means of our social salvation.

Why vote Socialist? For the sake of our immediate gains now in the midst of this crisis. Nothing will give us power at the City Hall, Albany or Washington, no matter whether Tweedledum or Tweedledee is elected so much as a tremendous Socialist vote. Nothing will so encourage the workers to build up the intelligent movement in which is our only hope.<sup>58</sup>

Such was the impassioned appeal to the nation's voters by the Socialist candidate.

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<sup>56</sup>Norman Thomas, "The Fate of a Gamblers' Civilization," Current History, XXXVI (May, 1932), 160.

<sup>57</sup>Speech at York, Pa., August 1, 1932. Thomas Papers.

<sup>58</sup>Speech at Madison Square Garden, New York Times, November 4, 1932, p. 16.



Norman Thomas covered thirty-eight states during the campaign and made two hundred and fourteen speeches.<sup>59</sup> The Socialist nominee did most of his traveling in a second-hand car driven by his wife, Violet. There were no "ghosts" accompanying him to produce speeches tailored to prescribed specifications. Nor could the Socialist party afford to hire high-powered publicity men to boost their candidate in advance of his arrival in each town or city. "Publicity agents eat too much!" commented Violet Thomas, explaining why she was taking on herself the combined role of chauffeur, secretary and maid-of-all-work to the Socialist candidate.

Thomas had already won a reputation as a fine speaker. He was not a spell-binder. Fire and brim-stone were not his stocks in trade. On the contrary, his speeches were refreshingly free of vituperation and name-calling. His delivery was forceful and effective and his platform manners served to enhance the impact of his words on the audience.<sup>61</sup> A small town newspaper editor in Pennsylvania thus described his

<sup>59</sup>Memorandum from the National Secretary to the N.E.C., December 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>60</sup>Literary Digest (New York, N. Y.), CXIV (November 5, 1932), p. 44.

<sup>61</sup>"He speaks at once with dignity and fire, with practical realism and sensitive imagination. ... When he speaks it is the depth of conviction that counts primarily. But he is the fortunate owner of a rich, resonant voice, and has the gift of speaking at high speed yet with clarity and freedom from oratorical bombast" Devere Allen, "Norman Thomas--Why Not?" Nation, CXXXIV (March 30, 1932), 365.

impressions after listening to Thomas at a rally in Haverford:

An intellectual treat rewarded me. Mr. Thomas is a speaker of rare brilliance and polish. As an orator, he can make circles around all the other candidates. In all my life, I rarely have heard such a clear-cut, scintillating speech as he delivered last night. ...It lasted more than an hour, and the speaker never once consulted a note.<sup>62</sup>

The Christian Science Monitor declared in an editorial that "one cannot hear him deliver one of his campaign addresses without being stimulated to do some fresh and serious thinking."<sup>63</sup>

Thomas could also employ humor and sarcasm with telling effect. Newspaper reporters could always be sure of getting an interesting "quote" from him. In Philadelphia, for instance, Thomas was denied permission to speak in a park by the commissioner of parks who held that it was intended purely for "rest and recreation." When local Socialists pointed out that Hoover was scheduled to speak later at that very place, the commissioner blandly announced that the president's visit would be "educational" and nonpolitical. Thomas defied the fiat of the commissioner and spoke to a throng of nearly three thousand persons at the forbidden spot. He said that

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<sup>62</sup>William T. Ellis, "One Wise-Cracking Candidate," Bloomsburg Morning Press, undated clipping, Archives of the Socialist Party. Mr. Ellis resented a reply that Thomas gave to a questioner on the subject of religion and condemned such "wise-cracking" on the part of a presidential candidate.

<sup>63</sup>Christian Science Monitor, November 2, 1932, p. 10. The editorial added incongruously, "It is interesting to speculate whether Norman Thomas may become the Ramsay MacDonald of American Socialism."



it was the "clumsiest hypocrisy" to describe Hoover's scheduled speech as nonpolitical. "Imagine such a non-political speech--bed time stories about wild life on the Rapidan and 'How I Sat Up All Night With Charlie Dawes' Bank' --with that famous educator and literary critic, Boss Bill Vare of Philadelphia, to preside." Thomas called upon his running-mate to speak to the crowd and announced that "Anyone who has heard of Mr. Maurer's 'eel story' knows that it is more educational and more recreational than anything Herbert Hoover ever told."<sup>64</sup>

On another occasion Thomas declared that while there was a considerable pro-Roosevelt sentiment in the country, he had "never yet been able to find a real Roosevelt rooter except perhaps Josephus Daniels who says he raised him." The Roosevelt people," he added, "are those who put cotton in their ears so they can't hear him...."<sup>65</sup>

The Socialist candidate drew large crowds at almost every place where he spoke. In Indianapolis, for instance, a rally of "several thousand party followers" was addressed by Thomas<sup>66</sup> whereas four years earlier only two hundred had

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<sup>64</sup>Typescript, Thomas Papers.

<sup>65</sup>Time, XX (November 7, 1932), 15.

<sup>66</sup>New York Times, September 7, 1932, p. 2.

had listened to him at the same place.<sup>67</sup> In Philadelphia, the meeting Thomas addressed was described as "the biggest socialist gathering ever" in that city.<sup>68</sup> In the "ultra-conservative" insurance city of Hartford, Connecticut, the Socialist addressed "the greatest political rally ever held at the Bushnell Memorial."<sup>69</sup> "Interest shown in speeches of Thomas worries leaders of both parties," ran a headline in the New York Times, over a special article on the Socialist's one-day swing through Connecticut.<sup>70</sup> A very large crowd turned out to hear Thomas in Columbus, Ohio, and a gathering estimated at 11,000 listened to his final speech in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.<sup>71</sup>

In his own city of New York, Thomas spoke at rallies attended by several thousands. The opening shot of the campaign was fired at a public meeting in Town Hall, which was described as the most enthusiastic Socialist gathering in fifteen years.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>"We had 10,000 people at a mass meeting for Norman Thomas at Indianapolis where but 200 heard him four years ago." Edward Levinson to W. E. Woodward, September 12, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>68</sup>New York Times, October 31, 1932.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>New York Times, November 6, 1932, Sec. II, p. 5.

<sup>71</sup>New York Times, November 8, 1932, p. 14.

<sup>72</sup>New York Times, September 19, 1932, p. 12.

The 2000 in the hall were enthusiastic--wildly so at times--especially when Norman Thomas ...arose to speak. While the audience stood and cheered, a group of 200 younger members of the party, led by half a dozen youths, bearing the red flag, the party emblem, paraded around the hall singing Socialist songs.<sup>73</sup>

The youthful admirers of Thomas, mostly college students, were again on hand when he returned to the city after a campaign trip. Over two thousand of them swarmed into the Pennsylvania railway station bearing placards and banners and lustily singing the Internationale. When they saw Thomas coming from his train, "they rushed forward and engulfed him with their enthusiasm".<sup>74</sup> The youths formed a gay procession and paraded down Seventh Avenue to the candidate's unpretentious office on Nineteenth Street. There Thomas jumped on a big packing case and talked to them about his campaign trip and about the growing support given to the cause by the young. "It is like looking at a field of healthy young trees, not large yet but growing; it holds out great hope for the future," Thomas told them.<sup>75</sup>

The climax of the campaign was a great rally at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Hours before the scheduled time, crowds streamed into the Garden and the police closed the doors when all the twenty thousand seats were filled.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Time, XX (November 7, 1932), 15.

<sup>75</sup> New York Times, October 26, 1932, p. 8

Over five thousand persons stood outside and listened to the proceedings broadcast by amplifiers. Inside the hall there was great enthusiasm. Contributing to the clamor were the ubiquitous college students--several hundreds of them-- displaying a huge banner that proclaimed, "Columbia professors write Roosevelt's speeches, but the students vote for Thomas."

In a front page story published the following morning, a New York Times reporter thus described the scenes inside the Garden:

Red flags, red bunting and red handkerchiefs and hundreds of ushers with red bands on their arms helped to give the interior of the Garden a distinctive color while the blaring of the Internationale and other Socialist compositions by a band behind the platform brought from the audience repeated cheers. A demonstration lasting twenty minutes marked the greeting extended to Mr. Thomas. ...It was with great difficulty that Mr. Thomas finally succeeded in restoring enough order to begin his address as midnight approached.<sup>76</sup>

The huge crowd cheered wildly as Thomas proclaimed that only socialism could banish the fear and insecurity that plagued the lives of men and women.

Fear for the job, fear for daily bread, fear of that catastrophe of war or violent disruption toward which we steadily drift--who among us can say of such fear, "We know it not?" It is against the living background of hungry men and women, and in their sight that I raise tonight the banner of socialism, the hope of the world.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>New York Times, November 4, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

The most vocal support for Norman Thomas outside the ranks of the Socialist party came from middle-class intellectuals--and from university students.

In the first category were men who were jolted by the depression and sickened at the failure of the capitalistic parties to propose far-reaching measures of reform. At the same time, they were repelled by what they believed to be the totalitarian and conspiratorial elements inherent in the Communist party. "A great many of us are eager to vote for you," wrote historian Carl Wittke, to Norman Thomas, "because we want to pile up as large a Socialist protest vote as possible."<sup>78</sup>

A large protest vote--that was the objective of most of the intellectuals who gave their support to the Socialist ticket in 1932. A personal regard for Norman Thomas and appreciation for the intelligent and militant campaign that he had been waging were also factors that influenced many of them.<sup>79</sup> Sympathy for the Socialist party as such was a very minor factor, and allegiance to the cause of Socialism was, perhaps, nonexistent among the overwhelming majority of the

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<sup>78</sup>Wittke to Thomas, June 3, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party. Wittke was a member of the faculty of Ohio State University.

<sup>79</sup>Irwin Edman, Professor Philosophy, Columbia University, said: "I do not think Norman Thomas is a great man, but he is a good and intelligent one, and he represents the only program I can with self-respect vote for." Symposium, "How I shall Vote," Forum, LXXXVIII (November, 1932), 259-260.

intellectuals supporting the Thomas-Maurer ticket.

"I am no more a Marxist than I am a Mohammedan," said Elmer Davis, while announcing his support of Norman Thomas.<sup>80</sup>

Clarifying his position in support of the Socialist ticket, Davis declared:

The Socialist program is the only one that seriously attempts to cure our disease; probably it will not win this fall, but if it commands strong support it may force the other parties to face a few facts and to consider national instead of local interests.<sup>81</sup>

In general, the stand taken by Elmer Davis was typical of the group of middle-class intellectuals who publicly endorsed the Socialist nominees. They sought a large protest vote in the hope that it would frighten the two major parties into making concessions in the direction of "liberalism".<sup>82</sup> "Socialism in our time," was certainly not the slogan of most of those men. On the other hand, many of them were convinced that the

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 158

<sup>81</sup>Davis, "Collapse of Politics," Harper's Magazine, CLXV (September, 1932), 395.

<sup>82</sup>"The value of the vote for Thomas next fall, will be in its protest against the present operations of political government. Only by the negative force of fear will it be able to effect any immediate changes. A promise that a third party will be a serious contender in 1936 will be the most salutary result of the campaign of 1932, not only in consequence of the deterrent fear with which such a prophecy may strike the predatory forces now in control, but by virtue of the hope which it will give to the masses everywhere whose faith in the democratic process is almost gone." Robert Morss Lovett, "Progressives at Cleveland," New Republic, LXXI (July 20, 1932), 259.

label of "socialism" was a liability in the United States. They hoped that a good showing by the Socialist ticket in the national elections would pave the way for a new "liberal" third party that would quietly dispense with the embarrassing appellation.<sup>83</sup> It was, in all likelihood, such a hope that had prompted the League for Independent Political Action, for example, to extend its support to Thomas and Maurer.<sup>84</sup>

To mobilize effectively nonsocialist support for Thomas and Maurer an organization known as "Committee of One Thousand" was set up with Paul Douglas as Chairman.<sup>85</sup> Heartened by the initial response, the organization changed

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<sup>83</sup>Oswald Garrison Villard, for instance, declared that a large protest vote for the Socialist party "will make both the old parties sit up and take notice, and encourage those who desire a third liberal party without the Socialist name." "On Throwing Away Your Vote," Nation, CXXXV (October 5, 1932), 299.

<sup>84</sup>The League was founded in 1928 by John Dewey, Paul Douglas and a few other liberals. It was essentially an upper-middle class, white-collar group, top-heavy with university professors. The LIPA believed in the need for a new alignment in American politics and in the principle of increasing social control. At its conference in Cleveland, (July 9-10, 1932), the LIPA endorsed the candidacies of Thomas and Maurer. The League also published earlier a "Four Year Presidential Plan" which was commended to the American public in an "open letter" signed by no less than 500 economists. See John Dewey, "Prospects for a Third Party," New Republic, LXXI (July 27, 1932), 278-280; Devere Allen, "A Program for Revolt," Nation, CXXXV (July 27, 1932), 80-82; Peel and Donnelley, 1932 Campaign, 197-198. For the "open letter" of the five hundred economists, see New York Times, August 8, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup>Other office-bearers were vice-presidents: Morris R. Cohen, John Dewey, Bishop Francis J. McConnell and Oswald Garrison Villard; treasurer; Reinhold Niebuhr; secretary, Mary Fox.

its name to "Committee of One Hundred Thousand." That name was retained till the end of the campaign, but the maximum membership of the Committee was only 9,393.<sup>86</sup> A group of well-known authors sponsored a "Committee of Writers for Thomas and Maurer." It was imperative, the sponsors declared, "to organize intelligent Americans for economic planning radical enough to remove the cancer of our present-day capitalistic anarchy. We believe that in sincerity, courage and economic understanding he is personally superior to either Mr. Hoover or Mr. Roosevelt."<sup>87</sup> The signers of the declaration included Stephen Vincent Benet, Van Wyck Brooks, Upton Sinclair, George Kaufman, Silas Bent, Stuart Chase, Elmer Davis, Henry Hazlitt and Lewis Gannett.<sup>88</sup> As the campaign progressed other well known writers and artists announced their support for Thomas. They included newspaper critics Alexander Woolcott, Ernest Boyd, and Franklin Pierce Adams; composers George Gershwin and Deems Taylor; playwrights and poets Marc Connelly, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Weaver, and Arthur Richman; and editors Paul U. Kellogg and Oswald

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<sup>86</sup>Memorandum from National Secretary to the NEC, December 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>87</sup>New York Times, October 7, 1932, p. 13.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid. Other signers were Charles J. Finger, Howard Brubaker, Burton Roscoe, Morris Ryskind, Bertram Bloch, Gilbert Gabriel, Paul Green, Heywood Brown, Llewellyn Jones, W. E. Woodward, and Claire and Paul Sifton.



Garrison Villard.<sup>89</sup>

Another small group of intellectuals who were vocal in their support of the Socialist ticket were the pacifists. In a poll of members of the largest organization of American pacifists, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Thomas held a commanding lead with 75.1 per cent.<sup>90</sup>

An interesting feature of the campaign was a remarkable political ferment among university students and the development of a considerable volume of support among them for the Socialist nominee. While to the rest of the nation the battle was between Hoover and Roosevelt, to hundreds of young students, like 17-year old James A. Wechsler of Columbia University, "the central figure in the campaign was tall, tireless Norman

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<sup>89</sup> Statements of support from these persons were released to the press by the Committee for Thomas and Maurer. Arthur Richman, a playwright and an ex-president of the Dramatists' Guild, for instance, declared in a statement: "...Thomas, while understanding the old traditions as fully as Hoover, has a mind receptive to new ideas; but unlike Roosevelt, he advocates them only after comprehending all their implications." He added that there was no indication that either Hoover or Roosevelt would espouse a cause that could be popular only with a minority of the people: "...to do this requires a social-mindedness and a courage which, so far as appears from anything they have done, they do not possess." Thomas Papers.

<sup>90</sup> J. B. Matthews, "Pacifists Prefer Thomas," World Tomorrow, XV (October 26, 1932), p. 402. Of 8,000 members polled, 1,709 responded and Hoover, Roosevelt, and Foster obtained 20.4, 2.9 and 1.6 per cent of the votes respectively.

Thomas.<sup>91</sup> The youthful revolutionists of Columbia were agog with excitement and were proud of themselves when a poll of Columbia students showed Thomas with a clear lead over Hoover and Roosevelt.<sup>92</sup> The campus newspaper, the Spectator, stridently declared that the results of the poll had shown the world that Columbia was "an educational institution." The newspaper proclaimed that Thomas "is the Columbia man's choice as well as any other intelligent man's for what some people still call the highest honor in the land."<sup>93</sup>

In a nation-wide campus straw poll, Hoover scored a clear victory but the Thomas vote was quite impressive. "The most striking feature of the poll," declared a report in the Daily Princetonian, "was the surprising showing of Thomas, the Socialist candidate, who led the voting in five colleges, carried Colorado and Missouri, and almost equalled Roosevelt's total in the East and the Middle West."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>James A. Wechsler, The Age of Suspicion (New York: Random House, 1953), 40. At the age of seventeen, Wechsler was a Socialist; later he migrated to the Communist camp but broke with them after some years. He is now editor of the New York Post, and an acknowledged "anti-communist."

<sup>92</sup>Thomas 1,033; Hoover 833; F. D. R. 547; Foster 21; ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Daily Princetonian, October 28, 1932, p. 1. Of 58,686 votes cast, Hoover received 29,289, Roosevelt 18,212, Thomas 10,470, Foster 715 and Upshaw 103. Roosevelt won no state outside the solid South. Thomas made his best showing in the Mid West, where he received 23 per cent of the total vote. He carried Columbia, New York University, University of Colorado, Colorado School of Mines, and St. Louis University. None of the candidates carried his own alma mater.

The national headquarters of the Socialist party, under the initiative of Clarence Senior, made a valiant attempt to mobilize support for the Socialist ticket in college campuses. Thomas-for-President Clubs were established in 274 colleges and universities. Some of the clubs were small and held only a few meetings, "but in the majority of cases the program outlined was followed carefully and considerable interest aroused."<sup>95</sup> Paul Ritterskamp, chairman of the "National Students' Committee" wrote letters full of fire and fervor to likely prospects in universities across the nation.

Students, our need is common--the need of all workers--to unite and break those fettering chains and false divisions. Leaders of tomorrow, join our fighting band that all workers may soon be free. It is up to us, the students, to educate, organize, and make assured the classless society through the coming of socialism in our time.<sup>96</sup>

Among those who responded with vigor and enthusiasm to that clarion call was a student named Walter P. Reuther of Detroit College. Young Reuther was chairman of the Thomas-for-President Club in his college.<sup>97</sup> Another young man who was active in organizational work among students was Monroe Sweetland.<sup>98</sup> There were hundreds of youths like Reuther and

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<sup>95</sup>Memorandum from the National Secretary to the N.E.C., December 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>96</sup>Ritterskamp to George F. Robinson (Lincoln College, Jefferson City, Mo.), October 7, 1932, ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Reuther is at present President of the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

<sup>98</sup>Sweetland is at present Democratic National Committeeman from Oregon.

Sweetland in American colleges who were exhilarated by the socialist message and who were enthusiastic about Norman Thomas.

But a party claiming to be the champion of the working classes of the land could hardly be enthusiastic over the support it received from poets, preachers, playwrights, professors, pacifists, columnists, and college students. What was of crucial importance was the support that the party could command from organized labor. The pitiful inadequacy of support from that quarter was the Achilles-heel of American socialism.

A socialist party without strong labor unions to back it would be like a spirited youth stricken by polio. Courage, determination, and sincerity might be the virtues of such a youth. But who would venture to place a bet on him in a track meet?

The leaders of the American Federation of Labor were unwilling to give any recognition to the Socialist party. The National Non-Partisan Committee of the Federation circulated a report of the labor records of Hoover, Curtis, Roosevelt, and Garner without any specific recommendations. Many labor leaders were personally sympathetic to the Roosevelt cause and a number of state Federations of Labor came out for the Governor. Only the Vermont State Federation of Labor chose to endorse the Socialist ticket.

The only important trade union that urged the need for independent political action by labor was the United Textile Workers of America. A resolution criticizing the two major parties and calling for the establishment of a labor party was successfully piloted through the convention of the U.T.W. by Emil Rieve, president of the American Federation of Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers.

Rieve, who was one of the few labor leaders openly sympathetic towards the Socialist party, headed a Labor Committee for Thomas and Maurer and was able to secure individual endorsements to the ticket from 139 persons in 26 unions.<sup>99</sup> It was indeed a meagre quantum of support for a party that had avowedly dedicated itself to the cause of labor. The only consolation that the Socialists could derive was, perhaps, the negative one of finding that the Communist party received even less support than themselves from labor unions.

The Socialist party also failed miserably to win electoral support from farmers, who were very badly hurt by the depression. The Socialists lacked the organization, the

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<sup>99</sup>The following unions endorsed the Socialist national ticket: Federated Trades Council, Milwaukee; International Association of Machinists, Local 1052, Milwaukee; American Federation of Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers, Local 11, Newark, N. J., Local 39, Philadelphia, and locals from Washington, N. J., and Milwaukee, Wis.; Cigar Makers International, Local 87, Brooklyn; Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Chicago Joint Board; C. L. U., La Grande, Oregon; C. L. U., Huntington, W. Va. Memorandum from the National Secretary to the N.E.C., December 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

finances and the field workers to carry their message to the farm folk. A memorandum prepared by the National Secretary of the party throws much light on the woefully inadequate work that the party was able to do among farmers during the campaign.

Letters were sent out to farmers in 23 states whose names were selected arbitrarily from a list of farmers subscribing to the "American Guardian." They were asked to distribute literature and to secure the names of farmers who would be interested in becoming members of the Farmers' League. The response to these efforts was not as large as we had hoped. A number of them did send for literature and directed the distribution by others. In all there were 122 farmers who pushed the work of the League, distributed literature, assisted at meetings and secured the interest of farmers of their acquaintance. These farmers are from seventeen states.

The work of interesting farmers was dropped early in order to cut down the size of the deficit. State organizations kept up a considerable amount of such work...<sup>100</sup>

No concerted attempt was made by the party to build up a strong base of support among the Negroes,<sup>101</sup> who, according to Walter White of the N.A.A.C.P., were ready for "the greatest political revolt...that has ever been known in a national election."<sup>102</sup> Norman Thomas followed the traditional

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> The comprehensive memorandum on the campaign presented to the N.E.C. by the National Secretary of the party did not contain any section specifically devoted to work among the Negroes.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in World Tomorrow, XV (November 2, 1932), 425. White stated that Negroes were disappointed with the performance of Hoover, but had little hope in the Democratic party.



Socialist approach of viewing the Negro problem mainly from the economic point of view. He declared that "the root of race prejudice is planted deep in the soul of economic inequality." "The establishment of economic justice and the end of a class division of society will rapidly help us recover our sanity concerning race relations," he added. Thomas disdained any appeal for support on racial grounds and scrupulously refrained from offering panaceas for overnight elimination of the social disabilities of the Negroes. As a result, perhaps, of this approach, he failed to gather to his standard any significant number of Negroes.<sup>103</sup>

The party was plagued by a grievous lack of funds. While the Democratic and Republican parties counted their campaign expenditure in millions of dollars, the Socialist party had a grand war chest of \$25,663.36 of which \$5,883.76 was owed by locals, branches, and state organizations.<sup>104</sup> The

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<sup>103</sup>The Communist party, with a radically different approach specifically designed to appeal to the racially-minded Negro, had no better luck than the Socialist party. Perhaps, as Wilson Record says, Negroes "were too preoccupied with staying alive and praising God (in that order) to give time to the building of the new society." Record adds that Negroes were also reluctant "to invite the stigma of radicalism when the stigma of race was already overwhelming." Negro and the Communist Party, 11. "In retrospect I think that we socialists made a mistake not to particularize more on the race issue in behalf of Negroes but I do not think it would have made much difference in the vote." Thomas to writer, January 17, 1955.

<sup>104</sup>Memorandum from the National Secretary to the N.E.C., December 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

Committee for Thomas and Maurer was able to collect only \$17,302.31. The Socialists could not command as much for their entire national campaign as was spent by some Republican and Democratic candidates to win a single Congressional seat.

Thomas kept his personal expenses to the barest minimum. A nineteen-day campaign swing cost the nominee \$229.41. A ten day jaunt through New England was completed at a cost of \$55.45. A typical item in Violet's carefully kept account book ran thus: Meals, tips, taxi: \$1.15. Thomas gave a tip to a woman correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor on how to cut expenses during travel. "We can save a lot by sitting down and by studying the menu," he said.<sup>105</sup>

The peregrinations of its presidential candidate did not cost the party any thing; in fact Thomas was able to make some money for the party while campaigning. At many of the meetings addressed by him, an admission fee of 10 or 25 cents was levied and, in addition, the local comrades also passed the hat around. Forty per cent of the amount collected went to the local party organization and the rest to the national headquarters of the party.

With heavy demands on its slender resources, the national headquarters was barely able to keep its head above water.

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<sup>105</sup>Christian Science Monitor, October 28, 1932, p. 4. Here are details of Thomas's expenses on his New England trip: meals \$16.20; gas and oil \$22.65; repairs and grease \$4.85; ferry charges and tolls \$6.25; public stenographer \$4; incidentals \$1.50.



On election day, stretching his limbs after an arduous campaign, the national secretary lifted the telephone in his office to call a friend. It was dead--the company had disconnected it because of non-payment of dues.<sup>106</sup>

No account of the Socialist campaign in 1932 would be complete without mention being made of the remarkable organizational and promotional work of the 28-year old Clarence Senior. Operating on an extremely low budget, Senior and his associates in the national headquarters drove themselves unmercifully in the service of the party. Thomas raised funds to put some "earnest young men" in the world. "They worked for almost nothing and without them we would have got practically nowhere."<sup>107</sup> The national headquarters mailed out over eight million pieces of campaign literature--a four-fold increase over the 1928 figures.<sup>108</sup> A brightly-edited campaign journal, America For All, obtained articles from many well-known writers and public figures who had come out for Thomas and Maurer.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Senior to H. N. Sturgeon (Sioux City, Iowa), November 7, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>107</sup>Thomas to the writer, January 17, 1955.

<sup>108</sup>Memorandum from the National Secretary to the N.E.C. December 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>109</sup>The journal was edited by Edward Levinson. It reached a circulation of 120,000 in the last week of October, 1932, and was reported to be paying its way. After the election, however, the publication was discontinued owing to lack of funds. Paul Sifton and Mary Fox were very active in publicity work under the auspices of the Committee for Thomas and Maurer.

Many election prophets proclaimed that the Socialist party might poll the largest vote in its history. The vigor with which Norman Thomas campaigned, the caliber of many of the Socialist candidates, and the dissatisfaction with the older parties that was alleged to be widespread, led many of them to predict a record Socialist vote. The Christian Science Monitor carried a report from its Washington bureau to the effect that the Socialist vote may tip the scale in some states.<sup>110</sup>

"The coming election will undoubtedly show a large increase in the Socialist vote," declared the St.

Louis Star-Times.<sup>111</sup> The New York Times editorially expressed a similar view, adding a tribute to the quality of some of the Socialist candidates:

it is impossible to deny that the high character and special ability of some Socialist nominees make a strong appeal to non-Socialist voters who are in mental and spiritual revolt from the two leading political parties and who are thinking of voting the Socialist ticket on the principle that in this case it is men, not measures, that count. Such an inclination is almost certain to swell the vote of Mr. Norman Thomas far beyond the natural limits of his party.<sup>112</sup>

Many Socialists and their allies were enthused by such rosy

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<sup>110</sup>Christian Science Monitor, October 24, 1932, p. 3. The Monitor's coverage of the Socialist campaign, however, was very inadequate.

<sup>111</sup>Quoted in Literary Digest, CXIV (October 15, 1932), p. 11.

<sup>112</sup>New York Times, November 4, 1932, p. 18. The newspaper predicted an unusually large "protest vote" in an editorial on November 3, 1932, p. 20.

reports in the "capitalist" press. They were overjoyed when the Literary Digest predicted, on the basis of its national poll, that Thomas would receive two million votes.<sup>113</sup> Even the cautious Hillquit publicly stated that the Socialist vote might exceed two millions. Kirby Page, the pacifist, delivered a radio address entitled, "If Norman Thomas polls three million votes."

Thomas himself rarely made any predictions about the size of the Socialist vote.<sup>114</sup> But on one occasion--on a day when he had received a tumultuous reception from his New York admirers--Thomas told a reporter that the Socialist vote would be "very good, probably the best we ever got." He even ventured to add that there was a good chance for the party to win two congressional seats in Wisconsin, one in California and one in the Reading district of Pennsylvania.<sup>115</sup> But as the campaign drew to a close Thomas sensed the mounting public sentiment in favor of Roosevelt. "There's a strong Roosevelt sentiment throughout the country but it's based less on affection for or confidence in him than hatred of his.

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<sup>113</sup> Literary Digest, CXIV (November 5, 1932), 44.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas made a general prediction about the outcome of the election as early as February, 1932. He told a reporter for the Poughkeepsie Eagle-News that the Democratic party could beat Hoover with almost any candidate and that Governor Roosevelt would win, if he was nominated by his party. Quoted in the New York Times, February 27, 1932, p. 8.

<sup>115</sup> New York Times, October 26, 1932, p. 8.

opponent," reported the Socialist candidate a few days before the election. "All this protest vote will go to Roosevelt and not to me," he added.<sup>116</sup>

The American people went to the polls on November 8, 1932. The Socialist presidential candidate received 903,286 votes.<sup>117</sup> Roosevelt polled 22,815,539 votes, while Hoover obtained 15,759,930.<sup>118</sup>

The American people had made their decisions on the weighty problems that confronted them. The New York Times proclaimed their verdict in a banner headline: DEMOCRATS CONTROL WET CONGRESS.<sup>119</sup>

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From York, Pennsylvania, came a letter addressed to the national secretary of the Socialist party--a few sentences scribbled with pencil on an yellowing sheet by an unlettered correspondent. "Dear Comrade The Election is over now is

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<sup>116</sup>Time, XX (November 7, 1932), 15.

<sup>117</sup>Corrected figures announced in January, 1933. New Leader, XV (January 14, 1933), 8.

<sup>118</sup>See detailed statistics in Peel and Donnelly, 1932 Campaign, 230-231.

<sup>119</sup>The newspaper carried the following streamers: ROOSEVELT WINNER IN LANDSLIDE! DEMOCRATS CONTROL WET CONGRESS; LEHMAN GOVERNOR O'BRIEN MAYOR. New York Times, November 9, 1932, p. 1.

the time to start the Edection Program Enclose find money  
order for 65 ct .... #120

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<sup>120</sup>Chas. H. Zorbough (?) to S. P. headquarters,  
November 12, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RIFT WIDENS

"We are not discouraged by the results. Election day does not mark the end of the campaign for us. Rather it is the signal for the launching of a more far-reaching campaign of organization," wrote Thomas to one of his supporters soon after the national elections of 1932.<sup>1</sup> The Socialist had expected nearly twice the votes that were actually recorded for him. He was convinced that several thousand votes cast for the Socialist ticket had not been counted.<sup>2</sup> Thomas attributed the failure of the party to poll a larger vote to "the stampede of the herd which voted its hates without taking a chance on its hopes,"<sup>3</sup> and to the organizational

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas to Horace S. Sourry, November 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas told the writer that there were very few Socialist watchers at polling booths and that a number of cases were reported of failure of election officials to comply with regulations. It also often happened, said Thomas, that the officials became tired after counting Republican and Democratic votes and were not too particular about counting the Socialist votes. Thomas told a story about a visit he once made to a polling place in New York City. An official recognized him and greeted him warmly. "We are treating you right, Mr. Thomas. We are giving you 26 votes," said he. "Have you counted them all?" Thomas asked him. "Hell, no!" was the answer. Interview with Thomas, August, 1954.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas to conference on organization, Socialist party headquarters, Chicago, November 9, 1932, Thomas Papers.

weakness of the party itself. Many newspapers, in commenting on the elections, expressed a similar view. "Our own guess," declared the Macon Telegraph, "is that the last-minute stampede to Roosevelt drew into its vortex a great number of people who were going to vote for Thomas, until they scented victory with Roosevelt, and a great number of others who feared that a vote for Thomas might be a vote for Hoover."<sup>4</sup>

Several newspaper editorials predicted a gloomy future for the Socialist party. "In spite of hard times and discontent with existing conditions, the American people have no faith in Socialism," declared the Washington Post.<sup>4</sup> "In view of the brilliant and arduous campaign made by Thomas, who while lacking the human and emotional appeal of Debs, is by far the ablest candidate Socialism ever had in this country, it appears the Socialist cause, as a separate movement, has little to hope for," commented the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.<sup>5</sup> Pessimism about the party's future was by no means confined to the editorial columns of newspapers. Its paralyzing tentacles reached into the ranks of the party itself.

While the Socialist vote was smaller than what had been fondly expected, it still represented a fourfold increase over the 1928 figures. Indeed, the Socialist party of America

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<sup>4</sup>Quoted in "The Socialist Avalanche that Failed," Literary Digest, CXIV (December 3, 1932), 10.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



was one of the very few labor and socialist parties that registered political gains in the depression year of 1932. Only a few months earlier, British Socialism had suffered a crushing defeat, its Parliamentary representation being cut from 288 to a mere 52 seats. The German Social Democratic party, the strongest unit in the Labor and Socialist International, was fighting with its back to the wall against the growing might of Hitler's Nazis. In fact, the Socialist movement found itself in a stalemate everywhere except in the Scandinavian countries and Spain--and in the United States. "Socialism recently ... has met with serious setbacks," bemoaned Emile Vandervelde, eminent Belgian radical and chairman of the International, in a message to his American comrades. "There is not one of the great powers that has not at its head a conservative or fascist government. In proportion as the economic decomposition of capitalism grows more grave, the frightened bourgeois turn to every means, to of force and corruption, to battle the masses and beat down their efforts toward deliverance."<sup>6</sup>

In the light of such circumstances, American Socialists need not have allowed themselves to be discouraged and disheartened by the size of their vote. But unfortunately a spirit of gloom overcame many Socialists. A vigorous campaign had been waged and had aroused tremendous enthusiasm; a

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<sup>6</sup>March of Socialism, 16.



record Socialist vote had been predicted; even the "capitalist" newspapers had conceded that the party might poll over two million votes. Socialist expectations had been raised so high that when the final results were tabulated, many experienced a great sense of frustration.

There were some interesting parallels between the 1932 campaign and that of 1908 when Eugene Debs barnstormed across the land in the famous "Red Special." "The vigor and enthusiasm of the campaign," wrote J. Mahlon Barnes, national secretary of the party, in a report after the election, "was such that the Socialists confidently expected a large increase of their vote and even the non-Socialist press of the country freely predicted about a million votes for Eugene V. Debs, but the vote actually cast for him in that election was only 421,000, a slight increase over that of 1904, the party's former high record." Barnes observed that the prevalence of acute distress and unemployment had not intensified but had blunted the radicalism of the workers and that the candidacy of the "progressive" Bryan further served to reduce the Socialist vote.<sup>7</sup> The Appeal to Reason cheerfully headlined its election story: "Taft is elected; Bryan defeated; Debs victorious."

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<sup>7</sup>Quoted by Clarence Senior, Memorandum from the National Secretary to N.E.C., December 9, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party. See also Ray Ginger, The Bending Cross (New Brunswick, 1949), 265-84; and Kipnis, American Socialist Movement 1897-1912, 212-13.

But among party leaders and members there was dejection and frustration. The mood that prevailed in the party following the 1932 elections was similar.

"Indeed my principal fear of the numerical results of the election," wrote Thomas, "is not its minor blow to our pride or its greater blow to our prestige and usefulness in public affairs but the possible adverse effect it may have on our growing organization."<sup>8</sup> His fears proved to be only too true. But if the election results stunned many Socialists, they had an even greater impact on the nonparty "independents" and "progressives" who had come out in support of the party's ticket. Thomas's postelection appeal to the members of the Thomas and Maurer Committee to join the Socialist party and fight for social and economic justice brought forth little response. Most of them quietly put an end to their flirtation with the Socialist party and resumed their "independence."

Nineteen months after the 1932 elections the Socialist party held a national convention. During the intervening period the party was rocked by several controversies and factional fights that sapped its vital energies. The disappointment caused by the election results was only one of the contributory causes for the deterioration of the party's morale and unity.

While the campaign had brought forth a semblance of unity

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas to conference on organization, November 9, 1932, Thomas Papers.

in the party, all the old wounds that had been inflicted during the Milwaukee convention remained unhealed. The differences between Thomas and Hillquit continued to grow. Bitterness increased far more between their supporters than between the two leaders themselves. The death of Hillquit in October, 1933, was a great blow to the party's unity and stability. Bereft of his steadying hand, the Old Guard became intransigent and tended to regard all criticisms as heresy and conspiracy. The Militants and others who regarded themselves as "left wingers," no longer confronted in the party an opponent whose skill in "theory" and ability in mobilizing support was far superior to theirs. With the passing of Hillquit a cementing force in the party disappeared.

Another factor that contributed to the intensification of the party's internal troubles was the degree of success that Franklin D. Roosevelt was able to register with his New Deal program. The dynamic leadership that Roosevelt provided and the tremendous popular enthusiasm that he was able to generate were hardly anticipated by the Socialist leaders. "Democratic failure which is inevitable will be found to play into our hands. We must be ready." Thus did Thomas express himself two days after the national election in 1932.<sup>9</sup> "Disillusionment in the Roosevelt regime will probably set in at an early stage of his administration," prognosticated

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

Louis Waldman.<sup>10</sup> Such hopes were speedily nullified.

The frustration and dissatisfaction in Socialist ranks were further aggravated by the collapse of the Social Democratic party of Germany. The fall of the German party without a show of fight or of resistance appeared to discredit the Socialist movement and posed a grave psychological problem for Socialists everywhere. The destruction of the Austrian Social Democratic party by Chancellor Dollfuss and the Heimwehr was yet another blow to the confidence of Socialists and intensified the controversies in their ranks on the "correct" tactics that the party should follow in order to win power. Bitter disputes also arose on whether the menace of fascism required a "united front" between the Socialist and the Communist parties.

The Socialist party became weakened and divided as a result of the combination of these circumstances.

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That all was not well in the house of Socialism was exposed to public view when three prominent Socialists left the party in succession, expressing dissatisfaction with its performance and prospects. All of them had been close to

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<sup>10</sup>Waldman to N.E.C., December 6, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

Thomas and had opposed the Old Guard. Their defection was a personal blow to him and strengthened the suspicion of the Old Guard against those whom they regarded as bourgeois pseudoradicals.

The popular columnist, Heywood Broun, resigned from the party in April, 1933. He had participated in Communist-sponsored meetings on the case of the Scottsboro boys<sup>11</sup> in defiance of a directive by the New York local and expected to be expelled. Broun told reporters that the poor vote of the Socialist party in the 1932 presidential election indicated that something was seriously wrong with that organization. He could find no cheer in the record of the Socialist parties of Great Britain and Germany. He had, therefore, decided to move "leftward," to a position much more radical than that of the American Socialist party. He would not join the Communist party "because I hate Communists," but he might start a party of his own, even if it were to be a "one-man" party.<sup>12</sup>

Norman Thomas was disturbed by Broun's resignation but, at the same time, he felt that the New York City Local of the party had been "a bit tactless" in the method in which it had

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<sup>11</sup>The case involved nine Negroes who had been sentenced to death by an Alabama court on a charge of having attacked two white women. The death sentence imposed on them was later thrown out by the United States Supreme Court. The Communists helped in the defense of the accused and, at the same time, used the episode in order to drum up support for their party.

<sup>12</sup>New York Times, April 29, 1933, p. 15.

handled the affair.<sup>13</sup> But the New Leader, voicing the views of the Old Guard leadership, cited Broun's defection as an example of the untrustworthiness of middle class newcomers to the party--"such a person should not have been urged to join the party in the first place." The journal reminded its leaders that Broun had been a staunch supporter of the Militants before and during the Milwaukee convention of the party.<sup>14</sup>

An even greater shock was in store for Thomas when Paul Blanshard announced his resignation from the party and his endorsement of the Fusion candidate, Fiorello LaGuardia, for the mayoralty of New York City.<sup>15</sup> In a "confidential" statement addressed to his erstwhile comrades Blanshard declared that after fifteen years of work in the Socialist movement he had reached the conclusion that the "Socialist Party as a political instrument is hopeless."

It is now evident that the party could not realize its great opportunities during the depression because the American working class had come to think of it as an insignificant and permanently defeated organization. In addition two factors, national and international, have made the party's position more

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<sup>13</sup>Thomas to Charles F. Chase, December 21, 1933, Thomas Papers. Thomas added that Broun was a staunch individualist and was somewhat uncomfortable as a party member. He felt that Broun had "really no serious interference of which to complain" but that he had seized on the excuse in order to precipitate his resignation from the party.

<sup>14</sup>Editorial, "Socialist Party Discipline," New Leader, XV (May 6, 1933), 2.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas to John Haynes Holmes, September 14, 1933, Thomas Papers.

hopeless in recent months. Roosevelt with his program of managed capitalism has taken the initiative from us in immediate economic change, and the Socialist International has lost prestige so completely in Europe that it is a positive disadvantage for an American party to be connected with it.

Blanshard felt that the party had outlived its usefulness and should be scrapped. "After all," he said, "a political party is not a church which is based chiefly on idealism and righteousness; it is an aggregation of citizens to exercise political power, and if it fails to develop any political power after a whole generation of effort it has no claim to the name."<sup>16</sup>

The New Leader was again quick to point out the moral. In an editorial entitled "A Lesson for Socialists," the journal declared that the "passing" of Blanshard was not an exceptional incident. "He posed as a 'left' in the Milwaukee convention. ...Events show that he was so far to the right that another step carried him into the capitalist reform camp."<sup>17</sup> Such gibes were easily recognized in party circles as constituting an indirect criticism of Thomas with whom Blanshard had worked closely both in the party and in the League for Industrial Democracy. "Paul Blanshard's action," wrote Thomas to one of his associates, "is, of course, a

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<sup>16</sup>"A Confidential Statement by Paul Blanshard Concerning his Resignation from the Socialist Party," undated, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>17</sup>"A Lesson for Socialists," New Leader, XVI (September 23, 1933), 2.



crushing blow to me personally and very much injured nearly everything in which I am interested--the relation of the L.I.D. to the Party, the victory of the right sort of element in the Party and all the rest."<sup>18</sup>

When LaGuardia won the mayoral election, he named Blanshard as Commissioner of Accounts and the latter forthwith took on his staff three bright young New York Socialists. Immediately there were demands that the men should be expelled from the party. Thomas did not want an acute controversy over the issue and requested the men to resign from the party. He showed no dislike or anger towards them because of their action. "In spite of very deep sorrow that you are accepting these jobs I shall be enough of an optimist that you can do some good to the city and may get some experience which will be useful to the only cause that matters," he wrote to them.<sup>19</sup>

From California came tidings that boded ill for the party. Upton Sinclair, veteran Socialist and writer, announced his intention to seek the Democratic nomination for the governorship of the Golden State. The State Executive Committee of the Socialist party, at its meeting in September, 1933, expelled him and denounced him for his apostacy. Earlier that month

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<sup>18</sup>Thomas to Andrew Biemiller, September 14, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas to Rosner, White and Maslow, December 19, 1933, Thomas Papers. Thomas added that he could not look upon them either as "expert borers from within" or as youngsters getting experience that might later be useful.



the novelist had written a confidential letter to Norman Thomas outlining the program that was later to blossom forth as the End Poverty In California movement. Thomas had critically appraised the program and had warned Sinclair that he could not hope to achieve any significant reform by working through the older political parties.<sup>20</sup> The novelist, however, decided otherwise and embarked on a spirited campaign that won him the Democratic nomination and brought him within an ace of his main objective.

The Old Guard leaders received the news of Sinclair's exit from the party with their usual "We told you so" attitude. They dismissed Sinclair as a crank and a faddist whose political somersault should cause no discomfort to any true Socialist.<sup>21</sup> Thomas, however, was greatly saddened. Sinclair was one of the founders of the Inter-Collegiate Socialist Society from which the League for Industrial Democracy had developed. He was an outstanding popularizer of socialistic ideas and through his numerous books he reached a far wider audience than any other American Socialist. The defection of such a man was not to be lightly to be dismissed.

Heywood Brown had been the only Socialist who occupied a leading place among the ranks of working journalists; Upton

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<sup>20</sup> Sinclair to Thomas, September 6, 1933; Thomas to Sinclair, September 14, 1933; Thomas to Sinclair, September 27, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>21</sup> Editorial, "Forget Him," New Leader, XVII (July 7, 1934), 2.

Sinclair was the only Socialist to enjoy a wide popularity as a novelist and writer. The party was much the poorer when it lost the services of those two men.

The departure of Broun in search of a more radical haven and of Blanshard and Sinclair towards the much-despised capitalist parties led to considerable heart-searching among many Socialists who were already gravely disturbed by the rise of fascism in Europe and what they believed to be incipient signs of it in the United States. "Clearly," wrote the World Tomorrow, "the party has arrived at a crisis in its life. No party is destroyed by the defection of a few members, no matter how prominent. But these desertions are proof of a general lack of a strong sense of direction in Socialist ranks." The journal called upon the party to become the center or a wing of a "thoroughly Marxian" radical movement as the only way of stemming "an obvious loss of morale and unity all along the line."<sup>22</sup>

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The question of the party's relations with organized labor, particularly with the A. F. of L., continued to provoke controversies in party circles during the months that

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<sup>22</sup>Upton Sinclair, Another Ex-Socialist," World Tomorrow, XVI (October 12, 1933), 559.

followed the national elections of 1932. The Old Guard leaders were extremely cautious not to say or do anything that might smack of hostility towards the A. F. of L. They were not very enthusiastic about setting up a Labor Committee with a full-time Labor Secretary in charge of its work. Hillquit was particularly opposed to the move by supporters of Thomas on the N.E.C. to get Powers Hapgood appointed as Labor Secretary and succeeded in blocking it.<sup>23</sup>

Hillquit disapproved of an appeal by Thomas for aid to the Progressive Miners of America--a coal miners' union in Illinois--whose members were on strike. The Progressive Miners of America had come into existence in 1932 as a result of a protest movement against the leadership of the United Mine Workers union. John L. Lewis and the U.M.W. organs had denounced the Progressive Miners as a "mongrel aggregation" and as dual unionists and waged relentless war against them.<sup>24</sup> Old Guard Socialists were worried that Lewis and the A. F. of L. would regard any attempt to help the striking Progressive Miners as a hostile action. Critics of the Old Guard were quick to point out a contradiction in their attitude. They

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<sup>23</sup>Hillquit's motion that the appointment of a Labor Secretary should be deferred was supported by Graham, Hoan, McLevy, Packard and Wilson. Thomas, Coolidge, Hapgood, Hoopes and Krzycki voted against it. Senior to N.E.C., April 13, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>24</sup>John Herling, "Building a Militant Mine Union," World Tomorrow, XVI (February 15, 1933), 162-63.

asserted that the Old Guard would never think of raising any objection to aiding a strike of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, even though the "official" A. F. of L. union in the industry was the United Garment Workers.<sup>25</sup>

To add to the confusion of rank and file party members, the New York World-Telegram published an exaggerated account to the effect that "the growing internal controversy" in the Socialist party over its trade union policy had reached the state of an "open split" between Hillquit and Thomas. The Communist Daily Worker gleefully retailed the story as a further indication of increasing disaffection within the Socialist party.<sup>26</sup>

To the embarrassment of Thomas, some leaders of the Progressive Miners of America indulged in utterances with an antisemitic undertone. He wrote to them expressing his concern at their attitude but did not receive a satisfactory reply. The Old Guard circles lost no opportunity in pointing up the moral to be drawn from the whole episode.<sup>27</sup>

Serious differences of opinion developed between Thomas

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<sup>25</sup>Powers Hapgood, "The Socialist Party and the Labor Movement," American Socialist Quarterly, II (Summer, 1933), 40-41.

<sup>26</sup>New York World-Telegram, January 18, 1933, cited in Daily Worker, X (January 20, 1933), 4.

<sup>27</sup>Thomas to Senior, November 29, 1933, Thomas Papers. "Here in New York and in othe Old Guard circles the present development in the Progressive Miners is always being thrown up against us...."

and the Old Guard leaders over a struggle between two rival unions of fur workers. The party had been maintaining fraternal relations with the Furriers' Joint Council affiliated with the A. F. of L. Some of the leaders of the Council were also party members. The Council faced a determined onslaught by a rival union set up by the Communists--the Needle Trades Workers' Industrial Union. Charges and countercharges of violence, and intimidation were freely exchanged between the leaders of the two unions. The A. F. of L. union charged that the Communists were acting in collusion with employers in order to induce them to break their contract with the Council. The upshot of the matter was that the Council obtained an injunction from the New York Supreme Court restraining the Associated Fur Coat and Trimming Manufacturers' Association from violating their labor agreement. The decision was appealed by the Communist-controlled union, which voluntarily appeared as a co-defendant after the Manufacturers' Association had admitted that its members had violated the agreement with the Furriers' Joint Council.

It was a desperate struggle for survival between two rival unions, and no holds were barred nor any punches pulled in the course of the affair. Many Socialists in the Old Guard group--seasoned as they were in fighting Communist-led actions in the garment unions--were inclined to look sympathetically on the efforts of the Furriers' Joint Council to

beat off what they believed to be an organized Communist onslaught. Thomas, however, was alarmed and dismayed by this attitude. In his regular column in the New Leader, he expressed his disagreement with the tactics of the Furriers' Joint Council. He declared that an organization of workers might conceivably be constrained to have recourse to "capitalist" courts in order to vindicate their rights as against employers. It was, however, highly improper for union officials to use injunctions, police assistance, or government pull to strengthen their organization or dragoon unwilling workers into their organization. Thomas emphasized that he had no love for a Communist-controlled union in the fur industry but he demanded that Socialists should not lay aside their ethical code even in a fight against the Communists. "To support or even to appear to favor such tactics will prove almost fatal to any sound and truly revolutionary leadership of the Socialist party in the great business of building the co-operative Commonwealth," he declared.<sup>28</sup>

Thomas's criticism provoked indignation among the leaders of the Furriers' Joint Council and their Socialist friends. They were aroused to fury when they learned that he had paid a visit to the office of the Communist-controlled

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<sup>28</sup>New Leader, XV (June 24, 1933), 16. On behalf of the Furriers' Joint Council, Richard Rohman countered with a sharp criticism of Thomas's dissertation. He asserted that the Communist union was a dual union that had collaborated with the employers to cut wages and had engineered physical attacks on members of the Council. "The Fur Workers' Side of the Injunction Case," New Leader, XV (July 1, 1933), 4.

union. Thomas explained that he had gone to the fur district for a firsthand study of the situation and had intended to visit the officers of both the unions.<sup>29</sup> N. Chanin, secretary of the Jewish Socialist Verband, criticized Thomas's action as providing aid and comfort to the Communists. "Your appearance before the left wing of the Furriers' Union gave a hold on to such fellows as Hyman and Ben Gold, as well as the CP. You gave them new courage in the struggle being waged now, not only in the Furriers' union but in the entire Jewish Labor Movement." Chanin conceded that the Joint Council had sought recourse to the Commissioner of Police and the Mayor of New York City but added that they were forced to that action by the strong-arm tactics of the so-called Industrial Squad of the Communist union.<sup>30</sup>

The Old Guard-dominated New York City Local of the party appointed a subcommittee to go into the whole question. Its report commended the A. F. of L. union, drew attention to the Communist control of its rival, and mildly rapped Thomas for visiting its office. The report stated that however well-meaning such an action might have been, it was liable

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<sup>29</sup>Thomas to Furriers' Joint Council, June 6, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>30</sup>Chanin to Thomas, June 8, 1933, ibid. Thomas said in his reply: "You do not approve of the tactics of the right wing but believe nobody ought to say anything. I think that it is time to bring some of these things out to the attention of the Party...." Thomas to Chanin, June 12, 1933, ibid.



to misrepresentation in the Communist press.<sup>31</sup>

Thomas was deeply shocked by the attitude of the dominant group of the New York city Socialists on a matter of principle that he considered to be of crucial significance. When the New Leader announced that it would publish no letters on the controversy pending the report of the subcommittee appointed by the New York Local, Thomas angrily threatened to withdraw his column from that journal. He showed his dissatisfaction by firmly refusing to countenance requests that he should accept the party's nomination as its candidate for the mayoralty of New York City. He expressed his feelings forcefully to a fellow Socialist who urged him to run.

The Party in New York officially has shown both by the action and lack of action of its Labor Committee and more recently by its action in the Furriers' case that it is willing to give blind support to A. F. of L. leaders of groups no matter what tactics they may use against, let us say, the Communists. I am as much opposed to Communist tactics as any man but when we approve or condone the use of Tammany fixers or of injunctions virtually directed against another union, as in the Furriers' case, we make our talk of class solidarity and of democratic methods plain hypocrisy. How can we trust ourselves under these circumstances to do what needs doing in the Labor Movement or in the City Hall?<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup>The report was signed by Jack Altman, Alexander Kahn, Simon Berlin, and David Kaplan. New Leader, XVI (July 15, 1933), 5; (July 22, 1933), 5.

<sup>32</sup>Thomas to George Steinhardt, July 21, 1933, Thomas Papers.



In several communications to party members and in an "open letter" in the New Leader Thomas emphasized that it was wrong to subscribe to the dictum that "anything goes against the Communists."<sup>33</sup> He wrote to secretaries of party branches in New York that he regarded the matter as "the most vital issue in the Socialist movement today." Any attempt to build unions by means of injunctions directed at other workers meant a drift to Fascism, he warned.<sup>34</sup>

Thomas's emphasis on ethics on the part of Socialists even if their opponents did not feel constrained to follow similar ideals provoked murmurs of dissent from some of his Militant supporters. To one critic from that circle Thomas declared that the continued indulgence by unions in the practices that he had deplored were more likely to make them tools of Fascism than of Socialism. "In a country where John L. Lewis is likely to become president of the A. F. of L. or, at any rate, its leading spirit, we have to take heed to minority rights. If we do not attend to these problems our general interest in civil liberty will not amount to much."<sup>35</sup>

Thus the debate went on regarding the question of a

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<sup>33</sup>Norman Thomas, "An Open Letter to Socialists," New Leader, XVI (September 9, 1933), 8.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas to Secretaries of Branches, September 7, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>35</sup>Thomas to Andrew Biemiller, September 14, 1933, ibid. Thomas was often critical of U.M.W. chieftain's attitude towards dissenters in his union.

suitable labor policy for the party. The Old Guard leaders declared that the party must strive to cooperate effectively with the A. F. of L. unions and their leaders. The Militants were sharply critical of A. F. of L. leaders and demanded a vigorous program of "Socialist Action" within trade unions. Thomas urged that the party's policy should be one of critical support to the A. F. of L.

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An important factor contributing to party harmony and unity was removed by the death of Morris Hillquit in October, 1933. He had been ailing for several months and the strenuous campaign that he waged in 1932 for the mayoralty, perhaps, hastened his demise. His keen mind was alert and vigorous till the end and he faithfully fulfilled his duties as a member of the National Executive Committee--with queries, criticisms, and forceful comments on the resolutions that came before that body. "I am on the high road to recovery and hope to be able to attend the next N.E.C. meeting," he wrote to Clarence Senior in February, 1933.<sup>36</sup> The valiant Socialist had, however, only a few months to live. Without stint he answered the call of the party. Accompanied by Norman Thomas,

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<sup>36</sup>Hillquit to Senior, February 16, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

he visited President Roosevelt shortly after his inauguration and placed before him the Socialist program for meeting the crisis. His last public appearances on behalf of the party took place on March 25, 1933, when he addressed a Karl Marx Memorial meeting and later took part in a debate with Senator Joseph T. Robinson. His final service to the I.L.G.W.U. was a flight to Washington in order to take part in hearings on a N.R.A. code for the cloak and suit industry. "He was then a dying man, rising from his sickbed to represent his beloved cloak makers. He was flown in an ambulance plane from New York to Washington to deliver the brilliant argument which was to be his last public appearance, the capstone of his long service to these workers whom he had helped to organize almost half a century before."<sup>37</sup>

"Has it been worth while?" Hillquit had asked himself a few months before his death. His answer was clear and emphatic.

I have taken an active part in the Socialist movement throughout the period under review. To me Socialism has never been a mere abstract philosophy or intellectual pastime. It has been my ideal and religion and one of my principal interests in life. I have given my whole adult existence to the service of the cause.

Has it been worth while?

...I am a Socialist because I cannot be anything else. I cannot accept the ugly world of capitalism, with its brutal struggles and needless

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<sup>37</sup>Stolberg, Tailor's Progress, 207.

suffering, its archaic and irrational, economic structure, its cruel social contrasts, its moral callousness and spiritual degradation.

If there were no organized Socialist movement or Socialist party, if I were alone, all alone in the whole country and the whole world, I could not help opposing capitalism and pleading for a better and saner order, pleading for Socialism.

...Having chosen and followed the unpopular course of a Socialist propagandist, I am entirely at peace with myself. I have nothing to regret, nothing to apologize for.<sup>38</sup>

Hillquit's last testament to the party and movement was a message that he sent to the United/Trades on the occasion of its forty fifth anniversary:

Tell them that the fight they are waging is a noble one, carried on for the creation of a brotherhood of man, which must eventually come about if civilization is to continue.

Tell them that I have absolute faith in the triumph of Socialism: of that order based upon the virtual equality of men.

Tell them I feel that the workers, and the workers alone, can and will free the world from its economic and social ills.<sup>39</sup>

"By the death of Morris Hillquit," wrote Arthur Henderson, Labor M.P. and former British Foreign Minister, "American Socialism loses a world-famous leader, Europe a sympathetic interpreter of the Socialist internationalist spirit in the United States, many here lose a loyal personal

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<sup>38</sup>Speech at the state convention of the Socialist party of New York, July, 1932; reproduced in Hillquit, Loose Leaves, 324-32.

<sup>39</sup>New Leader, XVI (October 14, 1933), 4.

friend,"<sup>40</sup> Emile Vandervelde declared that in the eyes of European socialists, "Hillquit was the incarnation, par excellence, of the Socialist Party in the United States."<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Adler, Secretary of the Labor and Socialist International, wrote that Hillquit's "clear brain, penetrating judgment and gift of inspiring oratory" always held the attention of international socialist congresses and made him in Europe the best known figure in the American labor movement.<sup>42</sup> "Sorrow for the International, and for the French party, and for us, who have lost a dear friend," cabled Leon Blum and Paul Faure, leaders of the Socialist party of France.<sup>43</sup>

Hillquit's passing removed a stabilizing force in the Socialist party. There had been growing criticism of his leadership, emanating principally from newer and younger elements in the party. They regarded him as too cautious and conservative and too firmly wedded to what they considered

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<sup>40</sup>New Leader, XVI (October 14, 1933), 4.

<sup>41</sup>New Leader, XVI (November 18, 1933), 4-5.

<sup>42</sup>Adler to Socialist party of America, October 9, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>43</sup>New Leader, XVI (October 14, 1933), 4. Laudatory editorials were carried by several leading New York newspapers. The only discordant note was struck by the Daily Worker which carried a scurrilous article about Hillquit nearly three weeks after his death. Paul Novick, "The Role of a 'Citizen of Unusual Usefulness,'" Daily Worker, October 31, 1933, p. 5. For a series of articles by American and European Socialist leaders on Hillquit's life and labors, see "Morris Hillquit Memorial Section," New Leader, XVII (October 6, 1934), 13-20.

to be the tactics of a sterile parliamentarism. With Hillquit gone, they were able to argue with greater vehemence and against less resistance that the party needed a new, radical, "leftward" orientation. Many of them had criticized Hillquit for what they regarded as his obsession with European socialism and had demanded an "American" orientation for the party. Ironically enough, with Hillquit gone and with the European socialist movement apparently on the verge of utter collapse under the fascist onslaught, they feverishly began to engage in endless "analyses" of European developments and in discourses on how the Socialist party of America should change its strategy and tactics in accordance with the "lessons" of European experience. But none of them had Hillquit's intimate knowledge of European affairs and of the problems confronted by European socialist parties.

It was widely believed that the passing of Hillquit would precipitate attempts to bring about a drastic reorientation of the party's "line." "It is certain," wrote the World Tomorrow, "that a revaluation of Socialist Party methods and objectives will be speeded up by the passing of the National Executive Committee's chairman."<sup>44</sup> But Hillquit's adherents were grimly determined to prevent any such "revaluation." They believed that Hillquit's approach was the correct one for

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<sup>44</sup>"Hillquit--and an Era--Passes," World Tomorrow, XVI (October 26, 1933), 584.

the party and that any departure from it could only spell ruin and disaster. Their ideological convictions were reinforced by a certain emotional loyalty to Hillquit's memory and hostility towards those who had opposed their beloved chieftain during his last days. "He was my leader--and he still is," tearfully declared Jacob Fanken in his speech at the funeral of Hillquit. That sentiment found a receptive echo in the hearts of many of the Old Guard leaders--Cahan, Waldman, Solomon, Oneal, Lee, and Gerber.

Unfortunately for the party, the breach between Hillquit and Thomas had widened since the Milwaukee convention. Hillquit was bitterly opposed to any kind of united action with the Communist party while Thomas favored co-operation on specific issues. The bitterness lingered on in the minds of Old Guard leaders and began to manifest itself in the form of extreme suspicion and distrust of virtually every move that Thomas made. In course of time the suspicion became almost irrational and pathological. The Old Guard leaders honored the memory of Hillquit but had little of the spirit of accomodation of the master that had enabled him to work with men as diverse in temperament as Eugene Debs, Victor Berger, and Norman Thomas. Thomas had differed with Hillquit, but he always believed that he could calmly discuss such differences with the veteran leader.<sup>45</sup> Thomas did not have a

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<sup>45</sup>Thomas to the writer, February 4, 1954.

similar confidence in other Old Guard leaders. There was no meeting of minds at the top level in the party and the consequence was increasing disintegration of party unity.

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Hillquit had been the party's chief spokesman in the Labor and Socialist International. Owing to his ill-health he was unable to attend a special conference of the L.S.I. summoned to meet in August, 1933, to discuss the situation arising out of the collapse of German Social Democracy and the growing menace of fascism. The delegation that the party sent to the special conference had, for the first time, a majority of anti-Old Guard Militants. The Militants had already greatly angered Hillquit and the Old Guard by their constant criticism of the L.S.I. and the German Social Democratic party. Their role in the special conference became a matter of intense controversy in the party.

The Executive of the Labor and Socialist International called for a special conference of representatives of affiliated parties to meet in Paris on August 21, 1933. The Executive declared that the victory of fascism in Germany necessitated a thorough examination of the strategy of the Socialist movement. "The circumstances which have led to the success of Fascism in Germany must be laid bare, and the international Labor Movement must not shrink from pointing out the reasons



which prevented the Labor Movement from making use of its power at the decisive moments." A three-point agenda was laid down for discussion at the conference: 1. the methods by which the workers were to carry on their struggle for power; 2. the way to working class unity; and 3. the tasks of workers in case of an outbreak of war.<sup>46</sup>

When the National Executive Committee of the Socialist party of America received the invitation of the L.S.I., it proceeded to elect its six-man delegation by mail vote. The selection of the American delegation was influenced by factional considerations and the anti-Hillquit group was able to nominate four of its partisans--Clarence Senior, Edward Levinson, Maynard Krueger, and David Felix. The other two delegates were Jacob Panken and Herman Kobbe. Senior had felt that Thomas himself should go to Paris in order to make contacts with European socialist leaders.<sup>47</sup> Since Thomas was unable to undertake the task, Senior was reinforced in his view that his own presence on the delegation was indispensable to ensure that the party did not get "two big a black eye from

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<sup>46</sup>Friedrich Adler (Secretary of the L.S.I.) to the Secretaries of Parties affiliated to the L.S.I. and the members of the Executive of the L.S.I., June 1, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>47</sup>Thomas was elected by the National Executive Committee of the party at its meeting in July, 1933, to serve on the Executive of the L.S.I. along with Hillquit. Increased membership entitled the American party to an additional seat on the L.S.I. Executive. New Leader, XVI (July 8, 1933), 12.

our delegates."<sup>48</sup> The delegates did not appear to have conferred on their plan of work at the conference. Nor did the N.E.C. bestow any attention to a discussion of the line that it expected its representatives to adopt. The N.E.C. gave no specific instructions to its delegates.<sup>49</sup>

One hundred and forty-two delegates from thirty countries were present when the special conference of the L.S.I. opened in Paris. Apart from the six Americans, the conference was a gathering of European Socialists and no representatives from Asian or African countries were present.<sup>50</sup> The destruction of the German Social Democratic party that had long been regarded as the "Rock of Gibraltar" of the socialist movement threw a pall over the entire proceedings. An atmosphere of pessimism prevailed among the delegates.<sup>51</sup>

Three groups could be discerned among the participants in the congress. With the German party no longer dominating the International, the spotlight was taken by the delegates

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<sup>48</sup>Senior to Thomas, July 17, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party. Senior added, "This sounds awfully egotistical I know, but I think it is, unfortunately for the party too true." Senior considered himself a veteran, having attended a World Youth Congress in Holland in 1928 and the Vienna Congress of the L.S.I. in 1931.

<sup>49</sup>Senior to writer, December 22, 1953.

<sup>50</sup>Clarence Senior, "The International Socialist Conference," American Socialist Quarterly, II (Autumn, 1933), 21.

<sup>51</sup>Jacob Panken, "International Plans Battle for Socialist Work," New Leader, XVI (September 16, 1933), 5, 7.

from England, Sweden, Denmark, and Holland. They constituted a strong group and showed no inclination to favor any drastic reorientation of their tactics on account of developments in Germany. The second group of delegates represented Socialist parties from Austria, Belgium, France, and Switzerland who, while more willing than the former to talk about the "lessons" of Germany, generally went along with them. Together they constituted a majority at the conference and it was their point of view that was embodied in the official resolutions adopted by the L.S.I.

Among the American delegates Panken and Kobbe went along with the majority. Lending them his moral support was Abraham Cahan of the Jewish Daily Forward, who, balked in his bid to win a seat on the delegation, was covering the conference for his journal. Cahan found his dark suspicions about Senior and his friends fully proved when they energetically and enthusiastically threw in their lot with a small dissident group that sought to bring about a "leftward" orientation of the International. Its leaders were Victor Alter and Heinrich Ehrlich of the "Bund," the Jewish Socialist party of Poland. So small was the group that the American delegates represented the biggest bloc in it. The dissidents held numerous caucuses and were quite vocal in the course of deliberations

at the conference.<sup>52</sup>

The split in the American delegation showed itself in the widely different points of view expressed by Panken and Krueger in their addresses to the conference. Krueger, speaking for the majority of the American delegation, adopted a very belligerent tone. He began by criticizing the record of the British Labour party and declared that it had been "a heavier weight on our shoulders than either the defeat of German Social democracy or the present danger of war." He had no good words for those Socialists who had collaborated with bourgeois politicians in order to form coalition governments. Since fascism was "primarily capitalist in action and capitalist in thought" no effective fight against it could

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<sup>52</sup>For an account of the conference from the point of view of the dissident group, see Heinrich Ehrlich, The Struggle for Revolutionary Socialism, Haim Kantorevitch and Anna Bercowitz, trs. (New York, 1934). Also see Report of the American Delegates, mimeographed (Chicago, 1933). The pages of this brochure are irregularly numbered. Several pages are not numbered at all.

Besides the four Americans, the dissident group numbered in its ranks Alter and Ehrlich of the "Bund," Bianco and Boconi of Italy, Andreesen of Estonia, Pivert and Zyromski of France and Spaak of Belgium. Spaak soon turned "reformist" and lived on to be the Prime Minister of Belgium (1938-39), Foreign Minister of the Belgian government-in-exile during World War II and an elder statesman of his country. Zyromski became leader of a left-wing faction in the French Socialist party and became increasingly friendly towards the Communists. In 1945 Zyromski openly came out for the Communists. (Borkenau, European Communism, 124, 130, 201, 465). Ehrlich and Alter met with a tragic end. They remained in Poland after the Nazi-Soviet conquest of their country and took a leading role in the resistance movement. The Russians arrested and executed them in 1942. Laidler, Social-Economic Movements, 525.

be waged by socialists in alliance with capitalist forces. Krueger emphasized that socialist should cease to regard the forms of "bourgeois democracy" as sacrosanct. They should understand the distinction between capitalist or bourgeois democracy and proletarian democracy that could obtain only within the structure of a Socialist society. He stressed the importance of working class unity and called upon the conference to send a direct communication to the Communist International towards that end.<sup>53</sup>

Panken regarded the sentiments expressed by Krueger and the other dissidents as not only sterile but also dangerous. He felt that the conference should not be made an arena for harsh criticism of brother parties in other countries. He warned against the tendency to belittle democratic methods and institutions. "One of the things that this conference, in my judgment, should pronounce," said Panken, "is that in the democratic countries it is the duty of the working class, and particularly of the Socialist movement, to defend democracy and to refuse, under any circumstances, to give up those rights which have been acquired at great cost by the workers. These rights are weapons to be used in the acquisition of greater power by the proletariat."<sup>54</sup>

Panken and Krueger also differed in their appraisal of

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<sup>53</sup>Report of the American Delegates.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

the situation in the United States and of the implications of the National Recovery Act. Panken did not believe that fascism was an immediate threat in the United States and his evaluation of N.R.A. was a little more favorable than Krueger's.

Cahan wrote later in the Forward that Krueger's speech created surprise and anger among many other delegates. He quoted a British delegate as telling Panken, "Tell Krueger that with such speeches he will not make the Americans socialists in a million years." "What is the matter with your party?" another was reported to have asked. "Why does it send such children as delegates?"<sup>55</sup>

A series of resolutions submitted by the dissident group was decisively defeated, securing only eighteen votes. Senior, Krueger, Levinson, and Felix voted with the dissidents while Panken supported the majority whose resolution on the "Strategy and Tactics of the International Labour Movement during the Period of Fascist Reaction" was finally adopted.<sup>56</sup>

The majority resolution called upon the working class to intensify its struggle against capitalism, fascism, and war. In countries where fascism had prevailed, a revolutionary overthrow of the dictatorship was the only means available to the people. In countries where democracy was in imminent

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<sup>55</sup> Jewish Daily Forward, October 22, 1933. Translation from the original Yiddish, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>56</sup> For text of the resolution see Report of the American Delegates.

danger, workers were enjoined to adopt every means at their disposal to repel the attack of fascism. But in nations where democracy still obtained "the working class must defend with all its might the individual and collective liberties as well as universal franchise and freedom of trade union organization." The resolution warned the workers against making democracy a fetish, drawing attention to the possibility of the perversion of democratic processes by the "lying demagogy" of fascism.

On the question of a further approach to the Communist International the resolution was very vague. It declared merely that the division of the working class "cannot be justified in the light of the lessons of history." "Whilst rejecting all the manoeuvres connected with the united front, the objective of which is not to unite the working class internationally but to accentuate its national divisions, the L.S.I. proclaims anew that it will spare no effort in trying to reunite the scattered forces of the working class."

The International appealed for a struggle against the dangers of war and called upon workers not to succumb to the temptation of war even as a means of emancipating enslaved people. Such wars, it held, could result only in treaties of an imperialistic character and in the reinforcement of nationalism among victors and vanquished alike. In case war were to break out, affiliated parties were instructed to maintain relations with the International in order to work

for the earliest possible cessation of hostilities.

The International's stand on war was reiterated in a joint resolution of the Disarmament Commission of the L.S.I. and the International Federation of Trade Unions. It declared that the "general strike remains the supreme weapon of working-class action against war, after all means of political and parliamentary pressure have been tried and proved unavailing." Such a general strike was to be directed against any "aggressor" nation that refused arbitration under the terms of the League Covenant. The L.S.I. and the I.F.T.U. could also give the call for a general strike if they deemed such a step indispensable.

The dissidents felt that the majority resolutions fell far short of what needed to be done in the fight to win Socialism and defeat capitalism, fascism, and war. They showed no inclination to bestow any plaudits on what they described as "bourgeois democracy." Their resolution urged that whatever might be the means by which socialist parties captured power, they should utilize it "to destroy the bourgeois state and install the dictatorship of the revolutionary party during the period of socialist construction." The fight against capitalism and fascism, it declared, was intimately bound with the struggle against recurrent crises that spelled misery and suffering for the masses. The seizure of power by the "revolutionary classes" was held to be



the necessary condition for a solution of the economic crisis and the problem of unemployment.

In their resolution on war, the dissidents expressed their complete lack of confidence in the League of Nations and allied organizations and asserted that in the event of war the duty of socialist parties was to rally the masses around the slogan "End the war by overthrowing capitalism." They warned against the "fatal policy" of national unity in wartime and called upon socialist parties to vote against all military budgets in peacetime as during war. Instead of waiting for war to break out, socialist parties should undertake vigorous preventive action and should draw up an international plan to resist war. They declared that the determination of the working class to transform a capitalist war into a workers' revolution would be the final guarantee of the efficacy of the antiwar struggle.

The dissidents also called for negotiations with the Communist International and the summoning, if occasion offered, of an International Congress of all anti-Fascist and anti-capitalist organizations.<sup>57</sup>

Beaten decisively at the conference, the "left wing" delegates decided to continue "the struggle for our revolutionary ideas" among the masses in the various parties affiliated to the International. Ehrlich admonished his colleagues not

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid. Texts of the minority resolutions at the L.S.I.

to relax their vigil against reformist mistakes and "crimes."  
 "To fight against this danger, to utilize its ideological failures in the interest of revolutionary Socialism, that is the task of the left wing within the Socialist International."<sup>58</sup>

Even as Senior and his colleagues were on their way to the United States to begin their "fight against reformism," the Old Guard was training its guns on them. The Old Guard leaders were disturbed by reports in capitalist newspapers about the activities of the Senior group. The Paris correspondent of the New York Times reported that the Senior group had made a futile attempt to get the L.S.I. to adopt a proposal favoring "the arming of laboring classes everywhere to meet fascistic or communistic violence with violence."<sup>59</sup> A more alarming story was carried by the Chicago Tribune. Its correspondent reported learning from a "trustworthy source" that "four out of the six American delegates headed by Professor Maynard C. Krueger of Chicago, all advocates of direct action," had submitted a proposal to the International "to arm the workers of the United States and all other countries with rifles, revolvers and machine guns in order to enable them to meet the universal menace of fascism."<sup>60</sup> The Tribune

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<sup>58</sup>Ehrlich, Revolutionary Socialism, 30, 34.

<sup>59</sup>New York Times, August 26, 1933, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup>Chicago Tribune, August 29, 1933, quoted in World Tomorrow, XVI (September 28, 1933), 542.

report proved to be rather mild in comparison with what Abraham Cahan had to say in the columns of the Jewish Daily Forward. He reported that the Senior group had offered a resolution at the conference outlining a plan for a revolutionary organization designed to take charge of revolutionary activities by workers if and when the party was outlawed. The plan, he added, included such items as "political strikes," and "the arming of the proletariat." Cahan quoted an explanatory note that, he alleged, formed part of the draft resolution. In that note, reported the editor of the Forward, its authors announced their intention "to organize in America a secret body to be controlled by two or three individual in charge, without responsibility to any one."<sup>61</sup>

The Cahan outburst created considerable commotion in party circles in New York. Senior and his friends wrote an angry letter to Cahan declaring that the quality of his reporting was "not even up to the standards of the kept capitalist press." They charged that his story was based entirely on "unfounded hearsay and malicious rumor." They

<sup>61</sup> Jewish Daily Forward, October 22, 1933. Translation from the original Yiddish, Archives of the Socialist Party.

According to Clarence Senior, the furious onslaught launched against the Senior group by Cahan was principally because the latter took to heart his failure to win a seat on the delegation. The episode, he feels, was perhaps the real beginning of the split in the party since the Forward "virtually declared war on the national administration of the party." Senior to the writer, December 22, 1953.

completely denied authorship of the alleged "explanatory note" about setting up a secret body in the United States. They admitted preparing a draft resolution on fascism but added that their suggestions were by no means designed to apply to the United States. They had relevance only to those countries actually under the fascist heel or in imminent peril from that danger. The proposal for arming the proletariat was made in reference to the needs of the Austrian comrades whose arms had been confiscated by Dollfuss.<sup>62</sup>

The Cahan charge was repeated in a much milder form by Panken in a report on the L.S.I. conference. He said that there were "some few delegates" who appeared to have abandoned hope in parliamentary activities and to deify violent revolution as the only method of ushering in Socialism. "To them Socialism must become a conspirative movement, with underground groups, with conspirative terroristic plans and a leadership in control of an underground organization unknown to the Party as a whole." Their attitude, according to him, amounted to nothing more than the Bakuninism of the nineteenth century. Panken, however, was extremely vague on who exactly were the Bakuninists and what exactly they had done. He said that he had come to learn that such proposals had been discussed at private gatherings and caucuses. "These proposals

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<sup>62</sup>Senior, Krueger, Felix and Levinson to Cahan, November 29, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

were not made at any of the plenary sessions of the Conference. Whether they were proposed at the Executive Committee or to the Special Commission appointed by the Conference is not known to me." That was all that Panken had to say in substantiation of his serious allegations.<sup>63</sup>

The furor over the issue died down after some time, though it left behind some bitterness on both sides.

In looking back on the whole episode--the L.S.I. conference--the impression grows strong that the American majority group did little good to their party or their cause by their talk and their tactics. A little more modesty and humility on their part about their own ability could certainly not have caused any harm and might have done some good. They were somewhat irresponsible in failing to bestow serious attention on the likely implications of their stand in increasing factional squabbles within the Socialist party of America. One must bear in mind, however, the tenseness and anxiety in the minds of many Socialists caused by the collapse of German Social Democracy. Further, it might legitimately be asked whether delegates to an international conference should speak up their minds on the problems of the movement as a whole or should restrain themselves for fear that divisions may be accentuated in their own national

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<sup>63</sup>"Report of Jacob Panken," Report of the American Delegates.

party.<sup>64</sup> Those were extenuating circumstances on the basis of which the worst that could be charged against the Senior group was poor judgment about the realities of the party's situation in the United States. There was, however, little justification for the kind of attack that Cahan and his cohorts levelled against the Senior group. It appeared to be a calculated campaign to discredit them--and indirectly Norman Thomas whose protégés they were believed to be. Haim Kantorovitch, editor of the American Socialist Quarterly, spoke out in anger against Cahan and his followers in the party. "Comrades, who for years have been sleeping peacefully and contentedly, have suddenly come to life, have become active and have begun to save the Socialist Party from the danger of extremism."<sup>65</sup>

Thomas must share some of the blame for the accentuation of party divisions that the whole episode caused. The American majority group was widely regarded as speaking for him while Panken and Kobbe were considered as Hillquit's men. But Thomas did not instruct Senior and his group on the line

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<sup>64</sup>The Senior group, in their report to the party, complained that the L.S.I. conference was dominated by the Socialist parties of Britain, Holland and Sweden whose representatives tended to view matters through their "national spectacles." They expressed their grave concern at "national party interests riding ruthlessly over the needs of the International..." "Report of the Majority of American Delegation," Report of the American Delegates.

<sup>65</sup>Haim Kantorovitch, "Introduction," in Ehrlich, Struggle for Revolutionary Socialism, 3.

that he wanted them to adopt at the Paris conference nor did he ascertain from them their plan of action. When the conference concluded its deliberations, Thomas found himself in a dilemma. He was not at all enthusiastic about the minority resolutions that his friends had so vigorously espoused in Paris. He felt that they were "a little less bad" than the majority resolutions and had a meaning in Europe that they lacked in America. Thomas, however, did not make clear his differences with the point of view set forth in the minority resolutions. He felt that an elaboration of his differences would mean playing into the hands of the Old Guard.<sup>66</sup> Thus he allowed the situation to drift. He remained silent in the face of the Old Guard attempt to depict him as the inspirer of the moves of the Senior group in Paris; he did not bring home to his own supporters wherein he differed from the minority resolutions and what course of action he personally advocated. The Old Guard continued to hold forth about the dangers of extremism, and the Militants continued to expostulate on the dangers of reformism. And the chasm between the two continued to widen.

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<sup>66</sup>Thomas to Paul Porter, January 30, 1934, Thomas Papers.

CHAPTER VII  
"UNITED FRONT?"

The question of the desirability of a "united front" with the Communists provoked the most serious divisions in the Socialist party. Two years of bitter wrangling over the issue left deep wounds on the party. The debate on "working class unity" was pushed to the point where the unity of the Socialist party was gravely jeopardized.

The controversy over a "united front" was brought to the fore in practically all Socialist parties following the collapse of the German working class movement before the Nazi onslaught. Could the Nazis have been stopped if the socialist and communist parties had united in time and jointly resisted the foe? Could the march of fascism in other countries be stopped if socialists and communists continued their internecine and fratricidal strife? Was joint action possible with communist parties that had denounced socialists as "social fascists" and had charged them with practically every imaginable crime? Would not the communists use the "united front" as a tactical maneuver in order to attain their oft-proclaimed objective of destroying the socialist parties? These were the questions that provoked heated discussion among socialist parties. In solid contrast with the babel of voices emanating from the socialists, an apparently harmonious chorus proceeded from the communists, directed by



the Communist International. Their hymn of hate against socialist leaders, particularly the fallen Social Democrats of Germany, continued unabated.

In the Socialist party of America, Hillquit and the Old Guard leaders were vehemently anti-Communist, and any suggestion for joint action with the Communists was anathema to them. They were, however, prepared to go along with whatever action the Socialist International might recommend; but they shrewdly guessed that the L.S.I. was not likely to favor close collaboration with the Communists. On the other hand, many Militants and those who regarded themselves as standing to the "left" of the Militants began to be increasingly obsessed with the idea that the implementation of a "united front" with the Communists was an urgent necessity. Thomas occupied a middle position in this party controversy as in many others. The German debacle made a deep impression on his mind. He believed that the fascist advance meant an inevitable trend towards war--and war was the evil that he loathed the most. He thought he detected signs of fascism in the United States, and he felt that the Socialist party should not be averse to embarking on joint action with Communists and other radicals on specific issues, like the fight against war and fascism. In his column in the New Leader, Thomas expressed the hope that a united front against fascism would materialize but added that the best way to attain that end was through negotiations between the two

Internationals.<sup>1</sup>

Desultory negotiations were then in progress between the two international organizations. The Socialist International had taken the initiative with a manifesto addressed to the Comintern in February, 1933, drawing attention to the grave situation in Germany. The Comintern, fondly nursing the delusion that a Nazi victory would be short-lived and would pave the way for the final triumph of Communism in Germany, treated the L.S.I.'s appeal with disdain.<sup>2</sup> It advised communist parties to negotiate measures for joint action against fascism and war with the socialist and labor parties in their respective countries--a move in line with the tactics of "united front from below."<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Adler, secretary of the Socialist International, cautioned affiliated parties not to negotiate individually with communist parties till the L.S.I. Executive clarified its attitude to the Comintern move.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>New Leader, XV (March 25, 1933), 16. Thomas wrote a number of pieces in this vein.

<sup>2</sup>"The establishing of an open fascist dictatorship," the Central Executive Committee of the Communist International had declared a year earlier, "by destroying all the democratic illusions among the masses and liberating them from the influence of social democracy, accelerates the rate of Germany's development towards proletarian revolution." International Press Correspondence, XIII (April 13, 1932), 378, quoted in Stunmthal, Tragedy of European Labor, 258.

<sup>3</sup>The Comintern's move was announced by Pravda on March 6, 1933.

<sup>4</sup>New Leader, XV (March 18, 1933), 3.

Early in April the Executive of the L.S.I. declared in a statement that the Comintern had shown no inclination for negotiations looking towards "frank and honest agreement" on joint action. The Executive expressed regret that the Comintern, instead of replying directly to the main questions posed by the L.S.I., had chosen to follow "the well-known method of laying down conditions and attacking the Socialist Parties before negotiations could begin." The Executive recommended that socialist parties should refrain from any further negotiations with national communist parties.<sup>5</sup>

While affiliated socialist parties were debating the L.S.I. recommendation, communist parties continued vigorously to appeal for joint action to rank and file socialists over the heads of their leaders. The Communist party of the United States circulated an appeal to all Socialist party branches calling for united action to meet the situation caused by "the collapse of the banking structure, the inflation program of Roosevelt and the big bankers and the war preparations against the Soviet Union." "Will your leaders continue to refuse to join the conduct of such struggles? Their policy until now has been for cooperation with the bosses and a refusal to enter into militant mass action. ...your leaders minimize the danger of war and slander the Soviet Union, thereby aiding the war plans of the bosses and their

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<sup>5</sup>New Leader, XV (April 8, 1933), 8-9.

preparations for attack on the Workers' Fatherland," the Communist "invitation" proclaimed.<sup>6</sup>

In fairness to the Communists it must be stated that they made little secret of their real motives in making such appeals to Socialist party members. The Sixteenth Central Committee Plenum of the Communist party of the United States held in February, 1933, clearly laid down what it had in mind concerning the Socialist party.

In this situation it is more than ever the strategic necessity of the Communist Party to direct its main fire against social-fascism, with the aim to isolate the social-fascist bureaucracy from the masses and to lead these masses into struggle against the Capitalist class. ...The instruments for accomplishing this aim are the application of the tactics of united front from below to draw the great masses of workers of the social-fascist parties and trade unions into common action with the revolutionary workers ...under the leadership of the Communist Party, together with the ruthless exposure of the social-fascist bureaucracy....<sup>7</sup>

In plain language the Communist party invited Socialist party members to walk into its parlor and, at the same time, served notice on Socialist leaders that they were marked out for political destruction. The Old Guard Socialist leaders in New York acted swiftly to counteract Communist united front moves. At the convention of the socialist party of

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<sup>6</sup>Communist party, New York district, to all Socialist party branches, March, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>7</sup>"For the Fight Against Hunger! For the Revolutionary Way Out of the Crisis! Resolution of the 16th Central Committee Plenum--From the Seventh to Eighth Convention of C.P.U.S.A.," Daily Worker, February 18, 1933, p. 3.

New York, O Neal successfully piloted a resolution condemning the Communist proposal and directing party subdivisions and members not to engage in any united front activities.<sup>8</sup> In the New Leader, editor O Neal wrote a long article tracing the history of the use of the "united front" as a disruptive maneuver by the Communist party. He asserted that the basic requirement for a concert of action was "proletarian solidarity based upon the ethics of good faith and sincerity." He did not believe that the Communist leopard had changed its spots and he warned Socialists not to be trapped in an ambush.<sup>9</sup>

But the anti-Old Guard forces in the National Executive Committee thought differently. Leo Krzycki offered a motion to the effect that a committee of three composed of himself, Hillquit, and Hapgood should meet a similar committee of the Communist party as early as possible to discuss the latter's proposals. Krzycki took the position that the Socialist party could not afford to refuse bluntly even to discuss the question of united action with the Communists.<sup>10</sup> National secretary Senior was anxious that the resolution should be adopted and he urged Thomas to use his influence with other members of the N.E.C. towards that end.<sup>11</sup> In his weekly

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<sup>8</sup>New Leader, XV (April 8, 1933), 11.

<sup>9</sup>New Leader, XV (April 1, 1933), 3, 13.

<sup>10</sup>Senior to N.E.C., April 3, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>11</sup>Senior to Thomas, April 11, 1933, ibid.

New Leader column Thomas expressed his support to the Krzycki proposal. He conceded that he was not sure whether the Communists were offering the Socialist party an olive branch or a stiletto. He was prepared, however, "to overlook much that has happened in the past if we can get assurance of good faith for the future."<sup>12</sup>

Thomas was, perhaps, afraid that under pressure from the Old Guard, the N.E.C. would turn down any proposal for joint action. To get around such a road block he put forth the suggestion that "experiments on the united front for particular objects should be carefully considered by Socialist local and state organizations, and the results of experiments reported to the party."<sup>13</sup> Old Guard Socialists regarded it as an irresponsible proposal that would tend to facilitate the proclaimed Communist objective of reaching out for the rank and file of the Socialist membership. It meant, they charged, that each little party local might wrangle over the issue, making it an easy victim to determined pressure exerted by the Communist party.

In his comment to the N.E.C. on the Krzycki motion, Thomas gave other reasons in support of his stand. He declared his belief that the party might be harmed if "we can be made

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<sup>12</sup>New Leader, XV (April 15, 1933), 16.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

to appear to be blocking any kind of united action." He felt that the "younger people" in the Socialist party should be shown that it was the Communists who would sabotage the united front. Besides, he would like to take the Communists at their word and attempt joint action in specific matters. If such action were found to be fruitful and if unity were achieved "it will be an enormous boon."<sup>14</sup>

Krzycki's proposal met with strong opposition not only from Hillquit but also from Daniel Hoan. The Mayor of Milwaukee warned against any hysterical move towards collaboration with the Communists and asserted that the "Communist Party's hatred and vindictiveness against the Socialist Party is so intense that it can not write a single communication without its being full of vilification, slander and lies."<sup>15</sup>

In a well-reasoned statement Hillquit expressed his opposition to any united front with the Communists. He said that the question was one that required "very serious deliberation." There was nothing novel in the Communist call for "united action."

They have been numerous in the past and in every instance they have been insincere and treacherous. The present documents bear all the characteristic earmarks of the customary communist maneuver. The invitation to form a "united front" bristles with gratuitous and deliberate slanders of our party and

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<sup>14</sup>New Leader, XV (April 22, 1933), 16.

<sup>15</sup>Hoan to Senior, April 6, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

is addressed "to all Socialist party branches" over the heads of the National Executive Committee and state organizations.

Hillquit added that a "sincere and honest co-operation of the Socialist and Communist parties on certain points of common interest is ...very desirable at this time," but he felt that convincing proof of good faith must be forthcoming from the Communists. He further emphasized that the Socialist party of America should honor the request of the L.S.I. not to negotiate with the Communists until a satisfactory agreement was arrived at between the two Internationals.<sup>16</sup>

The Krzycki motion was defeated in the N.E.C. by a vote of six to five. Thomas, Coolidge, Hapgood, Hoopes, and Krzycki voted in favor of the motion while Hillquit, Graham, Hoan, McLevy, Packard, and Wilson opposed it.<sup>17</sup>

The Daily Worker immediately denounced the Socialist leaders for "sabotaging" the united front and accused Thomas of hypocrisy. A few days later the newspaper carried a front page story announcing that "Norman Thomas Sympathizes with British Spies." Another report proclaimed that the Socialist party had entered into a united front with the New York police in its plans for the celebration of May Day.<sup>18</sup> The

<sup>16</sup>Hillquit to Senior, April 10, 1933, ibid.

<sup>17</sup>New Leader, XV (April 22, 1933), 16.

<sup>18</sup>Daily Worker, April 17, 1933, p. 3; April 24, 1933, p. 1; April 25, 1933, p.1. See also C. A. Hathaway, "Who lacks Sincerity, Mr. Thomas, or We?" Daily Worker, May 19, 1933, p. 4.



"theoretical" organ of the party, the Communist, reminded its readers that the Socialist International "remains the chief force in the working class which disorganizes and prevents the consolidation of the forces of revolution."<sup>19</sup>

Earl Browder, general secretary of the Communist party, asserted that the Socialist leaders betrayed and sabotaged every struggle "precisely because, in the last resort, they always take their orders from the capitalist government." He branded the Socialist party as "the bearer among the masses of the program of fascism," and emphasized that it was necessary for Communists "to learn concretely how to expose the maneuvers of the Socialist party typified by Norman Thomas."<sup>20</sup>

The Communists did not rest content with mere vilification. They were alert to find issues around which they could build up non-Communist contacts. The Scottsboro case had given them many opportunities for that purpose. They now drummed up support for a "Free Tom Mooney Congress." Some Socialist locals did send delegates to the "Congress" which

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<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Kirby Page, "Can Socialists and Communists Unite?" World Tomorrow, XV (May, 1933), 395.

<sup>20</sup>Earl Browder, "Why an Open Letter to the Party Membership," Communism in the United States, (New York, 1935), 120, 128, 132. The "Open Letter" was Browder's report to the Extraordinary Conference of the Communist party in New York City, July 7, 1933. Browder reaffirmed his idea of the basic purpose of the united front. He said that the united front was not "a peace pact with the reformists" but was "a method of struggle against the reformists, against the social-fascists for the possession of the masses." ibid., 149.

was held in Chicago between April 30 and May 2, 1933. The national secretary of the Young People's Socialist League, George Smerkin, was among those who attended and he wanted to send a report to all YPSL circles telling them that the "Congress" was "a tremendous advance in the working out of the united front as an effective tactic in the class struggle."<sup>21</sup> The Communists tried to follow up their initial success by further appeals to Socialist party members. The Daily Worker declared that the Socialist leaders, by refusing to take part in the "Free Tom Mooney Congress," had approximated the position of those who had framed Mooney. "Socialist workers!" exhorted the Daily Worker, "Despite all efforts to prevent you--come together in every locality, in local conferences to form local Tom Mooney Councils of Action!"<sup>22</sup>

"I am still getting reports from all sections of the country that Communists have not changed their usual tactics but are still trying to disrupt the party organization," wrote Senier to Norman Thomas.<sup>23</sup> Thomas, however, thought the "experiment" should be made. He was worried because the party was being maneuvered into a position "where we look like

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<sup>21</sup>George Smerkin to all Yipsel circles, undated, April, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party. The circular was confiscated by the national office of the party.

<sup>22</sup>Daily Worker, May 9, 1933.

<sup>23</sup>Senier to Thomas, April 11, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

people who do nothing except to refuse to act." His own "young people" were straining at the leash. They talked about the folly of "reformism," and the urgent need for working class unity. Thomas felt that the matter of appointing a subcommittee to meet with the Communists should be opened anew in the National Executive Committee.<sup>24</sup> "I am more than ever convinced," he wrote in the New Leader, "that we should explore the possibilities of united action on particular issues from demonstrations up to a possible struggle against war."<sup>25</sup> Thomas even persuaded himself that the Communists had begun to show a "better attitude" and had shown a tendency to give up their slanderous attacks. He reached that conclusion after participating in a great May Day gathering in Union Square. The immense throng was "a sight to lift up the heart and make one rejoice." There were Socialists and Communists in the gathering and, significantly enough, there were no attempts by the latter to create disorder.<sup>26</sup> And when he heard reports that Socialist party locals in two or three towns had held successful united front demonstrations "of one sort of

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<sup>24</sup>Thomas to Senior, May 1, 1933, ibid. Thomas was deeply perturbed at this time by the defection of Heywood Brown.

<sup>25</sup>New Leader, XV (May 13, 1933), 16.

<sup>26</sup>New York Times, May 2, 1933, p. 1. The Times reporter commented that "the spontaneously fraternal mingling of Socialists and Communists without, as far as Socialists were concerned, any orders from above was regarded as the most remarkable event of the May Day demonstrations in New York."

another," he was ready to renew the proposal for a top level meeting with representatives of the Communist party. "The Socialist party," he said, "suffers when it takes, as too often it has taken, an attitude of holding the fort instead of going out to win new territory. When in addition to that most of the guns of the fort seem to be trained on Communists rather than the hosts of capitalism the loss to the Party is vastly increased."<sup>27</sup>

It was rather unusual, to say the least, for a proposal that had been defeated to be brought up in the same form before the N.E.C. within a few weeks. Thomas's attempt did not meet with success. The N.E.C., on the other hand, decided by seven votes to four that no united front action should be embarked on by party locals without its specific permission. The New Leader editorially called for an end to confusion and indecision on the matter. It bewailed the fact that in the face of the "iron unity" of the Communists, the Socialist party had displayed "no more solidarity than a rope of sand" and called for "some reasonable discipline" to hold the party together.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> New Leader, XV (May 6, 1933), 16. Thomas hit the Old Guard where it hurt a little. "Moreover, some of our comrades have developed an unfortunate capacity to smell out what they think is Communist heresy, although they are slow in discovering examples of not too well concealed collaboration with old-line parties and indifference on the part of Socialists, in the unions and elsewhere to the interests of Socialism. It is time for Socialists to take these matters to heart."

<sup>28</sup> New Leader, XV (June 10, 1933), 10.

The Communists, meanwhile, were laying the groundwork for a very ambitious united front maneuver. Shrewdly sensing the prevailing antiwar sentiment in Europe and America, and seeking an approach that would suit the necessities of Soviet foreign policy, the Communist International had engineered a "World Congress Against War" in Amsterdam in August, 1932. The Socialist International had repudiated the Congress and exposed it as a Communist "front." But heartened by the success of the Amsterdam conclave and intent on capitalizing on it, the Comintern directed its affiliates to set up antiwar organizations in their respective countries. In the United States, the Communist party went to work with quiet efficiency, and in time a "call" for a United States Congress Against War, to be held in New York in September, 1933, went forth over the names of an impressive array of intellectuals, churchmen, educators and writers.<sup>29</sup> The Daily Worker thereupon proclaimed its wholehearted endorsement of the step taken by Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, and Upton Sinclair in calling for an antiwar conference. The Communists then began a concerted drive in order to influence Socialist

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<sup>29</sup>The motive underlying Communist participation in such a movement along with "pacifists and dishonest elements" was clearly set forth in an editorial in the Daily Worker at the time of the Amsterdam Congress. "The Communists are participating in this Congress in order to gain access to new masses of the toiling people, who hate war and want to fight against it.... At the Congress the Communists will expose the social democrats and renegade saboteurs...." August 8, 1932, p. 4.

locals to send delegates to the proposed Congress.

Thomas was increasingly worried that "lots of unrest, many defections and even ultimately a possible split" might result unless the party made some positive move.<sup>30</sup> The Cleveland Local of the party threatened to sponsor a referendum in order to force the N.E.C. to treat with the Communist party.<sup>31</sup> Thomas took note of such sentiments in favor of a united front with the Communists but failed to take into consideration the contrary point of view expressed by state conventions of the party in Massachusetts and Ohio. Perhaps the factor that influenced him most was the fear that the Communist party would dominate the antiwar movement and use it for its own purposes. He felt that it was highly important that the Socialist party should not isolate itself from such a movement but should boldly participate in order to prevent Communist manipulations.

At the N.E.C. meeting held in Reading, Pennsylvania, early in July, 1933, Thomas was finally able to have his way. The N.E.C. voted in favor of co-operating with "liberal, peace and Communist groups" in the proposed Congress Against War under two conditions. It stipulated that the Congress should not be dominated by any single group and that there

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas to Senior, May 22, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>31</sup> Senior to Thomas, June 8, 1933, ibid.

should be no attacks on any of the constituent organizations. Julius Gerber, Edward Levinson, and Harry Laidler were named party representatives to carry on negotiations with the arrangements committee of the Congress.<sup>32</sup> The Socialist representatives obtained the assurances that they needed from the arrangements committee and reported in favor of co-operation with the Congress. Thus the first attempt at "united front" on a specific issue was launched by the Socialist party.

But the New York Old Guard leaders heartily disapproved of the venture. Algernon Lee, Bela Low, and Jack Altman immediately demanded that the N.E.C. rescind its decision to co-operate with the Congress.<sup>33</sup> The ailing Hillquit, who had not participated in the Reading meeting, joined them and offered a motion for immediate action by the N.E.C. He said that the Congress was "one of the many camouflages and disguises under which international Communism makes war on the Socialist movement of all countries," and he drew attention to the L.S.I.'s specific repudiation of the venture. Hillquit described as "meaningless" the safeguards that the N.E.C. had obtained from the arrangements committee of the Congress. "I have no doubt," he said, "that the 'Congress' will be

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<sup>32</sup> New Leader, XVI (July 15, 1933), 12.

<sup>33</sup> Lee, Low and Altman to N.E.C. members, July 22, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party. Altman was a Militant.



dominated by the Communists, turned into a forum for reckless attack and maligning of the Socialist Party and causing no end of bitter and degrading recrimination without serving any useful purpose."<sup>34</sup>

If the Communist leaders had carefully planned to make it impossible for the Socialist party to enter the Congress, they could not have thought up anything better than what they actually did at this point. The Daily Worker jeered at the decision of the N.E.C. and said that it was made because a "large part of the Socialist workers are in rebellion against the sabotage practiced by the leaders against the united front."<sup>35</sup> A few days later the Worker outdid itself with a feature article that accused Socialist parties all over the world of actively promoting war.

They disarm the workers by minimizing the danger of war.

They sabotage all real struggle against war, while mouthing pacifist phrases.

They prepare their followers for war by glorifying imperialism and attacking the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup>

Such reckless accusations had been made by the Communist party

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<sup>34</sup>Hillquit to Senior, July 28, 1933, ibid. Hillquit added that the Reading resolution seemed to him to be an "indirect evasion of the spirit and intent" of an earlier decision of the N.E.C. not to enter into any united front activities till the L.S.I. had adopted a uniform guide.

<sup>35</sup>Daily Worker, July 17, 1933, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup>Morris Pitman, "Socialist Party Deceives Workers, Disrupts Struggles, Preparing for War," Daily Worker, July 29, 1933, p. 4.



before, but many Socialists were outraged that the charges should be resurrected at a time when the Communists were ostensibly inviting the Socialist party to co-sponsor an antiwar conference.<sup>37</sup> The subcommittee appointed by the N.E.C. to represent the party in the arrangements committee of the Congress announced that it would disassociate itself from the organization. Shortly thereafter the N.E.C. approved Hillquit's motion to rescind its decision to participate in the Congress Against War by a vote of seven to two, Thomas and Hapgood casting the only "nay" votes. Thus ended the first united front "experiment."

As a counterblast to the United States Congress Against War, the N.E.C. decided to organize a "League Against Fascism," with Hoan as chairman. Promptly Hoan issued a statement denouncing "Hitler, the Hangman." "Hitler is preparing for war. We must stop him before he sacrifices the German nation and the entire world on the altar of his insanity."<sup>38</sup> Nothing further came out of the "League Against Fascism." Thomas, irritated by the failure of his attempt to get the party to stay on in the Congress despite Communist provocation, refused to serve on the League. And two months later Senior dryly informed a friend that he, Krzycki, and

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<sup>37</sup>Levinson to Thomas, August 2, 1933, Thomas Papers. New Leader, XVI (August 5, 1933), 9; (August 12, 1933), 1, 12.

<sup>38</sup>New Leader, XVI (August 26, 1933), 8.

Krueger constituted the League Against Fascism--a skeleton organization for the purpose of collecting whatever funds were still due and keeping on in a purely formal way."<sup>39</sup>

While the Socialist "League Against Fascism" was skeletonized in two months, the Communist-inspired United States Congress Against War was quite an impressive success. Nearly three thousand delegates attended the Congress and unanimously supported a resolution protesting against war and fascism and praising the Soviet Union as the only nation following a policy of peace.<sup>40</sup> Despite their party's withdrawal from the movement, several Socialists maintained their connection with it and attended the Congress. J. E. Matthews and Paul Porter addressed the delegates. Devere Allen reported enthusiastically that it "certainly marked a turning point in the history of the American peace movement," and testified to the sincere desire of the Congress to bring the Socialist party into the movement.<sup>41</sup> Earl Browder, however, appraised the Congress in a different manner. In a report to the Central Committee of his party he boasted that the Communist

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<sup>39</sup>Senior to Levinson, November 3, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>40</sup>New York Times, October 1, 1933, p. 12; October 2, 1933, p. 5. Scores of "liberal, pacifist, veterans', labor and student" organizations were represented at the Congress. For some caustic comments on Communist tactics in relation to the Congress, see Eugene Lyons, The Red Decade (Indianapolis, 1941), 148-53.

<sup>41</sup>Devere Allen, "War and the 'United Front,'" World Tomorrow, XVI (October 12, 1933), 571-72.

party was "the very center" of the Congress. The party's success in the venture, he added, had "proved the possibility of penetrating into the ranks of the Socialist Party, and this is of the greatest political importance for us to day."<sup>42</sup>

Several Socialist party locals associated themselves with the American League Against War and Fascism--the permanent body set up by the Congress. The propriety of such action was soon raised before the N.E.C. and Thomas was willing to permit party locals work with the League if they so chose.<sup>43</sup> But the N.E.C. decided not to give such freedom to locals and directed that in each specific case of co-operative action with the Communists, permission of the N.E.C. must be obtained in advance. Senior dissuaded Thomas from persisting in his endeavor by telling him frankly that many N.E.C. members were emphatically of the opinion that "the subject must be closed and kept closed."<sup>44</sup>

While thus a momentary lull ensued in the controversy on the united front issue among the Socialists, the Communist party did not allow any grass to grow under its feet in its

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<sup>42</sup>Earl Browder, "For the United Front of the Workers Against War and Fascism," Daily Worker, October 21, 1933, p. 4. Speech at the Seventeenth meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

<sup>43</sup>Thomas to Senior, September 21, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party. Thomas added that he recommended such a course "with some hesitation." "It seems the less of two evils in a mismanaged situation," he said.

<sup>44</sup>Senior to Thomas, January 4, 1934, Thomas Papers.

disruptive campaign. Attacks on the Socialist leaders appeared with monotonous regularity in the Daily Worker.<sup>45</sup> Among the choice epithets that the journal reserved for Norman Thomas were "the chief social fascist," "lackey of big business," "good servant of finance capital," and "the boot-licker to the Roosevelt administration."<sup>46</sup> Not content with "exposing" Thomas, the Communist newspaper attempted to depict Mrs. Thomas as a coldhearted capitalist.<sup>47</sup>

The Thirteenth Plenum of the Communist International, in its "Thesis" proclaimed in January, 1934, ordered the continuance of such tactics against Socialist parties and leaders. The Comintern directed its constituent units "persistently to fight for the realization of a united militant front with the social-democratic workers--in spite of leaders of social democracy."<sup>48</sup> Earl Browder dutifully passed the word along in a report to the meeting of the Central

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<sup>45</sup>Daily Worker, October 5, 1933, p. 6; November 22, 1933, p. 6; January 24, 1934, p. 6. These are samples of the kind of "reports" that the Communist organ featured.

<sup>46</sup>Daily Worker, January 9, 1934, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup>Daily Worker, November 1, 1933, p. 5. Mrs. Thomas supplemented the family income by running a modest "tea room" in New York City. When she discharged two waitresses for unsatisfactory performance of their duties, the Daily Worker carried a lengthy account purporting to describe the pitiable lot of the proletarian girls working for Mrs. Thomas who made money by serving "pink tea for pink socialists." Mrs. Thomas contented herself by issuing a brief statement denying the charges as absolutely without substance. Her action and her statement were supported by her entire staff.

<sup>48</sup>"Thesis of the 13th Plenum, Communist International," Daily Worker, January 13, 1934, p. 6.

Committee of his party.<sup>49</sup>

Despite all the provocations and denunciations of the Communists, Thomas remained firm in his belief that a united front on specific issues was a desirable objective. In a book that he wrote early in 1934, The Choice Before Us, he reiterated that conviction.

I happen to belong to that group of Socialists, at present in a minority internationally, who believe that the urgency of the situation and the chances of success make it worthwhile to try boldly and carefully for a united front with Communists upon certain specific issues, especially if and when that united front includes elements which as yet are neither Socialist nor Communist.<sup>50</sup>

In the same work, Thomas conceded that the disagreements between the two parties "in method, tactics, psychology" were "nowhere sharper than in the United States." He was aware, he declared, that the Communist party was under instructions from Moscow to use the united front to wreck the Socialist party. Nevertheless he believed that on certain issues like the defense of the rights of workers and in the fight against Fascism, pressure of necessity would force the two parties to act together "unless they wish to be destroyed separately."<sup>51</sup>

On February 16, 1934, an event took place in New York

<sup>49</sup>Daily Worker, January 31, 1934, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>50</sup>Norman Thomas, The Choice Before Us (New York, 1934).

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 148, 151, 152.

that had a profound effect on Thomas and made him think differently about the possibility of working with the Communists. The New York episode was an outgrowth of happenings in far away Paris and Vienna.

On February 6 the Centrist Daladier government of France fell after a violent street battle in Paris instigated by rightist extremists like Colonel de la Rocque. President Lebrun called upon a former Chief of State who had the reputation of being a "strong man," Gaston Doumergue, to form a new government. The development was widely interpreted as increasing seriously the fascist danger in France.

A tragedy of far greater dimensions for the international socialist movement was brewing in Austria. Socialist Vienna had for long been the pride of the movement, and the Austrian Social Democratic party, under the leadership of Otto Bauer, had been very influential in the councils of L.S.I. But the doom of Austrian Social Democracy was sealed when Nazism overran Germany. Chancellor Dollfuss regarded both the Nazis and the "godless" Social Democrats as his enemies and took stringent action against the latter. The Socialist Defence Corps was dissolved and its arms confiscated and workers were forced to join the Chancellor's "Patriotic Front." The Social Democratic leaders, who believed that nazism represented the greater peril, adopted a policy of watchful waiting in the face of the government's repressive actions. By the time Dollfuss, under pressure from the Heimwehr, launched

his final attack against them, "the moral and material strength of the left had already been broken down by the long siege." In January, 1934, the Heimwehr chieftains began stridently to demand the dissolution of the Social Democratic party and they felt greatly emboldened by the developments in France. On February 12 police raided the Socialist headquarters in Linz. The workers offered resistance, the police opened fire, and the Austrian civil war was on in real earnest. The Social Democratic party's plans for a general strike miscarried owing to inadequate prior preparation and coordination. But for four days a small minority of the Socialist workers fought valiantly with such weapons as they could lay their hands on. When it was clear that further resistance was hopeless, Otto Bauer and Julius Deutsch, the Socialist leaders, fled to Czechoslovakia. The uprising was brutally suppressed, and another tragic chapter in the history of international socialism came to a close.<sup>52</sup>

American Socialists were deeply moved when they learned of the outbreak of civil war in Austria. Norman Thomas was in the midst of a lecture tour in Tennessee and Arkansas and was unable to take part in the plans that New York Socialists drew up for a giant demonstration to express sympathy for the Austrian workers. A mass meeting was scheduled for February 16

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<sup>52</sup>For a succinct account of the Austrian tragedy see Sturmthal, Tragedy of European Labor, 208-19.

at Madison Square Garden, under the joint sponsorship of the Socialist party and several labor unions. Matthew Woll, Vice-President of the A. F. of L. and Fiorello LaGuardia, Mayor of New York City, were invited to address the meeting. New York workers were called upon to "down tools" at three o'clock on that day and to march to the Garden. No invitation was sent to the Communist party to join in the demonstration.

The Socialists had good reason to ignore the Communists whose daily organ was carrying on a vicious campaign of vilification against the Austrian Social Democrats. Pravda editorially denounced Otto Bauer and his colleagues as "despicable traitors to the working class," and the Daily Worker screamed, "STEP BY STEP, THE SOCIALIST LEADERS PAVED THE WAY FOR THE OPEN FASCIST DOLEPUSS DICTATORSHIP."<sup>53</sup>

The Communist party held a big meeting in the Bronx Coliseum a day before the Socialist-sponsored Garden demonstration. Clarence Hathaway, editor of the Daily Worker, and Earl Browder attacked the Socialist leadership in fiery speeches and called upon Communists to march on Madison Square Garden the next day "for the widest fraternizing with the Socialist and A. F. of L. workers."<sup>54</sup> The Daily Worker brought out a special edition at noon the following day instructing Communists to gather at certain points and march

<sup>53</sup> Daily Worker, February 15, 1934, pp. 1, 2, 3, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Daily Worker, February 17, 1934, p. 2.



to the Garden.

On the afternoon of February 16 thousands of workers responded to the "strike" call of the joint Socialist and labor committee and began gathering in the cavernous auditorium of the Madison Square Garden. A large contingent of police officers was stationed at the Garden but the Socialist leaders requested them to lay aside their "night sticks" and not to intervene in any small altercations that might occur between rival groups at the meeting. Five hundred volunteer ushers were entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining order in the auditorium.

Small groups of Communists started drifting in, and there were arguments and fights when the ushers took away their flags, placards, and leaflets.<sup>55</sup> Six "stink bombs" and several bottles wrapped in newspapers were among the missiles that were removed from the Communists. But the ushers were helpless when two big contingents of Communists arrived and made their way into the auditorium. Disregarding the request of the ushers that they should proceed to the upper balconies, the Communists swarmed into the arena downstairs and occupied about fifty rows. They were, however, unable to reach the seats in the immediate vicinity of the speakers' platform. But scores of other Communists moved into the seats in the

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<sup>55</sup>For a lengthy report on the Madison Square Garden incidents, see New York Times, February 17, 1934, pp. 1, 3. Woll and LaGuardia did not appear at the meeting.

balconies on either side of the platform. Thus ensconced they amused themselves by chanting "We'll hang Matthew Woll to a sour apple tree" and "Down with Fascist LaGuardia." They also flung down armfuls of leaflets calling upon Socialist workers to unite with the Communists.

The Socialist and labor leaders on the platform were shocked and bewildered. The time was approaching for the meeting to commence, and the principal speeches were to be carried across the nation on a radio hook-up. Pandemonium reigned in the great auditorium, which was filled to capacity. Finally Algernon Lee, Director of the Rand School and chairman of the meeting, rose to speak. "A cannonade of boos and yells" from the Communist sections drowned his words. "We are here to express our burning indignation against one of the greatest crimes in history," said Lee, trying with great effort to raise his voice above the din. "Hooray for the working class," screamed a heckler. Joseph Schlossberg of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and David Dubinsky of the I.L.G.W.U. made futile attempts to speak to the crowd. Meanwhile several fist fights had broken out in various parts of the hall between the hecklers and enraged Socialists and labor unionists.

Suddenly the platform itself became the scene of a wild scuffle. Clarence Hathaway, editor of the Daily Worker, who, along with Robert Minor, appeared to be directing the activities of the Communists, rushed to the platform and

headed for the microphone. Was that a signal to his cohorts to storm the platform? Perhaps some of those on the platform felt that such indeed might be the plan of action of the Communists. "Several men leaped on Hathaway, struck him with fists and chairs, rushed him across the platform, and threw him over a railing to the floor."<sup>56</sup> Communists in the balconies started throwing chairs indiscriminately into the milling crowd below, and it looked as though some of them would make a dash towards the platform to help their leader, who was being forcibly ejected from the hall by the ushers.

At this point the police decided that they could no longer remain as mere spectators. Fifty officers marched into the hall and stopped the Communist scramble towards the platform. Hathaway, with bleeding injuries on his head, harangued the crowd outside the auditorium. Inside the hall itself Lee's attempts to carry on the meeting proved virtually impossible. "Chairs were flung from the balconies and screams and shrieks of women, mingled with boos, yells and catcalls drowned out the voices of speakers on the platform." "We want Hathaway," roared the Communists as Waldman tried

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 3. Hathaway later wrote in his newspaper that he went to the microphone to make "a one-minute appeal for perfect order in the meeting." He alleged that the chairman struck him and that others on the platform followed suit. Daily Worker, February 17, 1934, p. 2. But the New Leader asserted that Hathaway was struck down by a chair thrown from the balcony by one of his own supporters. XVII (February 24, 1934), 10.

to read a resolution expressing solidarity with the Austrian workers. An apple was hurled at Panken when he tried to speak. Frank R. Crosswaith, the Negro Socialist, was the only person who could make himself heard. Raising his powerful voice, Crosswaith declared that the Communists had again shown that they were pigs "who will always remain pigs because it is the nature of Communists to be pigs."

When Lee realized the futility of continuing the meeting under constant Communist heckling, he brought the proceedings to a close. Shouting and screaming, the Communists left the hall. Their leader, Robert Minor, was carried in triumph by some of his admirers, and from his perch he kept on shouting, "Workers, unite and fight."<sup>57</sup> The Communists marched to Union Square and held a meeting of their own--a victory celebration.

"The Communist onslaught," wrote the Times reporter, "found the Socialists poorly prepared." For all their suspicion of Communist intentions, the Socialist and labor leaders never dreamed that a great demonstration to express sympathy with the workers of Austria would be so brazenly and recklessly broken up. The veteran German trade unionist, Martin Plettli, living in exile in the United States, shed tears as he saw the disruption of the Garden meeting. "There is nothing new to me in that spectacle," said Plettli. "That

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<sup>57</sup>New York Times, February 17, 1934, p. 3.

is how the Communists operated in my country. That is how Hitler came into power."<sup>58</sup>

The Communists tried to pin the blame for the disturbances on the Socialists. The Daily Worker described how Hathaway had been beaten up by Socialist leaders with "Fascist viciousness" and "gangster brutality."<sup>59</sup> Hathaway wrote that the incidents were no more than "loudly expressed and natural protests of workers" who were incensed by the united front of the Socialists with Matthew Woll, "the most open, fascist spokesman" in the A. F. of L.<sup>60</sup> But the Communists had finally overreached themselves and their role in the entire affair came in for condemnation from several quarters. The Lovestoneites issued a statement blaming the Communist party for wrecking the meeting. A. J. Muste and his newly organized American Workers' Party condemned the Communist party for its "insane hooliganism." "The foremost figures in the C. P. including Clarence Hathaway...and Robert Minor, led the insane movement to break up the Socialist Meeting."<sup>61</sup> It was alleged that the Daily Worker was not publishing letters of remonstrance from several

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<sup>58</sup>New Leader, XVII (February 24, 1934), 1.

<sup>59</sup>Daily Worker, February 19, 1934, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>60</sup>Daily Worker, February 17, 1934, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup>"An Open Letter to American Intellectuals," Modern Monthly, VIII (March, 1934), 87, 90.

erstwhile sympathizers.<sup>62</sup> But a group of well-known writers and intellectuals who had been faithfully following the Communist line were finally provoked by the Garden fracas into writing an "open letter" protesting against the "disruptive action of the Communist Party which led to the breaking up of the meeting called by the Socialist Party...." The signers of the "open letter," among whom were John Dos Passos, Clifton Fadiman, Robert Morss Lovett, Lionel Trilling, Edmund Wilson, John Chamberlain, Meyer Schapiro, James Rorty, and Felix Morrow, made it clear that they were "irreconcilably" opposed to the policies of the Socialist party of America and did not think highly of the Austrian Social Democratic leadership. "All this, however, does not diminish the culpability and shame of the Communists. Their disconcerted beeing and yelling was disorderly and provocative in the extreme and belied their cries of 'Unity' and 'United Front.'"<sup>63</sup> Coming from such quarters the "open

<sup>62</sup> Herbert Solow, "After Madison Square Garden," Modern Monthly, VIII (April, 1934),

<sup>63</sup> The text of the "Open Letter" and a "reply" to it by the editors of the New Masses is contained in "To John Dos Passos," New Masses, X (March 6, 1934), 8-9. Besides those mentioned above the following signed the "Open Letter": Louis Berg, Will Gruen, Elinor Rice, Robert Ford, Diana Rubin, Louis Grudin, Anita B renner, Elliot E. Cohen, George Novack, John McDonald, Margaret de Silver, George Herron, Meyer Girshick, Gilbert Converse, Samuel Middlebrook and John Hammond, Jr.

The editors of the New Masses, faithful fellow-travelers, justified the Communist actions as a correct example of the  
(continued on next page)

letter" was indeed damaging testimony against the Communist party.

The Madison Square Garden affair brought to an abrupt end--atleast for the time-being--all talk of a united front in Socialist party circles. It steeled the Old Guard Socialist leaders in their determination to resist those persons in the party whom they regarded as virtually quasi-communists. Norman Thomas was profoundly shocked when he heard about the incident. It was the last straw that broke his hope in the possibility of united action with the Communists, he wrote to some of his friends. "Hitler himself would have wanted them to do exactly what they did."<sup>64</sup>

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tactics of the "united front from below" directed against the Socialist leaders. "If a leadership obstructs the natural gravitation of the masses towards unity, there seems to be only one solution: to attempt to throw the masses together, despite the saboteurs on top. How? Where? At demonstrations, at meetings, on the picket line, through activities which are of immediate moment to all strata of the working class. This the Communists tried to do at Madison Square Garden." The editors, further, expressed their utter contempt for the signers of the "Open Letter"--"those vacillating intellectuals who overnight have become metamorphosed from their academic cocoons into revolutionary butterflies" and who when "the critical moment comes...will no doubt flee in an attempt to save their beautiful multi-colored wings from the fire."

<sup>64</sup>Thomas to Milton Harvey, April 12, 1934; Thomas to Roger Baldwin, July 26, 1934, Thomas Papers.

The Garden episode made a deep impression on Thomas's mind. He continued to believe that united action on specific issues would be useful, but he could not bring himself to place much trust in the sincerity of the Communists even in their professed devotion to the working class. On several subsequent occasions Thomas referred to the impact of the Garden incident on his thinking about Communism. In a recent work, The Test of Freedom, Thomas stated that the "public climax of Communist intolerance was reached when communists invaded a great mass meeting at Madison Square Garden, called to protest Dollfuss' attack on the socialist workers in Vienna."<sup>65</sup>

What Earl Browder told the writer in September, 1954--twenty years after the Madison Square Garden incident--might be set forth here as a footnote to the whole episode:

I wanted CP men to go and make it a joint demonstration. But I made plenty of mistakes in relation to it--the principal one being not realizing the need for adequate preparation. It was wrong to have failed to take note of the traditional antagonism of the followers of the two parties and to have brought them into the same hall without preparation. I should have realized that a clash may take place. That was my mistake. I did not realize how conditioned the followers of the two parties were to antagonism.

But for other things I was not responsible. Some one in the Daily Worker had got out a special edition assailing the appearance of LaGuardia. I would not do that because LaGuardia was a personal

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<sup>65</sup>Norman Thomas, The Test of Freedom (New York, 1954), 19-20.



friend of mine. After the attack was made in the party paper I could have remedied it only by a revolution in the party which I was not in a position to do. I was by no means a dictator.

That incident was a very serious defeat for us. It harmed us. I have always felt that if the men in charge of the meeting had been a little more flexible, nothing like that would have happened. The bad results of the affair, however, helped to consolidate my leadership over the party. It was a heavy setback for a while, but it made it possible for me to put some control on the extreme leftists in the party.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Earl Browder, New York, September 9, 1954. Browder was inclined to believe that Clarence Hathaway was behind such things as the Communists actually did. While the former Communist chief may be technically correct in his assertion that he was not responsible for the hooliganism at the Garden, yet there could be no doubt of his contribution to the "conditioning" of Communists to ferocious antagonism towards the Socialists.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TWO YEARS OF THE NEW DEAL

Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the oath of office as President of the United States of America on March 4, 1933. At that time the banking system of the country was in a state of virtual collapse, and the future appeared to be bleak. Yet by his vigorous legislative program and his own dynamic leadership, Roosevelt achieved a significant measure of success, within the short period of three months, in stemming the tide of disillusionment and fear and in restoring a certain amount of confidence. He demanded and obtained from Congress extraordinary powers and exercised them in such a way as to capture the imagination not only of his own people but of millions of others in foreign countries. Early in 1933 the well-known British Socialist, Harold J. Laski, wrote that there prevailed in America "a wider disillusionment with democracy, a greater scepticism about institutions, than at any period in its history."<sup>1</sup> Then came Roosevelt, and by August, 1933, the British Trades Union Congress was loudly demanding a "Rooseveltian" revival program for Great Britain. Many British trade union leaders hailed the Roosevelt program as

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<sup>1</sup>Harold J. Laski, Democracy in Crisis (Chapel Hill, 1933), 47.

"a triumph of socialistic, if not Socialist, ideals."<sup>2</sup> In the United States too, the program of the President was sometimes described as socialistic and Socialists were often told that their party had lost its raison d'etre.

Socialist leaders did not expect that Roosevelt would act as strongly and decisively as he actually did. Nor did they anticipate that he would initiate any significant or far-reaching measures of social economic reform. Indeed, Socialist leaders predicted that his failure was inevitable and were anxious to undertake ways and means of turning it to the advantage of their own party. Norman Thomas ventured a detailed prophecy of what was in store for the United States. He said that the special session of Congress that Roosevelt might call would "flounder around," pass some hasty legislation under pressure--perhaps an ill-considered farm allotment plan--without adequate compensative legislation for city workers. The "cruel fallacy" of deflation would continue, unrest would increase, the cry for inflation would grow louder and, finally, in a kind of despair, Congress would yield. The inflation that would result was almost certain to be a "fantastic, whoops kind of thing, quite on the order of the French, if not the German inflation." Once inflation got under way in a grand manner, the average man who had escaped deflation would be ruined. The cry would go up for stabilization and

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<sup>2</sup>"The Battle of Hastings," New Statesman & Nation, VI (September 30, 1933), 377-78.

for a dictatorship to attain that objective. An American Fascist movement would begin to come into its own.

Thomas also drew a thumbnail sketch of what the American dictator would be like.

Already the pieces of that political jigsaw puzzle are lying about. We only lack the particular demagogue to put them together, and we may not lack him forever. ...The principal dictator must be a demagogue, a kind of American version of a Mussolini or a Hitler, but like them he will be on good terms with the big industrialists. He will have to offer the little man something--a great deal in speech and a little in action. ...Moreover any form of Fascism is obliged to play up nationalism as a kind of heady wine to keep the workers drunk while they are exploited. It will tend thus to accentuate the danger of war."<sup>3</sup>

Thomas believed that his description constituted a "reasonable prophecy." He conceded that his prophecy might be modified by "wholly unexpected good luck." Such modification, he believed, would imply that Roosevelt had "a skill, a strength and a good fortune beyond anything that we are warranted in assuming."

Having thus convinced themselves that Roosevelt would be a failure, Socialist leaders felt that their party should embark on some project that would rally the enthusiasm of party members and mobilize opinion in favor of comprehensive measures of relief and rehabilitation. The young national

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<sup>3</sup>Speech by Thomas [January or February, 1933], Thomas Papers. See also New Leader, XV (February 4, 1933), 16.

secretary, Clarence Senior, came up with an idea that found general acceptance, and the party vigorously and hopefully went to work in order to translate it into action.

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Senior felt that the party must embark on a venture that could capture the imagination of the public and restore the confidence of party workers. He finally hit upon an idea that seemed to him to meet the requirements. It was no less than the summoning of a "Continental Congress for Economic Reconstruction" to meet in Washington shortly after the convening of the special session of Congress by President Roosevelt. Senior felt that the conference should be sponsored by a broad-based group of labor unions, radical groups, farmers' organizations and consumers' associations. The Socialist party, while staying in the background, was to be the real driving force behind the entire venture. "Unless we do something like that this winter, we are going to be lost," Senior wrote to one of his associates.<sup>4</sup> The young national secretary was convinced that he had the right idea, and he was mildly amused that he should have christened his brainchild as a "Continental Congress." "I think," he added, "the

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<sup>4</sup>Senior to Powers Hapgood, January 24, 1933, Archives of the Socialist party.

method which I have suggested has all the advantages of being in the good old American tradition (!) and still will have an effect in addition to its publicity possibilities."<sup>5</sup> Senior discussed the project with Thomas and found him entirely in agreement.

The national secretary threw himself into the task of organizing the Congress with his usual vigor and energy. He even worked on a rough sketch for a broadside--"a picture of the United States with a farmer and a worker shaking hands and in another place a picture of a plutocrat sitting on bags of gold representing whatever proportion it is that one per cent or two per cent of the people get...."<sup>6</sup> The task of winning signatures from trade union leaders and other notabilities proved to be no easy task but had its lighter moments. Some had to be invited because they were regarded as likely contributors of money.<sup>7</sup> One prospective donor desired that the Congress should adopt a suitable resolution on birth control. In order to add a historical touch to the Congress, Senior rounded up a Robert Morse Cullum, "direct descendent of the first American to fall in the revolutionary war, ...Jonas

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid. Also Senior to Newman Jeffery, February 4, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>6</sup>Senior to Levinson, February 4, 1933, ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Senior to Levinson, March 8, 1933, ibid.

Parker, who was shot and then bayoneted at Concord." "Now we will be able to start the revolution!" Senior proclaimed in another communique. "I have just received a signature of the International Secretary of the Powder and High Explosive Workers Union!"<sup>8</sup>

A formidable obstacle was thrown on the path of those organizing the conference when the American Federation of Labor made it known that it would have nothing to do with it. However, Senior was able to line up quite an impressive array of labor leaders to sign the "call" for the Congress. Emil Rieve, president of the American Federation of Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers, agreed to be the chairman. Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, David Dubinsky of the I.L.G.W.U., A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Henry R. Linville of the American Federation of Teachers appended their signatures to the manifesto. Among prominent old-line politicians, only Senator Lynn J. Frazier agreed to speak at the Congress. John Simpson, leader of the Farmers' Holiday Association, and A. C. Townley, Founder of the Non-Partisan League, also endorsed the venture.

The National Executive Committee of the party, at its

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

meeting in Indianapolis on March 11 and 12, 1933, endorsed Senior's work and decided to set up a permanent organization following the Continental Congress.<sup>9</sup> Thomas and Hillquit publicly expressed their support to the Congress, even though neither acknowledged that it was being masterminded by the Socialist party.<sup>10</sup> But the Daily Worker lost no time in drawing attention to that fact and in presenting a series of demands that it wanted the Congress to adopt. The Communist party was very anxious to get into the Congress, but Senior and his associates on the organizing committee did their best to thwart their designs.<sup>11</sup>

Socialist journals carried numerous articles building the Congress as an epoch-making event in the working class movement. Mayor Hoan prophesied that the meeting would be "the largest constituent assembly of workmen and women the country had ever seen." Emil Rieve proclaimed that "Just as the 1776 Continental Congress gave us political democracy, so

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<sup>9</sup>"Minutes of the National Executive Committee," Indianapolis, March 11-12, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>10</sup>New Leader, XV (March 25, 1933), 16. Thomas was carried away by his own enthusiasm when he wrote that the projected conference "may rank in economic history with our earlier Continental Congress in political history." New Leader, XV (April 1, 1933), 8.

<sup>11</sup>Senior reported that he received a letter "supposedly signed by William Z. Foster" asking that the Communist party and the Trade Union Unity League should be invited to the Congress. Senior to Marx Lewis, April 3, 1933; also Hillquit to Senior, April 17, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.



must the 1933 Continental Congress open the way to industrial democracy."<sup>12</sup> Despite such vigorous and optimistic statements, the Socialists were sobered by the tremendous popular enthusiasm for Roosevelt following his inauguration. Senior felt that it should not appear that the Socialists had summoned the Continental Congress in order to embarrass Roosevelt. "It would run counter to the current super-patriotic sentiment that gets behind the president," he said.<sup>13</sup>

On May 6, 1933, several hundred delegates from practically every state in the Union crowded into the nation's capitol to participate in the Congress. "Thirty-two men and women rolled across the country from New Mexico in a springless truck equipped with hard board seats; hundreds rode all nights in day coaches; at least one couple rode freight trains from Seattle."<sup>14</sup> The War Department turned down a Socialist request for cots and blankets for the use of delegates who could not afford hotel charges. Many had to find accommodation in a government-owned tourist camp and were chagrined when their Negro comrades were denied admittance to the camp. Some hotels

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<sup>12</sup>New Leader, XV (April 22, 1933), 1, 4, (April 29, 1933), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Senior to Levinson, March 8, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>14</sup>Devere Allen, "A New Declaration of Independence," World Tomorrow, XV (June, 1933), 416-17.

where Negro delegates had made reservations in advance, refused to serve them. Norman Thomas led a protest demonstration against one such hotel, and white delegates walked out of places where Negroes were discriminated against.<sup>15</sup>

The delegates were thus in a militant mood when they gathered at the big Washington auditorium. They cheered to the rafters the strong attacks on capitalism, the bankers, the financiers, and big businessmen launched by the principal speakers. "It was an enthusiastic gathering; often rising to heights of enthusiasm unknown in recent depressing years," recorded the New Leader correspondent. "Again and again the vast assemblage rose to its feet, cheering and singing, giving its approval to radical utterances--the more radical the better they liked it."<sup>16</sup> Senator Frazier drew tumultuous applause when he denounced the capitalist domination of the American people. He declared that "shrewd and ruthless gamblers, falsely considered to be the financial be-

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas denounced the practice in his speech before the Congress, New York Times, May 7, 1933, p. 16. "How can we either protest Hitlerism with good grace or hope to escape similar ills in America, when we chronically carry out a more thoroughgoing discrimination against our colored fellow citizens than he has as yet imposed upon the Jews," he declared in a statement. New Leader, XV (May 13, 1933), 5.

<sup>16</sup>New Leader, XV (May 13, 1933), 1. For a complete record of the proceedings of the Congress, see Minutes and Resolutions of the Continental Congress of Workers and Farmers for Economic Reconstruction (Washington, 1933).

rometer of the nation," had brought the country to the verge of ruin.<sup>17</sup> The way out of the crisis lay in breaking down "capitalistic power," added the Senator.

Norman Thomas also made a vigorous speech, calling for united efforts by workers and farmers to win social and economic justice. "We have come in the spirit in which our ancestors built this Nation to write a new Declaration of Independence against evils infinitely worse than they suffered at the hands of a British monarch, and to organize for the struggle from which we shall not rest until we have made that declaration effective for ourselves and our children," Thomas declared.<sup>18</sup>

The Congress then proceeded to elect several committees to prepare resolutions for submission to the delegates. Many Socialists were strategically located in the committees, leading to some uneasiness on the part of those who did not like the domination of any individual group in the proceedings.<sup>19</sup> In an obvious move to forestall any Communist attempt to sidetrack the Congress on issues like the united front, a ruling was adopted that no discussion would be permitted on any issue not strictly germane to the specific pur-

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<sup>17</sup>New York Times, May 7, 1933, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup>May 6, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>19</sup>Devere Allen, "A New Declaration of Independence," World Tomorrow, XV (June, 1933), 416.

poses of the Congress.

The united front issue was, however, raised by Louis Budenz of the Congress for Progressive Labor Action when the Congress debated a proposed "Declaration of Independence." His attempt to incorporate a plank favoring united front in the Declaration was voted down after an impassioned speech by an Old Guard Socialist, August Claessens, warning against any united front with those "who attack us from the front and from the rear."<sup>20</sup>

Some young Socialists, whose dislike of the Communist party was matched by an equally ardent enthusiasm for the Soviet Union, sought to introduce an amendment "endorsing" Russian efforts. Chairman Rieve declared the amendment lost, even though "the roar of the 'ayes' was loud enough to be heard well-nigh to Anacostia." Rieve shrewdly declared that a sizeable number of visitors in the galleries had exercised their vocal chords in support of the amendment. A poll was loudly demanded, and Rieve was vindicated when the amendment was defeated by 900 votes to 700.<sup>21</sup>

Another ticklish situation arose when A. C. Townley concluded a fiery speech by calling for an all-out strike by farmers and workers to win their demands. "You can strike too," he declared, "you can enter into league with the farm-

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<sup>20</sup>New Leader, XVI (May 13, 1933), 3.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

ers so you can eat while you strike." Townley's call raised the passions of many delegates in the audience. Some of them burst into song while others demanded immediate action on his suggestion. Mayor Hoan, who was in the chair at the time, tactfully brushed aside such demands. "Nothing sounds better to our ears," said he, "than that farmers are ready to join hands with us. Together we will take power for all working people in the cities and on the farms."<sup>22</sup> That assurance restored some quiet in the audience and the proceedings continued.

The Congress adopted a number of resolutions, with very little opposition. The Congress called for a \$3 billion appropriation for immediate relief and a \$6 billions for a program of public works. It advocated an adequate system of social insurance, a thirty-hour week for workers, nationalization of the banking system, steeper progression in income and inheritance taxation, and a moratorium on foreclosure of "working class homes." The Congress also placed itself on record as favoring the abolition of the army and the navy and the channelling of the funds thus saved to the fight against unemployment. At the same time it advocated international co-operation for raising the standard of living of

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<sup>22</sup> New Leader, XV (May 13, 1933), 1.

peoples in backward countries.<sup>23</sup>

The Congress set up a "National Committee of Correspondence and Action" consisting of twenty-five members. Socialists Daniel Hoan and Powers Hapgood were elected along with Emil Rieve, Leroy Bowman of the League for Industrial Democracy, Joseph Schlossberg of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and two others, to act as the executive of the "National Committee." Delegates were instructed to hold state conventions of the Congress within three months and to establish local "committees of action."

The Congress adopted a "Declaration of Independence" that recounted the crimes and follies of the "economic rulers" of the United States.

We, the representatives of workers' and farmers' organizations, in Continental Congress assembled, call upon all those who toil to organize to achieve one supreme aim, a new economic system based upon the principles of cooperation, public ownership and democratic management, in which the planlessness, the waste, and the exploitation of our present order shall be eliminated and in which the natural resources and the basic industries of the country shall be planned and operated for the common good.<sup>24</sup>

Many Socialists were pleased by the enthusiasm of the delegates at the conference. "Here is better raw material

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<sup>23</sup>Henry J. Rosner, "End Exploitation, Congress Program," New Leader, XV (May 13, 1933), 3.

<sup>24</sup>"A New Declaration of Independence," World Tomorrow, XVI (June, 1933), 417.

for a genuine farmer-labor party than I have seen in a long time," Thomas wrote in the New Leader.<sup>25</sup> Even though the Congress had been conceived and organized by Senior and his Militant colleagues, Old Guard Socialists collaborated in the venture. Waldman and Panken served on the resolutions committees of the Congress along with Krueger, Hapgood, and Blanshard.

The Congress was for all practical purposes a Socialist "front" organization. Socialists guided its deliberations on lines they desired and also fulfilled their objective of getting a permanent body set up to carry on its work. Thomas had hoped that, without practicing any deception, the Socialist party could use the Congress for the propagation of socialistic ideas and for the performance of important auxiliary activities.<sup>26</sup> The Socialist party, however, was unprepared ideologically, organizationally, and financially to make Congress a broad-based national organization. The Congress was virtually ignored by the "capitalist" press. The New York Times buried a half column A.P. despatch about the Congress on page sixteen. The A.P. report hinted darkly that "observers noted here and there faces that had been seen

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<sup>25</sup>New Leader, XV (May 13, 1933), 6.

<sup>26</sup>Thomas to Senior, May 1, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

among Communist demonstrations during the past two years." Another A.P. report stated that the N.E.C. of the Socialist party had initiated a movement towards a possible coalition with the Communist party on "specific issues," and that the action followed "sporadic demands" from the floor of the Continental Congress for united action.<sup>27</sup> Thomas was constrained to write to the Times protesting against the inadequate press coverage of the Congress and distortions in the A.P. reports.<sup>28</sup>

The Associated Press reports certainly did not serve to advance the prospects of the Continental Congress or the hopes of Socialists that it might grow into a great farmer labor movement. But there were few complaints from the American public whose attention was centered on the White House and the actions of the new President. The enthusiasm evoked among delegates by the Congress rapidly evaporated. State conventions of the Congress were held in a number of states but no popular "mass movement" grew as a result of such conferences. Lack of finances soon proved to be a serious obstacle to the task of making the Continental Congress a fac-

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<sup>27</sup>New York Times, May 7, 1933, p. 16; May 8, 1933, p. 3. The N.E.C. action appointing a committee to meet Communist Party representatives had no relation whatever with demands for "united front" on the floor of the Congress.

<sup>28</sup>New York Times, May 24, 1933, p. 20.



tor of some significance and influence. Within a few months state organizations of the Congress were no more than groups of office-bearers, and the "National Committee of Correspondence and Action" was virtually forced to restrict its action to routine correspondence with the state units.

In the Socialist party itself the enthusiasm aroused by the Congress cooled off rapidly. Owing to factional considerations Old Guard leaders ceased to evince any interest in the Congress, which they came to regard as a Militant "baby." They were not willing to render any financial help to the Congress. Thomas himself had to spend so much time and energy collecting funds for the party, the League for Industrial Democracy, and individual comrades in distress that he found it hardly feasible to solicit funds for the Congress. In July, 1933, two months after the session of the Continental Congress, the N.E.C. of the party adopted a motion pledging full co-operation with the Congress but adding that the time was not ripe to organize a new party.<sup>29</sup> The same point of view was also expressed by the executive of the Continental Congress at its meeting in Philadelphia a few days later.<sup>30</sup>

Thus within two short months it was clear to Socialist leaders that the Continental Congress was doomed to peter

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<sup>29</sup>New Leader, XVI (July 8, 1933), 12.

<sup>30</sup>New Leader, XVI (July 15, 1933), 12.

out. The Congress represented an attempt by the Socialist party to expand its base of support by making contacts with labor unions, farmers' groups and consumers' organizations that stood to its "right." The failure of the experiment, coupled with the rise of fascism in Europe and the inauguration of the New Deal in the United States, led many Socialists--particularly the Militants and those who considered themselves "left-wingers"--to regard as futile any move to seek a rapprochement with "reformist" groups. They were reinforced in their belief that the need of the hour was "working class unity"--and this to them meant a "united front," on at least some specific issues, with the Communist party. With such an interpretation of the party's needs, Old Guard Socialists were in violent disagreement.

The end of the Continental Congress was hastened by the growing divisions in the party. Thomas sided with those elements in the party that favored a united front on specific issues with the Communists. But he continued to hope that "something may yet come" out of the Continental Congress.<sup>31</sup> When his hopes of co-operation with the Communists were dashed to the ground by the Madison Square Garden incidents in February, 1934, he again felt the need for the kind of approach that the Congress symbolized. "I do believe," he wrote to Senior, "that the Continental Congress can yet be

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<sup>31</sup>Thomas, The Choice Before Us, 156.

made of enormous service to us in the particular field of bringing farmers and workers together for conference and action. And that, I believe, is the one vital necessity of a movement that will be strong against Fascism."<sup>32</sup> But the Congress was in its last extremities and beyond any prospect of recovery. The National Committee of Action and Correspondence was unable to raise the minimum budget of \$8,000, and in June, 1934, it announced that it had decided to suspend its activities until the Congressional elections later that year.<sup>33</sup> The Committee valiantly ventured to imply that there might be a resumption of activities at some later date; but it was clear to all that the short, and not altogether happy, life of the Continental Congress of Workers and Farmers had indeed come to an end.

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As the Socialists were hopefully laying plans for their Continental Congress, the banking situation in the country had been steadily deteriorating. It reached crisis proportions on February 14, 1933, when the state of Michigan declared an eight-day moratorium. By March 2, twenty-one

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas to Senior, April 3, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>33</sup>New Leader, XVII (June 2, 1934), 3.

states had been compelled to enforce moratoria or special regulations for banking operations. On the day of Roosevelt's inauguration, New York and Illinois declared bank holidays, and the stock and financial markets in the nation's greatest financial centers closed their doors. One of Roosevelt's first actions was to order a nation-wide bank moratorium.<sup>34</sup>

The banking debacle appeared to many Socialists as a vindication of their predictions concerning the imminence of capitalist collapse. They believed that the confessed inability of bankers to carry on their business provided an excellent opportunity for the nationalization of banking. The Socialist party of New York adopted a resolution calling upon the government to take over banks and "operate them as agencies and instrumentalities of the government in the interest of the public."<sup>35</sup> On the glass windows of many banks in New York City appeared small stickers bearing the inscription, "If the Socialist party were in power this bank would be open."<sup>36</sup>

Norman Thomas felt that the banking crisis provided excellent propaganda material for the Socialist party. He was anxious that the party should ways and means of assert-

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<sup>34</sup>Faulkner, American Economic History, 658.

<sup>35</sup>New York Times, March 5, 1933, Sec. I, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup>New York Times, March 6, 1933, p. 2.

ing some leadership and capturing the attention of the public. One suggestion that was made to him was that the N.E.C., which was scheduled to meet in Indianapolis, should dramatically adjourn its proceedings to Washington, D.C., and that its representatives should present the Socialist proposals on tackling the crisis to President Roosevelt.<sup>37</sup> The suggestion was endorsed by Thomas and Hillquit and was speedily implemented.

The N.E.C., after a brief meeting in Indianapolis, shifted its venue to the capital and drew up a memorandum on the banking situation and allied subjects.<sup>38</sup> On March 14, 1933, Hillquit and Thomas, as accredited representatives of the party, called on the President and presented their memorandum. It advocated the immediate establishment of a publicly-owned banking system, of which the postal savings banks should be the nucleus. The system should be administered by a public board. Private banks that could not survive without government aid should be deemed to have lost their right to continue under private ownership. Such banks should be absorbed into the public system or liquidated as circum-

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<sup>37</sup>Thomas to Senior, March 8, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party. The suggestion was made to Thomas by Mary Fox of the L.I.D.

<sup>38</sup>"Minutes of the N.E.C., Indianapolis, March 11, 12, 1933," ibid.

stances required. Solvent private banks should be allowed to operate "for the time being," provided they were completely divorced from affiliates, joined the Federal Reserve System, and, under its control, guaranteed deposits. The flow of credit should be controlled by a Credit Board acting in collaboration with the Federal Reserve System and a National Economic Council, the Socialist memorandum urged.<sup>39</sup>

Marx Lewis, who accompanied Hillquit and Thomas to the White House, recorded that the President "was very friendly, tried to convince us of his good intentions which no one doubted but which Norman pointed out would not be sufficient to overcome even temporarily the difficulties we are in."<sup>40</sup>

Roosevelt obviously did not share the feeling of the Socialist leaders that the banking crisis provided an opportunity to nationalize banking. His measures to enable banks to get on their feet appeared to Socialists to signalize the return of the money changers to their seats in the temple with the blessings and support of the Federal government. The President, said Thomas, had patched up the system and had given it back to the bankers to see if they could ruin it again.

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<sup>39</sup>New York Times, March 15, 1933, p. 36.

<sup>40</sup>Marx Lewis to Senior, March 14, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

Wall Street had not abdicated. If, to use Mr. Roosevelt's figure of speech in his inaugural address, he had driven the money changers out of the temple, he had soon let them back, washed a bit behind the ears, wearing for a time at least their Sabbath raiment, and watched more carefully. But back they were, some of them in the choir, for a time at least, singing praises to their savior.<sup>41</sup>

*following March  
1933 visit  
of Hoover  
& Thomas*

The President's stand on the bank issue made it clear to the Socialists--if they had harbored any doubts at all--that he was determined, not to destroy capitalism, but to reform it and save it. They found confirmation of their opinion in his relief program and in his principal legislative proposals, which culminated in the National Recovery Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

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The National Industrial Recovery Act was placed on the statute book on June 16, 1933. It was, perhaps, the most important of the measures sponsored by the new Administration and President Roosevelt hoped that it would give Ameri-

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas, The Choice Before Us, 89-90. "It cannot be emphasized too strongly," wrote Raymond Moley, in 1939, "that the policies which vanquished the bank crisis were thoroughly conservative policies. The sole departure from convention lay in the swiftness and boldness with which they were carried out. Those who conceived and executed them were intent upon rallying the confidence, first of the conservative business and banking leaders of the country and, then, through them, of the public generally. ...Capitalism was saved in eight days. ..." After Seven Years (New York, 1939), 155.

can industry "a shot in the arm."<sup>42</sup> Economic recovery was to be brought on by an increase in purchasing power through reduction of unemployment, shorter hours to spread available work, and increase in wages. The principle underlying the N.R.A. was industrial "self-regulation" under governmental supervision through a system of "fair competition codes." Such self-regulation was intended to reduce wasteful competition and ensure improved working conditions for workers. The President was empowered to approve codes voluntarily agreed upon and to prescribe codes where such agreement was not forthcoming. Actions taken under the codes were to be exempt from antitrust laws.

Many of the provisions of the law were not only acceptable to important industrial interests, but had actually been demanded by them. In fact, several basic features of the N.R.A. had been advocated in the "plans" that were put forth in 1931 and 1932 by Gerard Swope, president of General Electric, and by the United States Chamber of Commerce. The Swope "plan" had envisaged the relaxation of antitrust laws and the formation of trade associations in each industry with compulsory membership in order to co-ordinate production and consumption on "a more intelligent basis." The rugged captains of industry were prepared and indeed anxious for gov-

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<sup>42</sup> Frances Perkins, The Roosevelt I Knew (New York, 1946), 204.



ornmental intervention for the enforcement of such a program.

While the N.I.R.<sup>4</sup> granted the demands of the industrialists, it also offered important concessions to Labor. Section 7 of the Act was devoted to the rights of Labor and to the conditions of service of workers in industrial establishments. The most significant concession to Labor was contained in Section 7(a):

(1) ...employees have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and shall be free from the interference, restraint or coercion of employers ... in the designation of such employees ... or in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other aid and protection; (2) ...no employee and no one seeking employment to join any company union or to refrain from joining ... a labor organization of his own choosing....<sup>43</sup>

Thus the Federal government gave its official blessings to Labor's right to organize and to engage in collective bargaining through its own representatives.

Another clause in Section 7(a) laid down that employers were to comply with the provisions regarding conditions of service for Labor agreed upon in their respective codes. Under the clause it was expected that working hours could be reduced, wages raised, and deleterious developments like sweat-shops and child labor abolished.

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<sup>43</sup>Quoted in Mitchell, Depression Decade, 254.

Section 7(a) was later hailed as the Magna Carta of American labor. To what extent Roosevelt and his advisers consciously desired the incorporation of such a charter in the N.I.R.A. is, however, not quite certain. According to Frances Perkins, Section 7(a) was written only after demands from A.F. of L. president, William Green, for some assurance regarding labor's rights. "Written in general terms," Perkins recalled, "7A was a problem in semantics. It was a set of words to suit labor leaders, William Green in particular."<sup>44</sup>

The man whom Roosevelt selected to be the boss of the N.R.A. was General Hugh Johnson. The General was a protege of Bernard Baruch and fancied himself to be a "strong man." As late as June, 1932, he wrote and circulated privately among his friends a plan for a dictatorship to promote economic recovery. The plan was cast in the form of a proclamation purportedly issued by a dictator pro tem, whom the General christened as Muscleinny. "The sole cure for the Depression," according to Muscleinny, "was singleness of control and immediate action."<sup>45</sup> There is reason to believe

<sup>44</sup>Perkins, The Roosevelt I Knew, 204.

<sup>45</sup>Johnson boasted that Muscleinny "spoke his piece considerably before the formation of the Democratic platform in the Chicago convention and that Muscleinny "pretty accurately diagnosed the situation and at least dimly anticipated much of the recovery program." Johnson added that the Muscleinny program was "a result of years of work under the direction of B. M. Baruch." Hugh S. Johnson, The Blue Eagle from Egg to Earth (Garden City, 1935), 123-133.

that the General was impressed by the "achievements" of Mussolini's corporate state.<sup>46</sup> He did not think very much of "these labor skates" and was very reluctant to organize labor advisory committees to assist in the formulation of codes.<sup>47</sup> Johnson, however, showed himself to be a good "ballyhoo artist" and was able to mobilize tremendous popular enthusiasm for N.R.A. and for its emblem, the Blue Eagle.

Among Socialists the N.R.A. evoked some satisfaction and a good deal of apprehension. The apprehension arose owing to the enthusiasm of industrial leaders for the self-regulation provisions of the Act. The top personnel of the N.R.A. appeared to them to be too closely identified with "Morgan and Baruch influences."<sup>48</sup> They noted with some uneasiness the resemblances between the corporate organization of industry in Italy and the self-regulation provisions of the N.R.A. Could the economics of fascism be accepted without the politics of fascism, its appeal to prejudice and its denial of civil liberties?<sup>49</sup> Socialist leaders made it clear that they

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<sup>46</sup>Frances Perkins recorded that Johnson gave her a book by Raffaello Viglione that glowingly eulogized the Italian system, The Roosevelt I Knew, 206.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>"There is a lot of Morgan and Baruch influence around the whole business," wrote Thomas. New Leader, XV (June 17, 1933), 12.

<sup>49</sup>New Leader, XV (May 27, 1933), 12.

did not regard President Roosevelt as an actual or potential fascist. They emphasized that their misgivings related mainly to the trends towards fascism that were inherent in the N.R.A.

The Socialists also sought to dispel the impression that the N.R.A. was socialistic because it represented government intervention in the economic sphere. They repeatedly pointed out that the Socialist party did not endorse government intervention per se but only intervention in order to bring about a system of production for use instead of for profit. Governmental "intervention" envisaged in the N.R.A., they held, would not bring to an end but would perpetuate "irresponsible private ownership" of the factors of production.<sup>50</sup> Norman Thomas described the N.R.A. as "an immensely bold attempt to stabilize capitalism."<sup>51</sup> He took issue with Roosevelt's description of the program as a partnership of industry, labor, and government--"you cannot have a partnership when one group owns the industries, controls the government and has the only real power in the matter of hours, wages and profits."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid. See also World Tomorrow, XVI (July, 1933), 435-36.

<sup>51</sup>Norman Thomas, "New Deal or New Day," World Tomorrow, XVI (August 31, 1933), 488-89.

<sup>52</sup>Thomas, The New Deal, 6.

Despite their misgivings, Socialist leaders recognized the potentialities of Section 7(a) and believed that it gave workers "an enormously powerful weapon for progress towards genuine Socialism."<sup>53</sup> They exhorted labor unions to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by Section 7(a) and build up their organizational strength. Only by a tremendous organizational drive could Labor safeguard its interests and prevent the N.R.A. from becoming a tool in the hands of business interests. "The logic of the N.R.A. requires that some group take hold. If that group cannot be workers, organized politically and industrially, it is almost certain that it will be a big business group," Thomas warned.

The National Executive Committee of the party, at its meeting in Reading early in July, 1933, referred to the "unparalleled incentive" provided by the N.R.A. and declared that it would be dangerous for workers to wait passively for beneficial results to flow from the legislation. Workers would be given only what they have the power to take, the N.E.C. emphasized.<sup>54</sup> Pointing out that the employers had formed themselves into powerful industry-wide trade associa-

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<sup>53</sup>New Leader, XV (June 10, 1933), 12. See also in the same journal "Industrial Control Bill as a Challenge to Socialists," (June 17, 1933), 6; "Industrial Autocracy or Labor Democracy Faces Workers Today," (July 1, 1933), 1.

<sup>54</sup>New Leader, XVI (November 11, 1933), 8. See also James Oneal, "Danger of Corporation Feudalism," ibid., 5-6.

tions, the N.E.C. asserted that the workers would be able to secure their legitimate rights only if they too were organized in strong industrial unions rather than in craft unions.<sup>55</sup> The N.E.C. warned that if workers failed to rise to the challenge there was the danger that the industrial set-up envisaged by N.R.A. might become "the framework of a Fascist state."<sup>56</sup>

The N.R.A. had indeed opened up a great opportunity for organized labor. If the Socialist party had commanded the allegiance of at least some powerful unions or if it had had the men and the resources to embark on a grand scale in an organizational campaign, the N.R.A. would have represented a turning point in the party's history and would have greatly enhanced its political strength. Yet, in another sense, the N.R.A. did constitute a turning point for the party. It was the first of a series of measures by which Franklin D. Roosevelt tied organized labor to the Democratic chariot--an alliance that has now lasted two decades. The party of the New Deal and the Fair Deal, of Southern Bourbons and Northern city bosses, became also the party to which the overwhelming majority of the leaders of organized labor gave allegiance.

The Socialist party unstintingly gave its support to the

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<sup>55</sup>"Socialists Call upon Workers to use N.I.R.A. for Themselves," New Leader, XVI (July 8, 1933), 1.

<sup>56</sup>New York Times, July 5, 1933, p. 31.

organizational efforts and strikes of labor unions. Hillquit represented the I.L.G.W.U. in the formulation of a code for the cloak and suit industry. Norman Thomas campaigned in favor of vigorous unionization in towns and cities, in coal mines and in cotton plantations, across the land. In the New Leader, Oneal exhorted Socialists not to spare any effort in fighting labor's battles. There was very little difference of opinion in the party on the issue, even though Militants and "left-wingers" were often inclined to be critical of the cautious conservatism of the A.F. of L. leadership.

Thomas and other leading Socialists kept up a running fire of criticisms on what they considered to be the shortcomings of the N.R.A. and the "sabotage" of its prolabor provisions by business interests. They asserted that N.R.A. by its very nature could not achieve more than moderate social reforms in the capitalist structure--inducement of mild economic recovery, abolition of child labor, and partial elimination of sweatshop conditions. It was, said Thomas, a "family affair within capitalist circles for protecting the poor fish from their cannibal neighbors."<sup>57</sup> But it was not even a sound program of capitalistic planning. Roosevelt and his advisers had tried to build a house "by letting each individual or each set of roommates plan one room without so much as a

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<sup>57</sup>Thomas, The Choice Before Us, 92.

blueprint to show how the house was to be put together."<sup>58</sup> The N.R.A., the Socialists further charged, had intensified the tendency towards concentration inherent in capitalism.<sup>59</sup> It had given an impetus to collusive action among employers enabling them to control supply, raise prices, and safeguard their profits.<sup>60</sup> The Socialists asserted that many of the "codes of fair competition" were unsatisfactory and represented little real gain to workers.<sup>61</sup> The hours of work laid down in many codes were too high<sup>62</sup> and minimum wages had tended to become maximum. They drew attention to the inadequate attention paid to the interests of consumers and urged direct representation of consumers in advisory boards.<sup>63</sup> The Socialists also denounced the way in which Henry Ford and a few others refused to abide by the N.R.A. and cited it as clear proof that the program lacked teeth to put down capital-

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas to Henry Goddard Leach, editor, Forum, December 16, 1933. Thomas Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Harry W. Laidler, "So Far NRA has Safeguarded Big Profits," New Leader, XVII (March 3, 1934), 6-7. Also see Laidler, "The N.R.A. in American Economic Development," American Socialist Quarterly, III (December, 1934), 26-37.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas to Joseph Wolf, January 3, 1934, Thomas papers.

<sup>62</sup> New York Times, December 18, 1933, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas to William N. Loucks, Director of Special Advisors, Consumers' Advisory Board, N.R.A., September 28, 1933; Thomas to Rhoda E. McCulloch, editor, Women's Press, January 25, 1934, Thomas Papers.



ist intransigence.<sup>64</sup>

The Socialists drew pointed attention to the growing practice of "chiselling" by employers and scored General Johnson for his failure to put an end to it. Thomas declared that Johnson, despite all his bluster, was either a weak person or was definitely on the employers' side.<sup>65</sup>

"If I were running the show I might use the General as a barker outside the tent but never as the lion tamer inside," he added.<sup>66</sup> The Socialists completely repudiated Johnson's view that with the advent of the N.R.A. strikes by labor had become unnecessary and intolerable.<sup>67</sup> Most of these criticisms were embodied in a long resolution on the N.R.A. adopted by the national convention of the Socialist party, held in Detroit early in June, 1934. The resolution characterized the N.R.A. as the beginning of state capitalism and called upon workers to organize militantly in order to

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<sup>64</sup>Thomas to Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 18, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>65</sup>Norman Thomas, "Surveying the New Deal," World Tomorrow, XVII (January 18, 1934), 37-38.

<sup>66</sup>New Leader, XVII (January 13, 1934), 8.

<sup>67</sup>The General told the annual convention of the A.F. of L. that "Labor does not need to strike under the Roosevelt plan." The N.R.A. had given Labor "complete and highly effective protection." "The plain stark truth is that you cannot tolerate strikes." Report of the Proceedings of the Fifty-Third Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor (Washington, 1933), 359.

combat any fascist trends that the program might manifest.<sup>68</sup>

In numerous speeches and articles Thomas argued that the unsatisfactory nature of many of the codes and the "chis-elling" practised by employers were to a considerable extent due to the weakness of labor organization. He disliked, for instance, the automobile code and ascribed its drawbacks to the absence of a strong union in the automobile industry.<sup>69</sup> He drew a moral for other workers when coal miners were able to win a fairly satisfactory code.

Anybody who knows anything about the coal fields of America must have got a genuine thrill when he read the code which was signed. The code included regions like Logan County, West Virginia which had been so closed to union organizers that to be ridden out on a rail was a minor punishment to one who might venture in. The lesson of the code is as plain as the nose on a man's face. The coal miners got what they wanted because they were organized; yes, and because 30,000 of them around Union Town, Pennsylvania, forced the issues by striking. It is not true that strikes automatically defeat the purpose of the NRA. In case after case they are precisely what gives vitality to it.<sup>70</sup>

Thomas and other Socialist workers welcomed and supported the numerous strikes that swept the country during 1933 and 1934. There was no controversy in party ranks on the question

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<sup>68</sup>For the text of the resolution see New Leader, XVII (June 16, 1934), 3.

<sup>69</sup>"Now ought to be time for a general strike in the auto industry to force better hours, better wages and active unionization," New Leader, XVII (March 3, 1934), 8.

<sup>70</sup>New Leader, XVI (September 30, 1933), 8.

of participating in strikes and helping strikers. Thomas and Oneal and Walaman and Lee were agreed that workers should be ready to engage in militant strikes, if necessary, in order to win their demands and strengthen their organization. Writing in September, 1934, when the party was threatened with a split as a result of disputes over other matters, Oneal declared that on the picket line and in the jails, in the shops and outside, "Socialists have made an enviable record of unselfish devotion to the workers." The Socialist party had demonstrated a spirit that "no setbacks can discourage and no attacks can smash."<sup>71</sup>

During the two years Thomas addressed scores of rallies of strikers in virtually every part of the country. In numerous speeches before forums and civic groups he upheld labor's right to strike and pleaded for support to their struggles. He applauded the "splendid work" of the striking Briggs workers in Detroit (February, 1933),<sup>72</sup> and the "gallant...strike for better conditions and union recognition" by the boot and shoe and leather workers of New England (April, 1933).<sup>73</sup> He commended the striking bakery workers of New York (August, 1933), and the silk workers of New Jersey (September, 1933), and hailed the strike of transport workers

<sup>71</sup>New Leader, XVII (September, 1934), 4. See also Paul Porter "Labor Upsurge, June 1933-December 1934," American Socialist Quarterly, III (December, 1934), 3-15.

<sup>72</sup>New Leader, XV (March 4, 1933), 16.

<sup>73</sup>New Leader, XV (April 15, 1933), 16.

in Philadelphia.<sup>74</sup> He addressed the Communist-led cotton pickers on strike in the San Joaquin Valley in California (October, 1934), and a "great meeting" of striking dressmakers in Los Angeles. Thomas returned to New York in good time to speak to striking taxi drivers and hotel workers (February, 1934) and was overjoyed to see his "boys" doing "a splendid job" in the shipyard strike in Camden, New Jersey.<sup>75</sup> The Socialist leader also expressed his full support to the Toledo Auto-Lite strike and the strike of rubber workers in Akron, Ohio, and described the short-lived general strike in San Francisco (July, 1934) as "a magnificent assertion of labor solidarity." The San Francisco general strike, led by Harry Bridges, was widely denounced as a Communist operation and as a serious threat to democracy.<sup>76</sup> Thomas felt differently about the strike. "Behind this San Francisco strike, as behind the labor unrest in dozens of cities throughout America, lies the age-old exploitation of a predatory society." Behind it also

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<sup>74</sup>"We hail the awakening of American labor in Philadelphia and we are proud that this awakening was so largely initiated by the labor activities of the Socialist Party," New Leader, XVI (December 30, 1933), 8.

<sup>75</sup>Thomas to Senior, March 30, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>76</sup>Walter Lippmann wrote: "If once it were admitted in San Francisco or anywhere on this continent that organized labor could paralyze a community, or by mass action dictate the government, other groups, opposed to labor or with interests of their own that they wish to realize, would be certain to organize too and to exert mass compulsion. That is the road to the destruction of democracy and the liberties of men." Interpretations 1933-1935 (New York, 1936), 142.

lay, said the Socialist leader, such evils as unemployment, low wages and breadlines.<sup>77</sup>

Thomas gave his wholehearted support to the great textile strike called by the United Textile Workers of America in September, 1934. He had addressed the convention of the U. T.W. and had told them that he would support whatever action the delegates might decide upon. In his column in the New Leader, Thomas supported the idea of a strike.

It will be a strike against the blacklist, against chiselling, against low wages, against the stretch-out system. ...Remember if you are told that this is not a good time to strike, that there is no good time to strike in the middle of a depression. When the alternative to a strike is worse slavery, brave men and women have no choice. It will be up to the rest of us to do all that we can to help our brothers and sisters among the textile workers.<sup>78</sup>

General Johnson condemned the textile strike and placed the responsibility for it on Norman Thomas.

Norman Thomas appeared and urged the strike. He is a politico. Whatever there is of economic doctrine in the Socialist party, it is political first and economic afterward, and Norman Thomas--as much as I respect and admire him--had no business there. When a strike becomes political, it has no place in the lexicon of the NRA.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>New Leader, XVII (July 21, 1934), 8.

<sup>78</sup>New Leader, XVII (August 25, 1934), 12. See also New York Times, September 13, 1934, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup>New York Times, September 15, 1934, p. 2. The Times recorded that the General's attack was greeted with "prolonged applause."

Thomas repudiated the charge that the strike was "political" because he had addressed the convention of the United Textile Workers. In a letter to Johnson, the Socialist leader asserted that he had expressly told the convention that "not even the friendliest outsider had a right to decide the momentous question of whether or not to strike." Thomas defended the strike as the only means of bringing about an improvement in the textile industry. "When in the face of facts like these you make yourself, in spite of your high position, the demagogic partisan of the millowners, you both invite and increase the suspicion that under your leadership NRA may degenerate into a quasi-Fascist scheme for standardizing work and workers," he added.<sup>80</sup>

Meanwhile half a million textile workers in fifteen states were on strike. In nine states governors called out troops, and fourteen strikers lost their lives before the strike was over. In the states of Georgia and North Carolina, state authorities indulged in highhanded tactics to intimidate the strikers, Thomas alleged. He said that the Governor of Georgia had made "shocking use" of concentration camps for strikers and that in North Carolina strike-breakers were sworn in as deputy sheriffs.<sup>81</sup> The strike itself did not end in a complete victory for the textile workers. It was called off

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<sup>80</sup>New York Times, September 16, 1934, Sec. I, p. 32.

<sup>81</sup>New Leader, XVII (September 29, 1934), 8. See also Paul Porter, "Textile Industry Paralyzed," New Leader, XVII (September 8, 1934), 1, 4.

following an appeal by President Roosevelt that the report of a fact-finding commission should serve as a basis for a settlement.

"The textile strike has confirmed my opinion that there is no way out except Socialism," Thomas wrote in the New Leader.<sup>82</sup> The Socialist leader was deeply perturbed by what he believed to be the denial of basic civil rights to striking textile workers in the southern states and by the silence of Roosevelt in the face of such "Hitlerization." His misgivings were by no means mitigated by the bellicose tone adopted by the N.R.A. chief in his references to strikes and strikers. The General had denounced the leaders of the San Francisco general strike as "rats" and "subversive influences," and had charged the textile strike leaders with unleashing "the forces of riot and rebellion."<sup>83</sup> Thomas warned labor unions to take note of such statements and of the fact that they went unrebuked by the White House. "The keeper of the Blue Eagle is not our friend but our enemy," he declared. "Unless labor can win its battles N.R.A. and the codes will be turned into a semi-Fascist regulation of American labor. ...In the struggle that lies before us our hope is in our strength."<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> New Leader, XVII (September, 29, 1934), 8.

<sup>83</sup> Johnson, The Blue Eagle, 319, 324.

<sup>84</sup> Speech to Italian trade unionists, (September, 1934), Thomas Papers.

The Blue Eagle, however, was not fated to live much longer. The enthusiasm that Johnson had whipped up with his flamboyant publicity methods was giving way to dissatisfaction. So involved was the N.R.A. in the formulation and execution of the numerous codes, that the hastily rigged up machinery creaked in every joint. From various sources came criticisms of the failings of the program. Mrs. Gifford Pinchot, wife of the Governor of Pennsylvania, publicly denounced as a "ghastly farce" the violation of the labor provisions of the N.R.A. by the steel and textile barons in her state. The Director of Purchase for the State of New York testified that N.R.A. codes were used "as a cloak to disguise illegal, unethical and unfair combinations in restraint of trade." The president of the International Association of Machinists declared that labor's part in the formulation of codes was insignificant and that N.R.A. had degenerated into a system of industrial feudalism.<sup>85</sup> Republican orators and opponents of the New Deal in the Democratic party itself vigorously denounced the experiment. Criticism also emanated from business interests, which chafed at the measure of control that the government was in a position to exert and which also were disturbed by the growing militancy of labor unions. With the progress of recovery,

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<sup>85</sup> New York Times, March 1, 1934, p. 1. Labor Secretary Frances Perkins told Interior Secretary Ickes that theater audiences in New York City booed N.R.A. propaganda movies. Harold L. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, 3 vols. (New York, 1954), I, 93.



the business interests began to shed the fear and uncertainty that had haunted them when the Roosevelt administration came into office.

In March, 1934, Roosevelt appointed a National Recovery Review Board with the eminent lawyer, Clarence Darrow, as chairman. The Board's report provided uncomfortable reading both for the administration and its conservative critics. The report held that monopolistic practices had grown in some industries and that small businesses had been adversely affected by the operation of N.R.A. The Board's conclusion was a real "shocker."

The choice is between monopoly sustained by government, which is clearly the trend in the National Recovery Administration, and a planned economy, which demands socialized ownership and control, since only by collective ownership can the inevitable conflict of separately owned units for the markets be eliminated in favor of planned production. ...To give the sanction to government to sustain profits is not planned economy, but a regimented organization for exploitation.<sup>86</sup>

The conclusion reached by the Darrow Board was very similar to the stand of the Socialist party on the N.R.A. The administration quietly shelved the report and very soon the Board itself was abolished.

On May 27, 1935, the Supreme Court of the United States held that the N.R.A. was unconstitutional.

The first keeper of the Blue Eagle, who had been dis-

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<sup>86</sup>New Leader, XVII (May 26, 1934), 1.

charged from his post in October, 1934, mourned its passing with a tearful verse from Byron:

So the Struck Eagle, stretched upon the plain,  
 No more through rolling clouds to soar again,  
 Viewed his own feather on the fatal dart,  
 And wing'd the fatal shaft that quivered in his heart.<sup>87</sup>

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The Socialists, while critical of the inadequacies of N.R.A., still recognized and approved some of its useful provisions. But they could find few redeeming features in the farm program embodied in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and its auxiliary measures. Socialist leaders were mostly city men who were not quite at home in a discussion of farm problems. Thus, when the A.A.A. came into being, Socialist criticism of the measure followed traditional lines. They charged that the program would not cure the basic problems of farmers. Within a short time, however, Norman Thomas busied himself in a vigorous campaign against the program. He saw in A.A.A. an instrument of exploitation of a poor and defenseless group of human beings. Nothing could provoke the veteran Socialist to more defiant and determined struggle than the exploitation of man by man.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration came into

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<sup>87</sup> Johnson, The Blue Eagle, frontispiece.

being on May 12, 1933. It was the New Deal's answer to the widespread discontent in farm states over low prices and poor markets. The A.A.A. set forth four means of raising farm prices: 1. restriction of output and removal of surpluses from the market; 2. direct payment to farmers for reducing their output; 3. levying of excise taxes on primary processors in order to get the money to pay these benefits; and 4. marketing arrangements between producers' co-operatives, processors, and distributors, permitted or required by the government, for the purpose of maintaining or raising prices.<sup>88</sup> Seven "basic commodities--wheat, cotton, field corn, hogs, rice, tobacco, and dairy products. Nine other commodities were added to the list later.

When the bill embodying the A.A.A. program was being debated in Congress, Norman Thomas outlined the Socialist objections to the program.

If it is passed and if it works--the second 'if' is bigger than the first--it will not cure any fundamental evil in capitalistic agriculture: not landlordism, not a bad marketing system, not a crazy tax system. It will only indirectly affect the farmers' load of debt which should be directly reduced. It will not greatly help, if at all, the problem of planned use of land. It will artificially preserve a while longer our present agricultural chaos, and may give the farmers enough so that the banks and insurance companies can collect their mortgages. Which is why the latter, or many of them, favor it.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Mitchell, Depression Decade, 187-88.

<sup>89</sup>New Leader, XV (March 25, 1933), 16.

Thomas denounced the restriction of production contemplated by the legislation. It was folly, he asserted, to induce scarcity under the pretext of promoting "a more abundant life." It was a crime to talk about elimination of food surpluses when millions of Americans were hungry, he emphasized. His indignation was aroused when the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace, ordered the "plowing under" of ten million acres of growing cotton and the slaughter of six million little pigs as the first move to reduce surpluses. Wallace confessed that the destruction of standing crops was "a shocking commentary on our civilization," and would hardly be deemed an act of idealism "in any sane society." The Secretary had, however, a familiar alibi. His emergency measures were made necessary "by the almost insane lack of world statesmanship during the period from 1920 to 1932."<sup>90</sup>

Thomas denounced the orders of the Secretary of Agriculture in strong terms. He referred to the tragic American phenomenon of bread lines "knee-deep in wheat," and declared that the government should have bought up the surpluses to relieve want and hunger at home and in famine-stricken countries like China.

No satirist ever penned such an indictment of a cruel and lunatic order of society as was written

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<sup>90</sup>Henry A. Wallace, New Frontiers (New York, 1934), 174-75, 200, quoted by Mitchell, Depression Decade, 180.

by the author of the Agricultural Adjustment Act in America who saw no way to restore a partial prosperity to farmers except to produce an artificial scarcity by paying agricultural producers from the proceeds of a tax on consumers to destroy the abundance of food-stuffs which men had struggled thousands and thousands of years to be able to create. And this, be it remembered, in the midst of a cold and hungry world.<sup>91</sup>

Thomas soon discovered new and more disturbing ramifications of the government's agricultural program. In November, 1933, he received a letter from Martha Johnson, a Socialist organizer in Arkansas. She asked him to visit the town of Tyronza in Arkansas and see for himself the plight of share-croppers. "Here you will find the true proletariat; here you will find inarticulate men moving irresistibly towards revolution and no less."<sup>92</sup> Thomas was impressed by the earnestness of her appeal and the urgency of her tone. In February, 1934, the Socialist leader arrived in Tyronza and was shocked by what he saw and heard about the distress and misery of the share-croppers. In a well-attended public meeting he denounced the iniquities of the system of land tenure and exhorted share-croppers to organize and fight against oppression.

Who were the share-croppers, and what did Thomas find out

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<sup>91</sup>Thomas, The Choice Before Us, 7. See also report of a speech by Thomas at Princeton University, New York Times, January 22, 1934, p. 5.

<sup>92</sup>Johnson to Thomas, November 7, 1933, Thomas Papers. Martha Johnson and her husband, Edward, were sent by the national office of the party to Arkansas in September, 1933 to help the struggling Socialist locals in the state.

about them during his visit to Arkansas? The average share-cropper farmed a tract of about thirty acres in a plantation that might range in size from a few hundred to several thousands of acres. He owned no property and had only the labor of himself and of his family to offer. The landlord or his authorized agent "furnished" him with a mule, seeds, tools, and food as well as a shack to live in. At the end of the year the landlord paid him half the price that he received for the ginned cotton raised on the tract. From that amount the landlord deducted the cost of the "furnishings" that he had provided the share-cropper during the year. Many tenants alleged that landlords were prone to use a "crooked pencil" in figuring out the accounts. It was hard for the workers to scrutinize the accounts if they were illiterate, and they dared not protest, particularly if they were Negroes.<sup>93</sup>

After his firsthand study of the situation Thomas came to the conclusion that the A.A.A. had intensified the sufferings of the share-croppers. He asserted that while the cash payments for crop reduction had gone to the landlords, the program had driven a large number of share-cropper families off the land or had reduced them to the position of casual day laborers, deprived of even such "rights" as they had

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<sup>93</sup>Norman Thomas, Human Exploitation (New York, 1934), 44-46.

before. The share-croppers, he declared, were the Forgotten Men of the New Deal. In a letter to Henry A. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, Thomas pleaded for urgent measures to remedy the situation.

Has the Administration any plans for these share-croppers other than pious hopes written into the contracts with landlords? ...What about the share-croppers driven from the land under any system of limitations?

...it is a social tragedy of the first magnitude, a tragedy that must be repaired, that we should be reducing a cotton crop when the men who raise it lack a decent supply of cotton for their families. The whole country ought to be aroused to the social significance of the situation.<sup>94</sup>

Secretary Wallace replied promptly and courteously. He did not challenge Thomas's description of the plight of the share-croppers but asserted that their "extremely low standard of living" had existed for a long time and was not due to the crop reduction program. Wallace added that the lot of the "squatter families" would be worse if the prices of farm products continued to remain low. The exhaustion of the credit resources of landowners, prior to the inauguration of the A.A.A., had been forcing them to dispense with the services of large numbers of tenants. His program, Wallace declared, called for a contract that contained terms designed to prevent the landowner from evicting his tenants. "We are determined

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<sup>94</sup>Thomas to Henry A. Wallace, February 22, 1934, Thomas Papers.

to avoid injustice and to correct it to the full extent of our power where it may arise," the Secretary announced.<sup>95</sup>

Thomas was not satisfied with the Secretary's analysis of the situation. He regarded Wallace and his advisers as "high-minded and competent" men<sup>96</sup> but felt that they had totally failed to comprehend the gravity of human sufferings in the cotton country. From his own observation and from the reports of trusted friends Thomas knew that there were large-scale evictions of share-croppers. He was convinced that contracts were openly violated by many landlords. They were full of loopholes "through which not a coach and four, but a fleet of trucks could be driven." He felt even more convinced about the rightness of his observations after he studied a report from a nonofficial committee headed by Dr. William R. Amberson, professor of Physiology at the University of Tennessee. The report stated that between 15 and 20 per cent of the share-croppers had lost their employment as a result of the acreage reduction program. The contract prescribed by the government had failed to protect them from dismissal or exploitation as day laborers. "These abuses," the Amberson report concluded, "are so widespread that a rectification of the situation through legal

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<sup>95</sup>Wallace to Thomas, March 8, 1934, ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Thomas, The Choice Before Us, 100.



action is impossible. It must now be recognized that the adoption of an economy of scarcity, through reduction in acreage and production, must inevitably lead to agricultural unemployment...."<sup>97</sup>

Secretary Wallace had requested Dr. Calvin B. Hoover of Duke University to make an independent investigation of the situation for the Agriculture Department. Hoover reported that the operation of the crop reduction program created a motive for reducing the tenants on farms and that the provisions in the contract against evictions were inadequate. He added that the cash income of the share-cropper would not be reduced if the provision of the contract stipulated under the acreage reduction program had actually been fulfilled.<sup>98</sup> It was Thomas's contention that the provisions were flagrantly disregarded by most of the landlords. In another communication to Secretary Wallace, the Socialist leader expressed the view that the contracts were too loosely drawn and that they were often flouted because enforcement of the contracts was in the hands of local authorities recruited from the landlord class. He urged Wallace to eliminate the loopholes

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<sup>97</sup>The Social and Economic Consequences of the Cotton Acreage Program (Memphis, 1934). Amberson was a member of the Socialist party.

<sup>98</sup>Quoted in Thomas, Human Exploitation, 49-50, 56-57.

in the contract forms, provide representation to share-croppers on enforcement bodies and to ensure for them the right of organization.<sup>99</sup>

Wallace again reiterated his "serious concern" about the problem but offered no assurance that the eviction of share-croppers would be stopped. He promised to strengthen the corps of investigators and to improve the system of enforcement of contracts but added that it would be difficult to draw up a contract that would adequately protect the share-cropper's interest. "I am sure," wrote the Secretary, "that our program has definitely improved general economic conditions in the South, but there can be no doubt that the standard of living of large numbers of Southern farmers is still far below a socially desirable standard. I realize that our cotton acreage reduction program leaves a considerable part of this problem still unsolved."<sup>100</sup>

Thomas could not get any further with Secretary Wallace in his attempts to relieve the distress of the share-croppers. Meanwhile disturbing reports reached him of evictions, intimidation of share-croppers by landlords, and attempts to sow seeds of racial discord among them. He was reinforced in his

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<sup>99</sup>Thomas to Wallace, May 9, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>100</sup>Wallace to Thomas, May 14, 1934, ibid.

belief that the share-croppers could expect to obtain justice only by building up a strong and militant organization. Already under his encouragement some Arkansas Socialists, led by H. L. Mitchell, state secretary of the party, had started an organization known as the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. Thomas kept in close touch with the leaders of the STFU and brought national attention to their efforts to organize the share-croppers. Plantation interests in the deep South were incensed as Thomas continued to proclaim from many a platform that "the greatest human misery, the most stark and savage exploitation on any large scale in America, possibly in the civilized world is to be found in the cotton country." The reaction of some of the planters took the form of an organized campaign against "Red" agitators and against the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union.

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The attitude of Socialists towards some other measures of the Roosevelt administration may be briefly described.

The main complaint of the Socialists against the President's relief program was that it was grossly inadequate to meet the needs of the situation. Thomas continued to press for a direct subsidy of ten dollars a week for every unemployed family coupled with a massive program of useful public

works. He repeatedly urged that the relief funds placed at the disposal of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Civil Works Administration should be increased "tremendously."<sup>101</sup> (The C.W.A. was a short-term project created by the President in November, 1933. By January, 1934, it was providing employment to 4.26 million persons). Thomas appealed to the President not to put an end to C.W.A. "Clearly it is only CWA which saves us from starvation punctuated by riot," the Socialist leader declared.<sup>102</sup> After a trip through nine southern and midwestern states in February, 1934, Thomas again warned that C.W.A. should not be ended. "To put it brutally," he told a reporter, "you can keep a dog hungry for a good while and he won't bite you, but you will have an awful time grabbing a bone away from him."<sup>103</sup> Thomas was not quite satisfied when the C.W.A. was replaced by the Emergency Work Relief Program. He continued to assert that the relief measures of the Administration were inadequate.

Socialists were not enthusiastic about the Civilian Conservation Corps established by the administration with a view to afford some relief to unemployed youth and to train them for future jobs. They were disturbed by control exercised by the War Department in the administration of the C.C.C.

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<sup>101</sup>New Leader, XVII (January 27, 1934), 8.

<sup>102</sup>New York Times, January 21, 1934, p. 21.

<sup>103</sup>New York Times, March 2, 1934, p. 3.

camps.<sup>104</sup> Their misgivings were certainly not assuaged by an article in *Liberty* by the Assistant Secretary of War, Harry Woodring. In the article, entitled "The American Army Stands Ready," Woodring declared that if the country should be threatened with foreign war, economic chaos, or social revolution, the army had the training, the experience, the organization, and the men to support the government and direct the country in the national interest. "The C.C.C. mobilization," said Woodring, "is to us more than a great military achievement: it is a dress rehearsal of the army's ability to intervene, under constitutional authority, in combating the depression."<sup>105</sup> Socialists felt that Woodring's ideas contained sinister implications. The N.E.C. of the party denounced the Woodring article as "a frank pronouncement of military Fascism" and criticized the President for not rebuking his subordinate.<sup>106</sup>

Of all the measures sponsored by the Roosevelt Administration the Socialists regarded only the Tennessee Valley Authority as deserving of praise as a socialistic venture. Thomas commended it as an example of "fine pioneering" and as "a flower in a garden of weeds."<sup>107</sup> He did not consider

<sup>104</sup> Thomas to Hyman Silverstein, May 10, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>105</sup> Quoted in World Tomorrow, XVII (January 18, 1934), 29-30.

<sup>106</sup> New Leader, XVII (February 3, 1934), 1.

<sup>107</sup> New Leader, XVII (February 24, 1934), 8.

the legislation for the regulation of stock exchanges as socialistic and described it as "an Emily Post code of etiquette on the way the big bad wolf eats the little pigs."<sup>108</sup>

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In 1934, after the first burst of New Deal measures, Socialists were busy proclaiming that the measures were not in any sense socialistic. They would concede only that some aspects of the New Deal were inadequate and inefficient applications of the "immediate demands" that had long been advocated by the Socialist party. Such was the stand of the party as it approached the mid-term Congressional elections of 1934.

The Socialists realized that in Roosevelt they had a formidable opponent and that there was tremendous popular enthusiasm for the President. They found that discontent with individual measures of the administration were often directed at his subordinates rather than at Roosevelt himself. The President was also fortunate in the enemies that he made. He demonstrated a deftness and shrewdness in political management coupled with bold and determined leadership that won praise from the Socialists too. "We Socialists in power would have to emulate the President's vigor in getting things done,"

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<sup>108</sup>New Leader, XVII (May 19, 1934), 12.

wrote Norman Thomas only a few weeks after Roosevelt was inaugurated.<sup>109</sup> In September, 1933, he conceded that the President had given evidence of "a more pro-labor point of view than any previous administration in Washington."<sup>110</sup>

Even while becoming increasingly critical of New Deal measures, the Socialist leader, in a letter to Maury Maverick of Texas in December, 1933, acknowledged that Roosevelt "has certainly shown far more ability and on the whole more liberalism than I suspected that he had from his record as Governor."<sup>111</sup> Thomas also declared on a later occasion that Roosevelt deserved praise for having demonstrated that vigorous leadership was possible within a framework of democracy. He praised "the brilliant generalship" of Roosevelt and added that his success "gives me a new measure of faith in the possibility of leadership in a democracy even under a rigid constitution and a judicial oligarchy."<sup>112</sup>

On several occasions Thomas publicly voiced his fears that some of Roosevelt's measures might tend towards creating a fascist state. But he made clear his belief that the President's intentions were good and that he was not an incipient

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<sup>110</sup> New Leader, XVI (September 23, 1933), 8.

<sup>111</sup> Thomas to Maverick, December 21, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas, The Choice Before Us, 94. See also speech at Chautauque Institution, Chautauque, New York, August 19, 1934, Thomas Papers.

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 Hitler or Mussolini. Thomas and other Socialists repeatedly explained that their criticisms of Roosevelt were not of the same order as those of conservative Republicans or of Al Smith and the Liberty League. The "reactionary" critics of Roosevelt, they held, wanted to scuttle even the very moderate reforms of the President.

During the months preceding the election Socialists found themselves criticizing the President's program as inadequate and at the same time defending its "progressive" aspects against the criticisms of extreme conservatives as well as of Communists. The conservatives called Roosevelt a disguised socialist while the Communists dubbed him a fascist. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch printed a Fitzpatrick cartoon that depicted the Socialist party as a soap-boxer, perched precariously on a tree stump, and wailing that somebody had stolen the planks of his platform. The Socialists, however, denied that Roosevelt had inaugurated Socialism and described his measures as steps towards state capitalism, in the course of which the President had accepted some "immediate" demands put forward by their party. Thomas declared that Roosevelt had merely borrowed a little red paint from his Socialist neighbor's pot to touch up his rickety pump.

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113 New Leader, XV (March 25, 1933), 16; XVI (November 18, 1933), 8. The Communist party accused the Socialists of welcoming the Roosevelt program with "unashamed hosannas." Daily Worker, September 2, 1933, p. 5. The Communist election platform for 1934 charged that the Socialists were rendering "the most loyal service to the capitalist exploiters and oppressors of the workers," Daily Worker, July 26, 1934, p. 3.



As the elections approached, the Socialists had forebodings that their party would make a poor showing. They believed that the popularity of the President coupled with the huge sums of money spent under the relief program would ensure a big Democratic vote. "This is going to be done pretty much on the principle that one doesn't shoot Santa Claus even though Santa Claus is a capricious old gentleman, stingy and unfair," said Thomas.<sup>114</sup> Fear of a crippling defeat did not, however, result in the adoption of vigorous campaign programs by the Socialist party. Much of their energies were diverted to the intense factional controversies that raged within the party. The national convention of the party, held in Detroit in June, 1934, was so occupied in a squabble over a "Declaration of Principles" that it had little time to draw up a satisfactory platform. A very brief platform was adopted that criticized the administration for its attempt "to stabilize capitalism by subsidizing scarcity," its recovery program under which wages lagged behind profits, and its heavy military expenditures. The Socialist party, the platform declared, was committed to "the one sole purpose of establishing the co-operative commonwealth, the economic foundation of which is social ownership and management for use and not profit." The platform pledged that Socialists

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<sup>114</sup>Speech over the CBS network, October 31, 1934, Thomas Papers.

elected to office would work for legislation to ensure decent living standards for all Americans and to vote against war and military preparations for war.<sup>115</sup>

The New York State convention of the party nominated Norman Thomas as its candidate for United States Senator, after a stormy debate marked by bitter exchanges between rival factions. All through the campaign Thomas was unhappy because of the growing crisis within the party but he plodded on in order to prevent a precipitous slump in the party's vote in the Empire State. His rivals in the Senatorial race were the incumbent Democratic Senator, Royal S. Copeland, and the Republican, Harold Cluett. Copeland's term in the Senate was undistinguished. Thomas charged that the Senator was not "bothered with any excess baggage of principle". "He is neither for nor against the New Deal. He is for Copeland. At all times he is against Mumps and Measles and for Fleischmann's Yeast, Nujol, Pluto Water, and whoever will hire him to broadcast on the radio. Otherwise he is on the side of what he considers to be the biggest battalion of voters." Thomas dismissed Republican Cluett as "just one more Republican with money" who had been nominated for a job that "no Republican seemed to think it worthwhile to fight for."<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> New Leader, XVII (June 9, 1934), 8.

<sup>116</sup> Campaign speech, (October, 1934), Thomas Papers.

It was a listless campaign, but Thomas did not slacken his efforts during the entire period. Accompanied by Violet, he drove into numerous towns and villages in New York in a car equipped with a loudspeaker. Thomas purposely concentrated his campaigning in upstate New York where the party was extremely weak. He hoped that some interest in Socialism might be aroused in that region as a result of his work. Thomas was afraid that the Socialist vote in general as well as in New York would be disappointing.<sup>119</sup> Such indeed proved to be the case and the party's vote slipped down in almost every state. But Thomas himself polled the highest Socialist vote in a New York senatorial race in many years. He secured nearly 20,000 votes above what he had polled in the state as a presidential candidate in 1932.<sup>120</sup> But Thomas's vote of 194,952 provided little ground for enthusiasm when compared with the 2.04 million votes polled by the Democrat, Copeland, and 1.35 million by the Republican loser, Cluett.<sup>121</sup>

The most heartening news for the party came from Connecticut where three state senators, two state representatives,

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<sup>119</sup>Thomas to Senior, October 23, 1934, ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Charles Solomon polled 126,580 votes in his race for governor of New York. It was, with one exception in 1920, the largest gubernatorial vote cast for a Socialist candidate. New Leader, XVII (December 15, 1934), 4.

<sup>121</sup>Max Bedacht, the Communist candidate, polled 45,396 votes.

one member of the Board of Education, three city selectmen, and fourteen justices of the peace were elected. The path for the remarkable Socialist victory had been paved a year earlier by the election of Jasper McLevy as mayor of Bridgeport and of twelve out of sixteen aldermen in that city. In Pennsylvania, Socialists Darlington Hoopes and Lilith Wilson were re-elected to the state legislature. Wisconsin elected three Socialists to the state assembly. These successes were, no doubt, welcomed by Socialists but their enthusiasm was tempered by the fact that they were confined to the party strongholds of Bridgeport, Milwaukee, and Reading. In the rest of the country the party's performance hardly warranted any celebration.

In New York the vote for state assemblymen fell from 122,955 in 1932 to 96,163; in Illinois the vote for governor in 1932 was 39,380 while in 1934 the party's candidate for State Treasurer secured only 15,845; in Massachusetts the party's vote for governor dropped from 24,503 to 9,721; in California where Thomas had polled 63,000 as the presidential candidate in 1932, the party's gubernatorial nominee secured only about 14,000 votes, though the veteran Socialist, George Kirkpatrick obtained nearly 90,000 votes in the senatorial race against Hiram Johnson. In Ohio where Thomas had polled 64,000 votes in 1932, the party failed to get on the ballot. Writing in the New Leader, Oneal declared that the election figures "should sober party members everywhere."

"It is not creditable for us that in the fifth year of the depression the party has suffered a distinct reverse. Nothing is to be gained by ignoring it or concealing it," he added.<sup>122</sup>

In California an ex-Socialist went down to defeat in his bid for the governorship of the state. But he rolled up a tremendous vote of 900,000. Was there a lesson for the party in Sinclair's heavy vote? Or was there a lesson in his defeat by a tacit alliance of old party machines and the financial and business interests in the state? Opinion among Socialists on these questions was divided.

There was no room, however, for any difference of opinion on another item of news from California. "We are short of cash, we are short of manpower, we are discouraged," reported a prominent California Socialist.<sup>123</sup> The state of the party in many other states was not appreciably better than that of the organization in the Golden State.

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<sup>122</sup>James Oneal, "The Socialist Vote This Year," New Leader, XVII (December 29, 1934), 5.

<sup>123</sup>Sam White to Senior, September 17, 1934, Thomas Papers.

## CHAPTER IX

### PLANS, BLUEPRINTS, AND MANIFESTOES

A national convention of the Socialist party was scheduled to be held in Detroit, Michigan, in June, 1934. As the date of the convention drew near it became increasingly clear that it might not prove to be a smooth and harmonious affair. Serious cleavages of opinion had come to exist in the party on a number of issues. These were aggravated by the psychological tensions created by the happenings in Germany and Austria and by the apparent success of Roosevelt in "stabilizing" capitalism in the United States. As a result of such circumstances many Socialists became preoccupied with the question of the "correct" tactics that the party should follow. A spate of plans, programs, and panaceas flowed from various individuals and factions in the party and the merits and defects of each were debated with considerable vehemence and heat. What should be the party's "road to power?" Should the party follow democratic and constitutional methods under all circumstances? Could extralegal methods be adopted if democratic processes were perverted by capitalist or fascist machinations? What should the party do to prevent the outbreak of war, and what was its duty if war actually broke out? These were some of the questions that agitated many Socialists. The party debates on such issues appear strange and unrealistic when one looks back upon them

after the passage of twenty years. But in 1934 they were live and "hot" issues in the socialist parties of many European countries as well as in the Socialist party of America. The discussions and controversies in the American party increased in vehemence as the time neared for the national convention of the party.

Particularly vocal in those controversies were the New York Militants and those who considered themselves even more "revolutionary" than the Militants. Among the Militants themselves there was considerable dissatisfaction about the influence exerted by the Old Guard leaders in party affairs. Some of them were not happy with Norman Thomas's views and wanted him to fight the Old Guard with greater vigor. Thomas, for his part, bluntly advised them to engage in constructive organizational work instead of spending their energies in radical phrasemaking. When some Militants like Murray Baron and Paul Porter wanted to start a journal to propagate their point of view Thomas told them that their accomplishments did not warrant any such move. He wanted them to "do something to give them a standing with themselves and with the party and the community before they write too much."<sup>1</sup>

As the difference between Thomas and the Old Guard leaders continued to grow, many of his Militant supporters began

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas to Senior, March 17, 1933, Archives of the Socialist Party.

to think in terms of wresting control of the party. They hoped to turn it into a highly centralized organization imposing a strict discipline on its members.<sup>2</sup> But Thomas made it clear to them that he had no use for a monolithic party exacting rigid conformity from its members. "In the American scene and at this stage of our historical development," he wrote to a Militant, "it is emphatically bad theory and bad tactics for the Socialist Party to emulate the Communists in the severity of its discipline in matters of detail." He added that once a group started heresy hunting, no one could foretell where it would lead to or how it would end. "The organization of the Militants would probably be one of the first things to be brought under its axe."<sup>3</sup>

Such criticisms from Thomas jarred some young party members who considered themselves to be genuine left-wing revolutionists. Not only were they disappointed in Thomas but they felt that the Militant faction itself had failed to live up to its professed objectives. Their response was prompt and characteristic--they organized themselves as yet another faction in the party. They described themselves as the Revolutionary Policy Committee (R.P.C.), and they proclaimed that their object was to make the Socialist party a truly revolutionary working class organization. The moving

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<sup>2</sup>Amicus Most to Thomas, September 21, 1933, Thomas Papers.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas to Amicus Most, October 5, 1933, ibid.



spirits of the R.P.C. were J. B. Matthews, Francis Henson, and Irving Brown.

In January, 1934, the Revolutionary Policy Committee circulated among party branches in New York a draft program for the Socialist party. The leaders of the R.P.C. had grown so sure of the validity of their "Marxian" analysis that they did not even bother to consult Norman Thomas or any other friendly party leader about the implications of their course of action. After studying the document Thomas informed the group of his serious disagreement with many of the statements contained in it. He declared emphatically that he considered the R.P.C.'s views on war, violence, and the dictatorship of the proletariat as "left wing infantilism." He doubted the value of ostentatious pronouncements in building up a political party and added that it was foolish to proclaim loudly plans for revolutionary action that the party, in its weakened condition, could hardly expect to carry out. "I cannot imagine more disastrous tactics at this juncture of affairs in our Party," said Thomas, "than this method of procedure by a small group which even from its own point of view ought to be enlarging its contacts and building slowly and quietly." Thomas made it clear that he would have to fight the R.P.C. men if they persisted in their attitude.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas to -----, January 30, 1934, *ibid.* The name of the addressee is withheld by request. See also Thomas's article in the New Leader, XVII (January 27, 1934), 8.

Perhaps Thomas's outspoken criticism had some effect on the R.P.C. They did not rush into print with their program but waited for two months in the course of which the draft was worked over. Early in April, 1934, the R.P.C. was ready to proclaim to the world its program for making the United States of America socialist. Its "Appeal to the Socialist Party," contained few surprises.<sup>5</sup> The statement was full of cliches that found favor with many "left socialists" in Europe at that time. It declared that the working class must acquire power in order to transform capitalist society into socialist society by means of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In acquiring such power the party should not make "a fetish of legality." The Workers' Republic that the party would strive to bring into being should be based on workers' councils, "historically suited to serve as the organs of liberation." After coming into power the party should safeguard the revolution by arming the workers and by transforming the economic and social basis of society. Till such time as the party obtained power it should vigorously support "so-called reforms" as unemployment insurance, reduction of hours of work, and abolition of child labor, not because they would represent a gradual evolution towards Socialism but because they would hasten a revolutionary crisis in capitalism by

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<sup>5</sup>"An Appeal to the Socialist Party," World Tomorrow, XVII (April 12, 1934), 183-85.

imposing on it burdens greater than it could bear.

The R.P.C. also had a clear-cut program of action for the party in its struggle against war. It declared that Socialists should oppose all "capitalist wars" regardless of how or by whom they were started, by means of "propaganda, demonstrations, organizations and strikes in key war industries, including forcible stoppage of munitions shipments by workers, and united fronts with all anti-war groups regardless of political beliefs." All antiwar activities should be carried on with the ultimate aim of preparing the workers for a general strike to prevent war. If, despite all such efforts, war should break out, the party should lead the workers in the task of turning such an imperialist war into class war.

The R.P.C. program was vague and wobbly with respect to the immediate problems confronting the Socialist party. The party was called upon to make "ceaseless efforts" to promote united action with the Communists on specific issues and also to formulate policies that would bring to its side farmers, Negroes, and the middle classes. On one plank, however, the R.P.C. statement was absolutely clear. "The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics--land of proletarian dictatorship--is preeminent, unique among the nations of the world. There, only, are the workers in power and constructing a Socialist society," it proclaimed.

The R.P.C.'s "Appeal" was precisely what Thomas had called it in its first draft--"left wing infantilism." It was merely

a rehash of hackneyed Marxist-Leninist platitudes. The eager revolutionists who penned the statement did not ask themselves whether such ritualistic mumbo-jumbo could really bring support to the party from the middle classes, labor unionists, farmers, and Negroes. Perhaps many who signed the "Appeal" were not quite clear as to what it was all about.<sup>6</sup> Some were perturbed when the statement was vehemently condemned not only by the Old Guard but by other party leaders too. Oneal ridiculed the R.P.C. men as "playboy revolutionists" who lived in a twilight zone between Communism and Socialism. "They are tossed between doubt and fear and are unable to decide whether they belong to one or the other."<sup>7</sup> Kirby Page, editor of the World Tomorrow, and Louis Waldman concurred in the view that the Socialist party would cease to be socialist if it adopted the R.P.C. program.<sup>8</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr declared that if the analysis contained in the document were correct, only the Communist party could be said to have the correct line. He

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<sup>6</sup>-----to writer, March 4, 1954. The informant, one of the signers of the R.P.C. "Appeal," has since risen to a position of some eminence in one of the older political parties and prefers to remain anonymous. "I remember vaguely," he wrote, "that many of the signers of the RPC statement were exceedingly unsure of their position. Many of us were impatient with the Rand School group, but we certainly were not in a position to stand up under thoughtful criticisms of the RPC statement."

<sup>7</sup>New Leader, XVII (April 21, 1934), 4. Oneal to Senior, June 11, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>8</sup>World Tomorrow, XVII (April 12, 1934), 187-88.

added that "the honest left-wingers who have penned it have been more intent upon fleeing from the errors of reformism than upon defining a revolutionary policy which would be at once politically realistic and relevant to the American scene."<sup>9</sup> Thomas was the most considerate of the critics of the R.P.C. He expressed his agreement with Niebuhr's comments, but at the same time he commended the R.P.C. men for attempting to provide "a compact and vigorous statement of the Socialist position."<sup>10</sup>

There were many in the party, however, who endorsed neither Thomas's commendation of the R.P.C. men nor Niebuhr's description of them as "honest left-wingers." They wondered whether some at least of the R.P.C. men might be "plants" of the Communist party or of the splinter Communist groups. The fact that J. B. Matthews and Francis Henson had been active in "united front" organizations controlled by the Communist party increased their suspicion.<sup>11</sup> Soon there were other

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 185-86.

<sup>10</sup>Norman Thomas, "Proposals for Action at Detroit," World Tomorrow, XVII (April 26, 1934), 206.

<sup>11</sup>Earl Browder told the writer that neither he nor the Communist party had anything to do with the R.P.C. He added that Francis Henson did show him a draft of the proposed R.P.C. program and that he advised Henson to disband the group. "The R.P.C.," said Browder, "was merely the result of the careerist ambition of a few people. They were adventurers who wanted to stay to the left of the C.P." Interview with Browder, September 9, 1934.

Despite Browder's disclaimer there is some ground for  
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rumors to the effect that the R.P.C. was infiltrated by adherents of Jay Lovestone, leader of the Communist party (Opposition). Irving Brown and Francis Henson were reported to be the principal Lovestoneites in the R.P.C.

As the rumors began to gain currency, the R.P.C. group was somewhat shaken even though its leaders asserted that

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belief that J. B. Matthews was working very closely with the C.P. during those days. Matthews later was a confessed fellow-traveller.

In December, 1934, Lovestone appeared before the N.E.C. to present an appeal for united action. Darlington Hoopes bluntly asked him whether he had planted any spies in the party. Lovestone did not offer a direct reply to the question, but asserted that he was anxious to get "contacts" in the Socialist party. He added that he would not have objected if the Socialist party had made similar attempts with regard to his organization. New Leader, XVII (December 8, 1934), 3.

Benjamin Gitlow who was then attempting to obtain entry into the Socialist party has some observations on this question. "The leaders of the Revolutionary Policy Committee did not impress me favorably. ...I discovered that Henson ... was working completely under Lovestone's direction. Through him and others in the Revolutionary Policy Committee Lovestone hoped to split off a substantial number of Socialists who would immediately join his group. Upon further investigation, I discovered that the Revolutionary Policy Committee swarmed with agents of the Communist Party, the Lovestonites and the Trotskyites. ...Then I came in contact with Irving Brown. The minute I heard him talk I knew that he was a Lovestonite. Brown had worked on the draft of the program of the Revolutionary Policy Committee which was issued as "An Appeal to the Membership of the Socialist Party." Benjamin Gitlow, I Confess (New York, 1939), 578-79.

Daniel Bell describes the R.P.C. as "a weird mélange of revolutionary romanticists and secret Lovestoneite agents." "Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Egbert and Persons (eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, 377.

their "Appeal" had begun to attract increasing attention in party locals all over the country. Despite its tall claims the R.P.C. was never more than a small and weak group in the party.

The R.P.C. maneuver served to disturb some of the New York Militants. With a national convention of the party fast approaching, they did not want the R.P.C. to appear as the champion of the most radical program to be put forth before it. In May, 1934, the New York Militants issued a manifesto of their own entitled Towards a Militant Program for the Socialist Party of America.<sup>12</sup> In its essentials it was not very different from the R.P.C. document. The "Program" proclaimed that the working class must conquer power and that "the question of the means to be followed is purely one of expediency."<sup>13</sup> Neither "capitalist legality" nor "capitalist democracy" should be permitted to stand in the way of social revolution. While open and legal methods would be the most desirable way to reach power in democratic countries, the socialist movement must be prepared to use extraparliamentary methods if the democratic way was blocked by capitalist or fascist intrigue. Once the party captured power, it would have to use "dictatorial means" to defend the revolution and

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<sup>12</sup>Towards a Militant Program for the Socialist Party of America (New York, 1934).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 10.

build a socialist society.<sup>14</sup> In order to fulfill its plan and attain its objective, the Socialist party must transform itself into "a disciplined, centralized organization that can control its membership and institutions." Such in brief was the "road to power" pointed out by the manifesto of the New York Militants.

On many other issues like the party's attitude towards the Soviet Union, the united front, war, and a farmer-labor party, the manifesto differed very little from the R.P.C. document. The "Program" of the New York Militants was thus open to the same kind of criticisms that had been leveled at the R.P.C. "Appeal." Nevertheless, Thomas again announced that it was an encouraging phenomenon that so many Socialists had begun to bestow serious thought on the policies that their party should pursue. While thus he sought to give a pat on the back to his "young people," Thomas was not happy with the kind of arguments advanced by the R.P.C. or the New York Militants and the language in which they were couched. "A good many of these plans," he said, "forget the old-fashioned recipe for cooking a hare: first catch the hare. They would be far more appropriate if we already were leading an immense movement."<sup>15</sup>

One of Thomas's protégés, Paul Porter, was working on

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>15</sup>New Leader, XVII (May 19, 1934), 12.



another "Plan" that, he believed, would be more suited to meet American conditions. Porter, a Militant, was convalescing in a New York sanitarium. He corresponded frequently with Thomas and was familiar with the Socialist leader's views on various issues. The program that Porter drew up, christened the "Commonwealth Plan," was not made available for publication until the middle of May, 1934.

In commending his "Plan" to the attention of Socialists, Porter asserted that it was primarily a "here-and-now propaganda paper" rather than a complete "cook book for the future." He referred to the widespread support that Upton Sinclair had been able to obtain in California for his EPIC program and added that it emphasized the importance of stating a genuine Socialist program as a unity that could be widely comprehended.

The Plan began with a promise to provide every family in America with annual earnings of \$5,000. It would be put into effect if a Socialist president and congress were elected by the people in the national elections in 1936. Immediately on entering office, the Socialist President would sponsor four basic laws that would 1. socialize the basic industries and bring them under public corporations; 2. ensure the farmers' right to land; 3. promote peace and tranquility by drastic reduction of arms and armed forces and repudiation of imperialism; and 4. safeguard farmer-worker control of the government and prevent judicial obstruction of socialist

reconstruction by the appointment of additional justices to the Supreme Court. Subsidiary laws would be enacted in order to improve the conditions of service of workers, ensure "a guaranteed price in a guaranteed market" for farmers, initiate a vast program of public works, housing, and rural electrification, make the tax system equitable, and promote social welfare.

The Plan described how the process of socialization of basic industries would take place. An Economic General Staff would be set up to supervise and co-ordinate economic activities under the plan. Under its direction a Reconstruction Congress would be called for each major industry on which democratically elected delegates from legitimate trade unions and consumers' organizations would be represented. The Congress would plan the reorganization of the industries on a socialist basis. A Federal Appraisal Board would determine the compensation to be paid to private owners affected by socialization. Payment would be in the form of "Commonwealth Bonds" which would bear interest for twenty years and then lapse.

What if the capitalist ruling class should try to block the execution of the plan, once the people had given a mandate in its favor? "Should they do so, ...then--we can always follow the advice of Lincoln. Said the great Abraham Lincoln: 'This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the

existing government they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it!"<sup>16</sup>

Such was the "Commonwealth Plan" that Paul Porter brought out on the very eve of the convention. It was a hastily drawn document but had a certain merit in that it attempted to present some socialist concepts in a more palatable manner than was usually done. It adopted votecatching devices like the promise of a \$5,000 annual income for each family. That was, perhaps, pardonable. Porter, perhaps, did not see any reason why the older parties should have a monopoly in making pre-election promises of all things to all men. The Commonwealth Plan also made its obeisance at the altar of revolution but took care to relate it to Lincoln and 1776 rather than to the Paris Commune or a Petrograd coup.

There was little opportunity for the propagation and popularization of the Plan among party members prior to the convention. It received little support from Old Guard leaders or from doctrinaire elements among the Militants and the R.P.C. Thomas, however, felt differently. He thought the Plan was a fairly good approach for discussion and action under the conditions then prevailing in the United States.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Paul Porter, "The Commonwealth Plan," World Tomorrow, XVII (May 24, 1934), 277-80.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas to writer, February 4, 1954. Also see New Leader, XVII (May 19, 1934), 12.

But the convention was only a few days away, and he had no time to "push" the plan among the delegates. In a last-minute attempt to win some support for it at the convention he sent a telegram to the editor of World Tomorrow announcing his "enthusiastic endorsement" of the Plan and expressing the hope the the convention would consider it seriously, making such changes as were called for.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the ferment in the party, the Old Guard leaders refused to be jolted from their traditional groove. The New Leader editorials, the discussions in party forums, the courses in the Rand School, the gatherings at Tamiment Camp, the picnic, and the Forward costume ball continued in the same manner as they had for several years. Valuable indeed as such activities were, the Old Guard leaders were derelict in the discharge of their responsibilities towards the newer and younger party members. They were impatient with and even intolerant of newcomers who ventured to criticize the traditional policies of the party. Unfortunately for the party, such sentiments were heartily reciprocated by those at whom the Old Guard leaders sneered.

Socialists of the type of Oneal, Waldman, Lee, and Panken, the leading figures of the Old Guard, saw no need for any change in the tactics of the party as a result of the

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<sup>18</sup>World Tomorrow, XVII (May 24, 1934), 277. See also Maynard Krueger, "On the Threshold of Great Things," New Leader, XVII (May 26, 1934), 4-5.

experience of socialist parties in Europe. The New Leader carried several articles justifying every action of the German and Austrian Social Democrats and taking up cudgels against those who expressed doubts about the rightness of their policies. The old line Socialists also supported vigorously the resolutions adopted at the Paris conference of the L.S.I. on such issues as the fight against war, united front with the Communists, and the use of democratic means on the "road to power." They were not prepared to stray from the path chalked out by the International.

The emphasis that Old Guard leaders placed on "democratic means" increased in vehemence as the Militants and the left-wingers in the party continued to proclaim that such methods would not suffice if there was an imminent threat of fascism. The two groups were in fact talking about entirely different sets of circumstances, but neither would concede that point. The conviction grew in the minds of the Old Guard leaders that the party was in grave peril from foolhardy elements that advocated a dangerous doctrine of insurrectionism. The left-wingers, on the other hand, learned to speak in contemptuous terms of the Old Guard leaders and to regard them as a deadweight retarding the growth of the party.

With the object of winning support for their position at the approaching national convention, the Waldman-Lee-Oneal group persuaded the New York State Committee of the party to

adopt a series of resolutions.<sup>19</sup> The resolutions were to be submitted to the convention for its endorsement. They were practically a restatement and reiteration of the majority resolutions adopted by the Paris conference of the L.S.I. Waldman and Oneal also appealed to left-wingers not to jeopardize the future of the party by activities and statements that would isolate it from the people and particularly from trade unionists. "Here we are," said Waldman, "a political party without any representation in Congress, with not a single governor, without any important municipal administration except Milwaukee, without any substantial delegations in the state legislatures, worrying about the perfection of our program when the real question is how to build a political party." He called for a "live, elastic" program.<sup>20</sup> Oneal warned the Militants and the R.P.C. men that their policies would reduce the party to the position of a sect like the Socialist Labor party. The middle classes and the labor unionists could never be won over to the party by their revolutionary manifestoes, he added. Oneal expressed the hope that a "spirit of give and take" would prevail at the convention so that the maximum agreement could be secured on essentials with a minimum of

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<sup>19</sup>Resolutions adopted by the State Committee, Socialist Party, New York (New York, 1934). A mimeographed brochure.

<sup>20</sup>Louis Waldman, "The Socialist Party Faces America Today," New Leader, XVII (April 25, 1934), 4-5.

friction.<sup>21</sup>

The Old Guard leaders were clearly on the defensive as the convention date approached.

Thomas realized that the convention would be a crucial one for the party. For the first time in his career he would be the most powerful and influential leader in a party convention. Thomas was anxious to bring about a change in the composition of the National Executive Committee. In the N.E.C. his views had repeatedly been thwarted by adverse votes by such old-timers as McLevy, Graham, Packard, and Wilson. He wanted to get some of his younger supporters on the top policy-making body in order to steer the party on a course that he deemed appropriate. "Indications are that we will be able to pull at least four and probably five people of the present N.E.C.," reported Krueger in a confidential memorandum to Thomas in March, 1934.<sup>22</sup> Thomas became increasingly confident of securing a majority on the N.E.C. and also believed that the Old Guard would not be able to run a candidate against Leo Krzycki for the national chairmanship of the party.<sup>23</sup>

Thomas, however, failed to exercise vigorous and decisive

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<sup>21</sup>James Oneal, "Some Problems that Face American Socialists," New Leader, XVII (May 5, 1934), 4, 5, 6.

<sup>22</sup>Krueger to Thomas, March 19, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>23</sup>Thomas to Krueger, March 21, 1934, Ibid. Papers.

leadership in the crucial weeks before the convention. The party was not in a healthy state. The Old Guard leaders were becoming increasingly embittered and resented the attacks against them by the Militants and the R.P.C. They felt that Thomas had definitely identified himself with the left-wingers in the party and distrusted his actions. The Militants and the R.P.C. failed to realize that their tactics might seriously disrupt the unity of the party and bring on a disastrous split. A significant number of party members were undoubtedly not directly involved in the factional squabbles and a vigorous and constructive leadership could have marshaled their strength for healing the breach in the party and giving it a proper sense of direction. Thomas did not formulate a plan of action for the convention and a program that would have commanded a broad basis of support. In his weekly column in the New Leader and in his articles in the World Tomorrow he discussed general party problems and evaluated the plans of others. But what did Norman Thomas himself want the convention to do? That was far from clear.

Thomas appeared to believe that the party needed a vigorous program of action. He had not been enthusiastic about the record of the German Social Democratic party or of the British Labor party. He felt that they had not succeeded in "bringing about even an approach to revolutionary change."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Norman Thomas, "Is Peaceful Revolution Possible?" World Tomorrow, XV (September 14, 1932), 252.



The failure of German and Austrian Socialism served further to undermine his faith in the tactics of gradualism and "romantic parliamentarism." "The older Fabian socialism as a method is doomed if for no other reason than that unless we win soon we shall be swallowed up in world war or crushed under some form of American fascism," Thomas declared.<sup>25</sup> The Socialist leader thus seemed vaguely to desire a "leftward" orientation for the party. But, at the same time, he realized that in the fight against fascism it was at least as important for the party to build closer contacts with workers to the right of the party as with Communists to its left.<sup>26</sup> He was convinced that an important reason for the success of fascism in Germany was the lack of unity among workers, farmers and white collar employees. "It is a truism," he wrote, "that in no near future can a movement based solely on industrial workers capture a modern state while farmers and 'little men' are inspired by ideals not of the cooperative commonwealth, but of Fascist nationalism. And here in America socialism hasn't even the factory workers!"<sup>27</sup>

Thus what Thomas seemed to be seeking was a "left" program that would meet the needs of the times and, at the

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<sup>25</sup>Norman Thomas, "Hastening the Day," World Tomorrow, XVII (March 15, 1934), 135.

<sup>26</sup>New Leader, XV (April 15, 1933), 16.

<sup>27</sup>Norman Thomas, "Hastening the Day," World Tomorrow, XVII (March 15, 1934), 135.

same time, attract the support of farmers and white collar elements. The Socialist theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, presented similar views in a more effective and compact form than Thomas. Niebuhr exhorted Socialists to heed the lessons of Europe and to evolve a strategy for an American revolutionary movement "in which American revolutionary tradition will be exploited, the peculiar circumstances of American life will have justice done them and all those who are disinherited by capitalism will have a fair opportunity to unite in one effective radical party, looking to the establishment of a collective society." Such a strategy, he declared, should involve a turn to the "left" politically in order to bring about working class unity, and a turn to the right culturally in order to heal the breach between workers and the dispossessed classes. The party needed "a Marxism which disavows revisionism and parliamentary optimism in the field of politics and economics, but which is frankly revisionist in dealing with psychological and cultural forces which orthodox Marxism has not fully comprehended."<sup>28</sup>

Niebuhr argued that if a socialist party were really to lead the workers, it should do justice not only to "the necessities of parliamentary action in constitutional countries" but "to the natural and justified cynicism of a great part of labor in regard to the pretensions of democracy and

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<sup>28</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "Making Radicalism Effective," World Tomorrow, XVI (December 21, 1933), 682, 684.

and the dangers of parliamentary careerism, opportunism and compromise." He criticized the Old Guard Socialists for their "fatalistic lethargy." They were so certain that time was on the side of socialism, that they felt no obligation but disengagement with war as a weapon for settling international one of preserving "the pure milk of the word" against corruption. They were impressed by the results of a poll of 100 ministers sponsored by the World Tomorrow. Nearly 29

100 ministers declared that they would not sanction or participate in any future war. They were alarmed that they alienate the middle classes and farmers unless they disavowed Harry Emerson Fosdick, one of the best farming politicians, some of Marxism's "cultural excess baggage."

What we need is a socialism which neither deviates from the central emphases of revolutionary Marxism nor complicates its revolutionary problem by insisting upon dogmas which accentuate psychological and cultural differences between various classes of the disinherited and prevent them from feeling the common bond of poverty, oppression and the fateful mission of building a new society.<sup>29</sup>

Radical pacifists like Devere Allen and Kirby Page declared that the party could win considerable support for a vigorous program of opposition to war. Allen urged that the party should commit itself in advance against any support of war and prepare for "a unified strike action" to prevent war.<sup>31</sup>

should adopt a "short statement of socialist aims and

<sup>29</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "A Reorientation of Radicalism," World Tomorrow, XVI (July, 1933), 443-44. See also Niebuhr, "A New Strategy for Socialists," World Tomorrow, XVI (August 31, 1933), 490-91 (1933), 585-86.

<sup>30</sup> Comment by Reinhold Niebuhr, World Tomorrow, XVII (April 12, 1934), 185-86.

<sup>31</sup> Devere Allen, "Peace is Dead--Long Live Peace!" World Tomorrow, XVII (March 29, 1934), 152-54.

Thomas, "Proposals for Action in Detroit," World Tomorrow, XVII (April 26, 1934), 200-01.

Thomas was also of the opinion that the party should adopt a positive declaration setting forth its opposition to war.<sup>32</sup> Allen, Page, and Thomas believed that there was widespread disillusionment with war as a weapon for settling international disputes. They were impressed by the results of a poll of 20,870 ministers sponsored by the World Tomorrow. Nearly 13,000 ministers declared that they would not sanction or participate in any future war.<sup>33</sup> They were stirred when Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, one of the most famous religious leaders of America, proclaimed that he would "never again, directly or indirectly sanction another war."<sup>34</sup> The activities of the Communists in setting up the American League Against War and Fascism also led some Socialists to conclude that their party needed a new and vigorous statement of its opposition to war.

Thomas did not clearly expound to the party membership his own ideas on a program of action. In an article in World Tomorrow on the eve of the convention Thomas outlined his "Proposals for Action at Detroit."<sup>35</sup> He said that the convention should adopt a "short statement of Socialist aims and

<sup>32</sup>Norman Thomas, "If War is to be Averted," World Tomorrow, XVI (October 26, 1933), 585-86.

<sup>33</sup>Kirby Page, "20,870 Clergymen on War and Economic Injustice," World Tomorrow, XVII (May 10, 1934), 222.

<sup>34</sup>New York Times, May 8, 1934, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup>Thomas, "Proposals for Action at Detroit," World Tomorrow, XVII (April 26, 1934), 206-08.

tactics" which must "emphasize the fact that our great desire is to set up the cooperative commonwealth with its shared abundance." He expressed the hope that the convention would adopt suitable resolutions on issues like inflation and a farm program and clarify the party's stand towards organized labor and a possible Farmer-Labor party. That was all that he had to say.

It was by no means a vigorous leadership that Thomas offered in the weeks before the convention. It was virtually an abdication of leadership. Thomas wanted the convention to adopt a statement of Socialist aims but made no attempt to prepare a careful draft that could obtain the broadest agreement in the party. Thomas was not the kind of leader who energetically directs his followers, dominates conventions, and gets them to adopt measures that he himself has ordained. Perhaps he might have rendered a greater service to the party and the cause if he had asserted himself a little more and if he had exerted himself a little more in order to gain acceptance of his point of view by the convention. Perhaps... <sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas himself has come to feel that he should have acted more vigorously during the days immediately preceding the Detroit convention. "I worked with the Militants and, to a less extent, with some others to organize support preparatory to the Detroit convention. But in retrospect, I think that I made something of a mistake in not taking more lead in the matter. ...I now think I should have acted more vigorously in trying to shape up things, especially in drawing up a declaration of principles." Thomas to writer, February 4, 1954.

## CHAPTER X

### A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

One hundred and forty-two delegates from forty-three states gathered in the ballroom of the Fort Wayne Hotel, Detroit, on May 30, 1934, for the eighteenth convention of the Socialist party of America.<sup>1</sup> There was a general impression among the delegates that the convention would witness the culmination of bitter factional squabbles that had rocked the party since the Milwaukee conclave of 1932. There were more factions in Detroit than there had been in Milwaukee. Roughly speaking, one could distinguish the Old Guard; Militants who were prepared to go all the way with Thomas; Militants who were not prepared to go all the way with Thomas; the Revolutionary Policy Committee; the Wisconsin group; and assorted independents and "populists". No single group had sufficient strength to dominate the convention.

The Old Guard leaders suspected that their opponents might effect a coalition to wrest control of the party machinery. While they did not have a plan of action to prevent such a coalition,<sup>2</sup> they were determined to put up a vigorous

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<sup>1</sup>Socialist Advance (Chicago, 1934), 25-26. The convention handbook.

<sup>2</sup>Waldman, Labor Lawyer, 258-59.

fight against it. They were not prepared to yield an inch to the Militants or the R.P.C.<sup>3</sup> Louis Waldman of New York was the acknowledged spokesman for the Old Guard group.

Norman Thomas worked in close co-operation with the Militants. So sharp had the differences grown between him and the Old Guard leaders that hardly any consultation took place between them prior to the convention.<sup>4</sup> Thomas desired and worked for a change in the composition of the National Executive Committee. He wanted an N.E.C. that would more closely approximate his own point of view on the role of the party. Neither he nor many of his Militant supporters desired to drive the Old Guard from the party.<sup>5</sup> Some other Militants and many of the adherents of the R.P.C. believed that the Old Guard should be forced out of the party and, in any case, not appeased.<sup>6</sup>

The Wisconsin Socialists, led by Daniel Hoan, had little

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<sup>3</sup>"I was absolutely determined to have a showdown with the Revolutionary Policy Committee and the Militants and the policies they represented." Waldman to the writer, March 2, 1954.

<sup>4</sup>Waldman wrote to the writer that he had had "plenty of opportunities to warn Norman Thomas in speeches and in discussions before various public bodies and party organizations" that the Old Guard would not tolerate a platform of the type advocated by the Militants and the R.P.C. Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas to the writer, February 4, 1954.

<sup>6</sup>Monroe Sweetland to the writer, March 4, 1954.

enthusiasm for the revolutionary talk of the Militants or the R.P.C. However, they disliked the Old Guard even more, and Hillquit's taunting reference to them as "sewer socialists" still rankled in their hearts.

Jay Lovestone, leader of the Communist party (Opposition), and Benjamin Gitlow, former general secretary of the Communist party, were among those who watched the proceedings of the convention as visitors. They had not been invited, but they could come in without any difficulty because the convention was open to the public. Rumors were soon in circulation to the effect that Gitlow and Lovestone had held "caucuses" with groups of Militants and R.P.C. members.<sup>7</sup> Old Guard leaders were especially provoked by the presence of Gitlow and Lovestone and the willingness of some Socialists to fraternize with them.<sup>8</sup>

The first test of strength in the convention came in the election of members for various committees. The fears of the Old Guard leaders were confirmed when control of important committees was captured by the Militants and their allies.

Emboldened by their initial success, the Militants introduced a motion to place the convention on record as

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<sup>7</sup>Gitlow did hold a "long conference" with J. B. Matthews of the R.P.C. on the eve of the convention. I Confess, 579.

<sup>8</sup>Waldman wrote in Labor Lawyer that Stalinists were also present in Detroit but that "they required no special organization since the militants represented their aspirations," 258. This is another illustration of Waldman's bitterness against the Militants.



endorsing the minority resolutions at the Paris conference of the Labor and Socialist International. The minority resolutions had called for the destruction of "bourgeois democracy" and the installation in its place of "the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes." They had also advocated an international plan to resist war and had emphasized the importance of turning "imperialist war" into workers' revolution. A move by the Old Guard to have the motion tabled was defeated and a bitter debate ensued.

Maynard Krueger and David Felix, who had signed the minority resolutions as delegates of the party, spoke in favor of the Militant motion and they were supported by Haim Kantorovitch, Andrew Biemiller, and Morris Stempa. Waldman, Panken, and Solomon of New York, Joseph Martineck of Ohio, and Ida Belooof of Kansas opposed the motion and criticized the minority resolutions as foolish and dangerous. Belooof said that the debate on such resolutions could only be likened to a quarrel between a husband and wife, leading to divorce, over what college to send their infant child to.

Mayor Daniel Hoan aligned himself against the Militants and warned them that if controversies were provoked on such issues he would propose "that we send no more delegates to go to Europe and bring back fights to America." The Militant move was dealt a final blow when Thomas came out in opposition to it. He emphasized that any endorsement by the party of

the dictatorship of the proletariat would be "playing with fire" and placing a weapon in the hands of a fascism. He offered an amendment which, while not binding the party to the minority resolutions, accepted them "as representing the attitude of the Socialist party of America on the problems discussed in the Paris conference." The convention accepted the Thomas amendment, but when the amended motion itself was put to vote, it was defeated by a narrow margin.<sup>9</sup>

The Militants were also thwarted in their attempt to criticize the leadership of the American Federation of Labor. The strictures were contained in a motion presented by the resolutions committee. It charged that many of the A.F. of L. leaders clung to an "obsolete ideology" and were guilty of vacillation in the face of strong demands from their members for militant action. Oneal condemned the charges against the A. F. of L. leaders as "left sectarianism" and said that the party could never hope to make headway among labor unions with such an attitude. He declared the leaders of the A. F. of L. reflected pretty accurately the mentality of the rank and file in the unions. B. Charney Vladeck endorsed Oneal's views and wanted the Militants to bear in mind that rank and file union members were often more conservative than their leaders. Jasper McLevy, Leo Krzycki, James Graham, Allan Benson, Samuel Orr, and Jacob Panken called upon the

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<sup>9</sup>New York Times, June 2, 1934, pp. 1, 9; New Leader, XVII (June 9, 1934), 1, 3.

delegates to eliminate the offensive references to the A.F. of L. in the resolution. Andrew Biemiller, Haim Kantorovitch, Maynard Krueger, and Glen Trimble argued that the criticisms were justified and that their retention in the resolution would have a wholesome effect.<sup>10</sup>

The convention decided, by a decisive majority, to delete the critical references to the A.F. of L. in the resolution.<sup>11</sup>

The resolutions that the convention adopted on trade union work and on the farm problem did not provoke much controversy. The constitution committee, led by Daniel Hoan, suggested a few changes, chief of which was that belief in the class struggle should be a condition for membership in the party. The changes were accepted by the convention.<sup>12</sup>

Only one more day remained for the convention and Old Guard leaders began to feel a growing sense of confidence. They were happy that the convention had turned back two

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<sup>10</sup>Thomas took no part in the debate.

<sup>11</sup>New York Times, June 3, 1934, p. 26; New Leader, XVII (June 9, 1934), 1, 3, 6.

<sup>12</sup>Weldman recorded in his autobiography that he had never believed in the class struggle theory and that the change proposed by the constitution committee was "a considered program" to weed him and his colleagues out of the party. He alleged that the Militants had worked out "deals and alliances" with Hoan for that purpose. Labor Lawyer, 260-61.

determined efforts by the Militants and their allies. The latter on the other hand were stung to the quick and searched for a new line of attack in order to bring the convention to their side. They knew that they could not carry out any such plan unless they could induce Thomas to be their spokesman. Thomas, for his part, had acted according to his conviction in opposing the Militant bid to commit the party to the L.S.I. minority resolutions. He had remained silent while the debate raged on the party's attitude towards the A.F. of L. But he was not happy at the thought of his "young men" being thwarted at every turn by the Old Guard. He was anxious to do something that would restore their confidence and, at the same time, promote the interests of the party.

Thomas knew that his "young men" hungered for "a revolutionary affirmation of the Socialist faith" as the only way of steeling the party to meet the challenge of fascism and war. He himself had urged that the convention should adopt a brief and vigorous statement on those issues. The Socialist leader came to the conclusion that he should lend his support to a "Declaration of Principles" that would satisfy the Militants and, at the same time, clarify the attitude of the party on the thorny questions of "the road to power," and the fight against war and fascism. On his recommendation the resolutions committee asked Devere Allen to draw up a Declaration of Principles. Thomas wanted Allen to do the job because he was an experienced journalist and also because he was not

too closely identified with the group of Militants who had championed the earlier, unsuccessful moves in the convention.<sup>13</sup>

Allen was a trusted friend of Thomas. He was an ardent pacifist and it was the antiwar spirit of the Socialist movement that had attracted him to the party. Allen regarded himself as a radical pacifist and believed in the need for vigorous and organized action against war. His intense dislike of war colored his thinking on many other political issues. He was a newcomer to the party, having become a member only in 1932. He did know the problems and difficulties that the party had faced in the past as intimately as many others. Yet he found himself entrusted with the responsibility of producing, within a few hours, a Declaration of Principles for the guidance of the party. Allen did not seek the job; it was thrust on him at the eleventh hour.

Allen worked on the draft of the Declaration till the early hours of the next morning.

...I consulted almost nobody, personally, in drawing up the Declaration. However, I had placed in my hands, before working on it, a tremendous batch of official resolutions from locals and state organizations throughout the country. I sat up all night digesting these and noting down the expressions of opinion, the desires, of the Party all over the nation, and then drafted a rough approximation of what seemed

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<sup>13</sup>Thomas to the writer, February 4, 1934.

to me the least common denominator.<sup>14</sup>

By the time that he completed his draft of the Declaration, the hour was nearing for the beginning of the final day's session of the convention. There was no opportunity for a calm and dispassionate appraisal of the implications of various statements contained in the Declaration. There was no consultation of any kind with the Old Guard leaders, and the Declaration was not shown to them before it was actually presented to the convention.<sup>15</sup>

The Declaration called upon those who labored with hand and brain to overthrow the "monstrous system" of capitalism and to replace it with a Socialist order. Socialization of industry, it declared, was more than simple government ownership. It was the opposite of irresponsible bureaucracy and included democratic administration through elected and responsible representatives of workers.

Emphasizing the need for political and economic organization of workers in town and country, the Declaration

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<sup>14</sup>Allen to the writer, April 1, 1954. Allen said that he had always resented the attacks on the Declaration as the work of one man, who tried to inject a personal point of view into it. "If I had the time, I could write a book, proving that the Declaration was truly representative of the overwhelming majority of Party opinion."

<sup>15</sup>Thomas to the writer, February 4, 1954. "No, I didn't intend to discuss the declaration before it was presented with Waldman, Lee or O'Neal. For one thing, under the circumstances, there wasn't time. For another, it would not have done...the slightest good in the mood of the people mentioned."

exhorted Socialists to be loyal and active members of their respective unions and to aid them in their struggles for better wages, increased leisure and better conditions of employment for workers.

The Declaration expressed opposition to militarism, imperialism and war.

War cannot be tolerated by Socialists, or preparedness for war. They will unitedly seek to develop trustworthy working class instruments for the peaceable settlement of international disputes and conflicts. They will seek to eliminate military training from schools, colleges and camps. They will oppose military reviews, displays and expenditures, whether for direct war preparedness or for militaristic propaganda, both in wartime and in peacetime. They will loyally support, in the tragic event of war, any of their comrades who for anti-war activities or refusal to perform war service, come into conflict with public opinion or the law. ...they will refuse collectively to sanction or support any international war; they will, on the contrary, by agitation and opposition do their best not to be broken up by war, but to break up the war. They will meet war and the detailed plans for war already mapped out by the war-making arms of the government, by massed war resistance, organized so far as practicable in a general strike of labor unions and professional groups in a united effort to make the waging of war a practical impossibility and to convert the capitalist war crisis into a victory for Socialism.

The Declaration emphasized that in its struggle for a new society, the Socialist party would follow "peaceful and orderly means." Its methods of struggle against "the increasing resort by a crumbling capitalist order to Fascism" might include a general strike "which will not merely serve as a

defense against Fascist counter-revolution but will carry the revolutionary struggle into the camp of the enemy."

Proclaiming the devotion of the Socialist party to political and economic democracy, the Declaration advocated the replacement of "the bogus democracy of capitalist parliamentarianism" by a genuine "workers' democracy." If, after the electorate had given the Socialist party a mandate, a crisis was created by the denial of majority rights, "we shall not hesitate to crush by our labor solidarity the reckless forces of reaction and to consolidate the Socialist state." The Declaration also announced what the party should do if capitalism collapsed in the midst of general chaos and confusion. If orderly procedure was not possible, "the Socialist Party, whether or not it is a majority, will not shrink from the responsibility of organizing and maintaining a government under the workers' rule."<sup>16</sup>

Such was the Declaration of Principles that Devere Allen drafted, working alone, all through the night, in a Detroit hotel room.

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B. C. Vladeck was elected chairman for the last day of

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<sup>16</sup>"Declaration of Principles," American Socialist Quarterly, III (July, 1934), 3-6. The text of the Declaration is given in Appendix E.



the convention. He invited Joseph Schlossberg, secretary-treasurer of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, to address the delegates. Schlossberg proclaimed that the class war was in full swing in the United States. "Now more than ever it is our duty to build up a great class party of the workers, and I hope we will be able to bring that about," he declared.<sup>17</sup>

The hall was still echoing to the cheers of the delegates when the chairman called upon the resolutions committee to present the Declaration of Principles. Old Guard leaders became angry as they listened to the Declaration. They regarded it as a mischievous and a dangerous rehash of the minority resolutions of the L.S.I. that the convention had already thrown out. Louis Waldman was in a fighting mood. He had been greatly incensed by the various moves of the Militants and wanted to meet them in an open fight.<sup>18</sup> Now his opportunity had come, and he made a lashing attack on the Declaration.<sup>19</sup>

Waldman said that while some parts of the Declaration represented sound Socialist doctrine, there were others to

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<sup>17</sup>New Leader, XVII (June 9, 1934), 3.

<sup>18</sup>Waldman, Labor Lawyer, 261.

<sup>19</sup>For a stenographic report of the debate on the Declaration see, "Debate on Declaration of Principles," American Socialist Quarterly, III (July, 1934), 7-57.

which "a political party dedicated to lawful and peaceful struggle cannot commit itself." He picked up for special criticism the propositions advocating mass resistance to war and the assumption of power by the party in the event of a capitalist collapse, even if it had not obtained a popular mandate. Condemning such sentiments as bombastic and unreal, Waldman warned that they would not bring a single convert to the party but would lead to division and ruin.

While Waldman spoke there were some boos from the visitors' gallery and from a section of the delegates. The New Yorker retorted sharply that the visitors in the gallery, who had not succeeded in building a strong party organization in their own city, had little right to jeer at Socialists who had devoted their lives to the service of the party.

"I propose to invite all the boos there are," said he, "and I will also be glad to defend any delegate of this convention if he is indicted as a result of this declaration."<sup>20</sup>

Waldman indicated clearly that the Old Guard would fight the Declaration to the finish. He and his colleagues were not prepared to accept a document that had been drafted by their factional opponents and in whose preparation they had been insultingly ignored. Other speakers who opposed the Declaration took the cue from Waldman and denounced its provisions as dangerous adventurism. Charles Solomon, who followed Waldman, demanded that the Declaration should be put

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 7-9.

to vote as a whole and accepted or rejected in its entirety. His belligerent demand closed the door on the possibility of making verbal changes in the Declaration in order to eliminate ambiguous phraseology and to make the document more generally acceptable to the delegates. The sponsors of the Declaration gave up any ideas that they might have entertained of accepting changes in the wording of the Declaration and determined to join issues with the Old Guard in a grand trial of strength. Thus a rough draft of a Declaration that a single individual had written out in a hurry on the basis of letters and reports from various party branches and of his own personal beliefs, became the subject of a fratricidal conflict between two rival factions.<sup>21</sup> Old Guard leaders based their entire attack on a few words and phrases in the document, and the Militants and their supporters defended those phrases as

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<sup>21</sup>"I never intended it as anything more than a rough draft," wrote Devere Allen to the writer; "I brought it in and presented it to the floor for consideration, expecting it to be handled as I would any other document in my editorial work--subject to great improvement, criticism, change, and final re-editing. ...Charles Solomon ... thinking he could defeat the Declaration by his tactics, moved that it had to be adopted exactly as it stood, or rejected. The majority could not do otherwise than accept such a challenge, and thus the Declaration was put through, to my intense surprise, and somewhat to my dismay, just as it stood. This has always violated a basic principle of my belief--that everything should be talked over, changed, and refined, before final adoption." Allen to writer, April 1, 1954.

though their very lives depended upon them. Within a few hours each side asserted with fury and vehemence that the quarrel was not over words but over basic principles and over "philosophy."

The debate went on in an atmosphere of increasing tenseness, reminiscent in dramatic quality, according to the reporter of the New York Times, of the St. Louis convention of the party in 1917 when it adopted the famous antiwar manifesto.<sup>22</sup>

George Kirkpatrick, the veteran California Socialist and one-time vice-presidential candidate of the party, condemned the Declaration of Principles and warned that the expressions

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<sup>22</sup>New York Times, June 4, 1934, p. 1. The anti-war manifesto, drawn by Hillquit, Algernon Lee and Charles Ruthenberg, proposed a seven-point program of opposition to war including demonstrations, petitions, opposition to conscription and organization of workers for "concerted and mass action to shorten this war and establish lasting peace." See Bell, "Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Egbert and Parsons (eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, 314.

During the debate on the Declaration of Principles, supporters of the document tried to invoke the memory of Hillquit to buttress their argument. But Algernon Lee, opposing the Declaration, said that in committee and before the St. Louis convention Hillquit had called attention to the "uselessness and danger" of phrases like "massed war resistance." Charles Solomon said Hillquit had harbored some doubts of his own about the wisdom of the St. Louis resolution. "Debate on Declaration," American Socialist Quarterly, III (July, 1934), 22-25. Obviously provoked by such statements, Hillquit's widow wrote to the New Leader that her husband had never repudiated the St. Louis resolution. "He took exception to some of its wording. The provocative phrases were added against Morris Hillquit's advice and in his opinion did not add to the strength of the Declaration." XVII (June 30, 1934), 4.

contained in it would become "swords, ropes and blackjacks in the hands of our enemies."

You may feel comparatively safe here and now. I judge, for example, that Comrade Thomas feels relatively safe. ... he, of course, will be personally safe, clothed about, as he has been by the comrades with very extraordinary distinction. He is, ... as yet, too distinguished to be hanged. Mayors, or bloodthirsty sheriffs with pistols in their belts, are not likely to strike Comrade Thomas in the face and knock his teeth out. He is dead safe for some years to come, just as some men who teach economics in universities are safe in being radical.<sup>23</sup>

Humbler members of the party, Kirkpatrick asserted, would be the ones that would suffer as a result of the statements contained in the Declaration.

Algernon Lee said that a declaration of principles should be an illuminating and educative document, setting forth the fundamental principles of socialism. He criticized the document submitted by the resolutions committee as hastily prepared, ambiguous, and dangerous in its implications. Lee warned against the folly of revolutionary romanticism and said that the Declaration, with its threat of massed resistance to war and capture of power, would put a conclusive argument in the hands of every district attorney in states that had laws against criminal syndicalism. A general strike against war, argued the Rand School chief, could not be brought on by

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<sup>23</sup>"Debate on Declaration," American Socialist Quarterly, III (July, 1934), 18-20.

a handful of "illogical students and college professors," but only by the concerted action of millions of working men.<sup>24</sup>

Charles Solomon assailed the Declaration in a fiery speech. He said that he disliked it, not because it was too radical, but because it was too reckless. "I refuse to vote for a resolution that seeks to formulate ropes of rhetoric, and I want to tell you, comrades, that ropes of rhetoric can be just as deadly as ropes of hemp, because more than one radical has been hanged with a rope of rhetoric." The American people, said Solomon, would no doubt be ready for "mass resistance." Their "mass resistance" would be towards the kind of doctrines that the Declaration contained. "I want to assure you it will be the most effective mass resistance you men have ever seen work in history," he added.<sup>25</sup>

An attack on the Declaration on "patriotic" grounds was made by Joseph Sharts of Ohio. He declared that he was proud of being a citizen of the United States and that he would not countenance any activities that might jeopardize the safety and security of the nation, especially in the midst of a war.<sup>26</sup>

Sharts's speech was greeted with boos from the visitors' gallery. There were similar interruptions occasionally when

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 21-23.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 24-27.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 11, 13.

other critics of the Declaration were speaking. Thomas appealed to the visitors not to indulge in such demonstrations and added that their barracking might defeat the ends that they favored.<sup>27</sup>

Devere Allen made the first speech in defence of the Declaration. He said that "the war-makers of this country" were ready with detailed plans of action to be implemented on the outbreak of hostilities. To meet the threat of war, a united and extensive movement built around "central principles of indispensable importance" was urgently needed. Allen was confident that the Declaration would hasten the growth of such a movement and attract new support for the party. He knew that there were people all over America "listening for this word to come forth from this convention before they will enter into the socialist movement and put their shoulders to the wheel." He scorned the criticism that the Declaration would commit the party to illegality in the event of the

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<sup>27</sup>Waldman alleged that the Militants had packed the galleries and had stationed well-organized cheering and jeering squads. "The convention was...taken over by the hecklers who had learned their lesson well from the Communists and the Nazis. All the organization of disruption which characterized Communist opposition was evident here: the insulting of veteran delegates, the jostling of those who dared to oppose the militants, the obscene howls and jeers and boos which greeted the statement of any persons who dared oppose the left-wing proposals." Labor Lawyer, 263-64. If any Nazi-style hooliganism prevailed during the debate on the Declaration, it was not recorded by William Feigenbaum and Sydney Hertzberg, who covered the convention for the New Leader, and by Joseph Shaplen, special correspondent of the New York Times.

outbreak of war. If ever the capitalist government forced the masses into another war, declared Allen, "to remain legal through that conflict would be to brand forever the socialist movement with the mark of shame."<sup>28</sup>

The view that the Declaration did not go "far enough" was expressed by the Militant, Powers Hapgood. He would support the Declaration, he said, but his opinion was that it should be amended in many ways "not to the right, but to the left." Hapgood announced that the American workers were waiting for a political party that would not quibble about phrases but stand ready to prepare them for resistance against any war that the capitalists might seek to promote.<sup>29</sup>

Joseph Coldwell of Rhode Island, an old Socialist who had served a prison term during the world war, passionately defended the Declaration. "Goodbye comrades," he declared, as he concluded his speech, "if I don't see you again, I will meet you in prison."<sup>30</sup> Leo Krzycki, national chairman of the party, asserted that the Declaration was merely a reaffirmation of the stand taken by the party at its St. Louis convention in 1917.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>"Debate on Declaration," American Socialist Quarterly, III (July, 1934), 13-16.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 43-45.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 23-24.



Daniel Hoan lent his powerful support to the Declaration. He said that there was no one in the party more opposed to making blueprints for the future than himself. However he had come to believe that the party should not be blind to some of the "obvious collapses" that might result under capitalism. Could the party be so cowardly as to disguise its intention to call a general strike against war, if such a course were practicable? Was the party to be afraid of proclaiming that in the event of a capitalist collapse it would undertake the responsibility of organizing a government? The mayor expressed his own intense opposition to war. "My forefathers also were in the Revolutionary war; my father was in the war, but if I cannot participate with the workers against more war, I am not worth the powder to blow me to hell," he declared.<sup>32</sup>

Norman Thomas, in a vigorous speech, appealed to the delegates to accept the Declaration. "The issue that has been raised this afternoon ought to lift up our hearts," said he.

We say, in the event of war we will do thus and so. We say that in the event of the complete collapse of government we will do thus and so. We say that if, after achieving power by constitutional means--I would have thought the left would have attacked this part, not the right--if, after achieving power by constitutional means, there is a struggle against us, then we will act as brave men ought to act. Now what is there in that? What, but what socialists have always said?

Resolutions at least as bold as the Declaration had been

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 35-38.

adopted by the exiled Socialists of Austria and Germany and by the British Labour party, Thomas continued. "And now, for the first time in the American language, in language that supports democracy, we have... an answer that we are proud to stand on, to the kind of questions that will be asked," he declared, amidst cheers from his supporters and ironic laughter from opponents of the Declaration.

There could be no greater cruelty and insanity than war, Thomas said. The resistance of Socialists to war, even though it might result in their destruction, "may yet water the seeds of that revolt against cruelty, against the tyranny of war, in which is the only hope of mankind," he added.<sup>33</sup>

Andrew Biemiller, chairman of the resolutions committee, winding up the case in support of the Declaration, said that the document was in the best traditions of international socialism as well as of the Socialist movement in the United States. He agreed with Solomon that the document should be discussed and adopted as a whole and not piece-meal. "There is a philosophy involved in it, we make no bones about it; it is the philosophy of revolutionary Socialism, and we are standing by it throughout this entire report."<sup>34</sup>

Waldman summed up the case against the Declaration in a speech reflecting anger, indignation and scorn. He ridiculed

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 28-30.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 46-48.

those who had stated that the Declaration was not radical enough and that the party's progress was retarded because it was not "left enough." He reminded them that in 1932 a national referendum on the preferences of the American people had taken place and, while 800,000 Americans had given their support to Thomas and Socialism, over twenty million others had acted differently. "We are not left enough!" shouted Waldman. "Dreamers! Visionaries! Romanticists! Why don't you adjourn and wake up tomorrow? We are not left enough for American labor, that is the reason you want a suicidal declaration to be made today!"

The New Yorker asserted that he was behind none in his detestation of war. But the Declaration, he felt, would bind, fetter, and paralyze the efforts of the party to build a public opinion opposed to the cruelties and carnage of war.<sup>35</sup> The Declaration, he said, would imply an alliance with lawbreakers because it called on the party to support loyally any comrade who might come into conflict with the law as a result of antiwar activities. Would the party loyally protect a man who might blow up a munitions factory as part of his

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<sup>35</sup>When he wrote about the convention ten years later, Waldman had a different explanation of why he opposed the Declaration. He said that by 1934 he had begun to lose faith in the tradition Socialist stand on military appropriations, national defense, and "national vital interests." "The democracies needed weapons, armies, navies, air forces with which to defend their way of life." Labor Lawyer, 262.

contribution to anti-war activity? Would not potential saboteurs and enemy spies seek to infiltrate the party in order to carry on their activities under cover of its name? "Stupidity has never run wilder than it runs in this declaration," he added.

Waldman said that the use of the general strike for revolutionary purposes was an abandonment of the traditional Socialist position. He characterized as "nonsense" the statements contained in the Declaration on what the party should do in the event of a "general collapse." Warning the delegates to pay heed to the lessons of past experience, Waldman expressed the view that the passing of the Declaration would be a grievous setback for the party, even as the antiwar resolution adopted by the St. Louis convention in 1917.<sup>36</sup>

As the debate on the resolution came to an end, Matthew Levy asked the chairman whether any amendments would be permitted. Chairman Vladeck replied in the negative and added that the discussion had proceeded on the understanding that the recommendation of the platform committee would be considered as a whole. Louis Hendin said that it was unprecedented in a Socialist convention for delegates to be asked to accept or reject a resolution in its entirety. Vladeck put the

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<sup>36</sup>"Debate on Declaration," American Socialist Quarterly, III (July, 1934), 40-43.

issue to vote, and his ruling was sustained by the delegates.<sup>37</sup>

The Declaration was then voted upon and was adopted by a vote of 99 to 47.<sup>38</sup> A demand was made that the Declaration should be submitted to a referendum of party members. Under the party's constitution a referendum was mandatory if requested by 25 per cent of the delegates at a convention. Opponents of the Declaration were able to get more than the prescribed minimum number of delegates to support their motion. That meant that the struggle over the Declaration was to be carried into every local of the party.

The Old Guard, however, sustained a severe defeat in the election of members for a new National Executive Committee. James Oneal was the only representative of the Old Guard to be elected. Norman Thomas, Powers Haggood, Darlington Hoopes, Daniel Hoan, James Graham, and Albert Sprague Coolidge were re-elected. Maynard Krueger, Franz Daniel, and M. Shadid were elected to their first terms on the N.E.C., without opposition.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>If the Militants were in a mood for a compromise, they might have taken advantage of this opportunity to make verbal changes in the Declaration.

<sup>38</sup>Weighted in terms of dues-paying members represented by the delegates, the vote represented a victory for the Declaration by 10,822 to 6,512. See Devere Allen, "Why the Declaration Must Pass," World Tomorrow, XVII (June 28, 1934), 323-326.

<sup>39</sup>New Leader, XVII (June 9, 1934), 5-6. All the members of the new N.E.C. except Oneal had voted in favor of the Declaration. Franz Daniel was an organizer for the Amalgamated  
(Continued on next page)

The delegates sang the Internationale and the eighteenth national convention of the Socialist party came to an end.

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Writing in the New Leader two weeks before the Detroit convention, Norman Thomas had expressed the hope that the delegates would not adopt resolutions "which by their language or emphasis will defeat the effect of the platform."<sup>40</sup> Yet the convention had adopted a Declaration whose "language and emphasis" created serious divisions in the party and gave room for distorted reports to appear in newspapers across the land.<sup>41</sup>

The New York Times, in an editorial, expressed pain and surprise at Thomas's "going over to the extreme Left Wing" of the party. The Times wondered how Thomas, "long the champion of peaceful and democratic methods in bringing about political

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Clothing Workers in Philadelphia. M. Shadid was a physician and headed a co-operative hospital in Elks City, Oklahoma. He was a protege of Oscar Ameringer, the veteran Oklahoma Socialist.

<sup>40</sup>New Leader, XVII (May 19, 1934), 12.

<sup>41</sup>Even in the New York Times reports of the convention were somewhat tendentious and gave the impression that a group of extreme radicals who believed in transforming the Socialist party on "Bolshevik" and "Sovietist" lines, had seized control of the party machinery. Thomas and the Militants regarded Joseph Shaplen, special correspondent of the Times, as an ally of the Old Guard.

and social reform," could support such a program as that contained in the Declaration. It surmised that Thomas was compelled to go along with the extreme leftists when he found that they had won a majority at the convention. "He will seem to have acted on the principle of the French political leader, who said, when he saw his people rushing off to join in an emeute: 'I must follow them, since I am their chief.'" <sup>42</sup>

The Christian Science Monitor declared in an editorial

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<sup>42</sup>"Norman Thomas Goes Left," New York Times, June 5, 1934, p. 22. See also "Class Warfare," New York Times, June 4, 1934, p. 16. The anonymous author of "Topics of the Times" poked fun at Thomas and his pacifist allies:

"And who is that distinguished-looking person on the platform?" said Alice.

The March Hare stared at her.

"I am surprised at you, Alice," he said. "Don't you know a classifist when you see one?"

It was Alice's turn to stare.

"It's the first time I've heard the word," she said. "And, what's more, I believe, it's a new one to you too."

"Naturally," said the March Hare. "Seeing that I have just made it up myself. I made it up out of class war and pacifist. A classifist is a pacifist who adores class war. He adopts a resolution denouncing foreign wars of all kinds without exception. Then he adopts another resolution in favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat. A dictator of the proletariat is a man who shoots people who won't let him dictate them out of the profit system into the nonprofit system."

"Of course," concluded the March Hare, "it is a shame to use such difficult words in such warm weather. Perhaps I could have put it more succinctly by saying that classifist hates trenches but dotes on barricades." New York Times, June 5, 1934, p. 22.

that it was unfortunate that the Socialist party had been captured by "left wingers" who were "dangerously obsessed with the doctrine of class warfare." "That is a doctrine that will never win the American people and the Socialist Party will promote neither its own success nor the good of the country by such hateful teaching," the Monitor added.<sup>43</sup>

From the Communist press came a vehement repudiation of the view that genuine revolutionaries had won control of the Socialist party and that their new Declaration was communistic. A. B. Magil, special correspondent of the Daily Worker, informed his readers that the Declaration was "couched in such evasive language as to allow all sorts of corrupt opportunism and horse-trading with politicians of the two major capitalist parties."<sup>44</sup> The Daily Worker editorially announced that "despite the blustering verbiage of the Thomases, Kruegers, Hapgoods etc.," the program of the Socialist party was "typical Social Fascist reformism." The editorial called upon the working class to understand the real purpose of the "left" maneuvers of the Socialist party "so that the influence of the Socialist Party leaders can be destroyed, as a prerequisite for the overthrow of capitalism and the setting up of

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<sup>43</sup> Christian Science Monitor, June 8, 1934, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> A. B. Magil, "S. P. Convention Ends; Bogus 'Left' Gains Control over Party," Daily Worker, June 5, 1934, p. 2.



Soviet Power."<sup>45</sup>

For several weeks the New Leader carried letters from party members endorsing and criticizing the Declaration of Principles. Editor Oneal condemned it as "the most confused in the party's history," and expressed the view that it would close the door to co-operation with organized workers. Without such co-operation, Oneal said, the Socialist movement in the United States would have no future.<sup>46</sup> John Haynes Holmes, the well-known New York minister, said that the Declaration was "Communism minus the consistency, courage, rigor and direct, forthright fighting spirit" of the Communist movement.<sup>47</sup> Thomas and his allies, charged Waldman, had foisted a document on the party that was "less frank, but not one bit less dangerous than the doctrines of the Communists."<sup>48</sup> Opponents of the Declaration were greatly heartened when the veteran Socialist, James Maurer, sharply denounced it as a "jumbled conglomeration of words." "We need a party of workers and not a party of irresponsible radicals and high hat reformers who don't know what it is all about," said

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<sup>45</sup>"The S. P. 'Revolutionary Declaration,' Daily Worker, June 7, 1934, p. 6. See also A. B. Magill, "The Socialist Party Convention," New Masses, XI (June 12, 1934), 10-12.

<sup>46</sup>James Oneal, "A View of the Declaration of Principles Adopted at Detroit," New Leader, XVII (June 9, 1934), 1, 8.

<sup>47</sup>New Leader, XVII (July 14, 1934), 6.

<sup>48</sup>New Leader, XVII (June 16, 1934), 9.

Maurer. "They are long on talk and short on constructive action. I believe that Meyer London was right when he said, we do not have to be fools to be revolutionary."<sup>49</sup>

Support for the Declaration was expressed by several members including Thomas, Hoan, Paul Porter and Murray Baron. Thomas said that it was wilful misrepresentation to call the Declaration anarchistic and Communistic. In describing capitalist democracy as "bogus," the Declaration had merely voiced a criticism that Socialists had proclaimed on countless occasions. Massed resistance to war meant merely that young men would refuse to be dragooned to fight a war. "Who can say anything less and be anything other than a 'pink tea Socialist?'"

Thomas justified the statement in the Declaration that the party would assume power in the event of capitalist collapse even if it did not constitute a majority. "Well, comrades, isn't that what you would do? And if not, why not? In a collapse where you can't count noses, would you wait until you could count noses before you would try to restore order and create conditions which would make true democracy possible?"

The Socialist leader dismissed the charge that the Declaration would commit the party to illegality. He asserted that in the event of a witch-hunt, a prosecutor could use almost

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<sup>49</sup>New Leader, XVII (June 16, 1934), 9.

any kind of a Socialist speech against Socialists.

On this matter of illegality, I am reminded of the old story of the Boston woman who left her five children, warning them not to put beans up their noses. When she got back, all of them had beans up their noses. Some of our comrades are suggesting to prosecutors the very thing they say they want to avoid. And it is not the Declaration of Principles itself which will, perhaps, be quoted against the Socialists, but what some Socialists have said about the declaration, contrary to the opinion of those who proposed it.<sup>50</sup>

Thomas said that critics like Abraham Cahan had asked what the party would do if Nazi Germany or Japan launched an unprovoked attack on the United States. His reply would be that no nation had ever attacked United States. The United States had always done the attacking. If the United States embarked on a war against a Germany or Japan it would not be because of the crimes of the German or Japanese militarists but because of "the usual capitalist and national rivalries for power and profit." "To destroy Hitler or the Japanese military junta would no more destroy intolerance, brutality and militarism than did the destruction of the Kaiser's rule." If, by an "amazing miracle," an international war broke out that constituted an exception to his analysis, the party would have plenty of time to change its policy.<sup>51</sup>

While the merits and defects of the Declaration were

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<sup>50</sup>New Leader, XVII, (June 16, 1934), 8.

<sup>51</sup>Norman Thomas, "What happened at Detroit," World Tomorrow, XVII (June 28, 1934), 320-22.

being discussed in the columns of the New Leader, factional bitterness within the party was steadily on the increase. Waldman fired the first shot by telling a reporter of the New York Times immediately upon his return from Detroit that he and his colleagues repudiated the essential features of the Declaration sponsored by "Mr. Thomas and his allies." "New York State Socialists will not permit themselves to be driven into a position which they consider indefensible and untenable, and I am confident that I express the sentiments of many other State and local organizations," he added.<sup>52</sup>

Thomas wrote a personal letter to Waldman earnestly requesting him to desist from such attacks on the Declaration and those who had supported it. Appealing to him in the name of their long years of common devotion to the party, Thomas entreated him not to attribute to the supporters of the Declaration "a support of violence or of present illegality which is not in their minds." A split in the party was a desperate measure that should not be lightly talked about, Thomas said.<sup>53</sup>

Waldman brusquely rejected Thomas's appeal. He said that he was more convinced than ever that "only bitter partisanship and factional loyalty" could have made Thomas support that Declaration of Principles. The Declaration, if it did not

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<sup>52</sup>New York Times, June 5, 1934, p. 10. Also see Thomas's reply, New York Times, June 7, 1934, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup>Thomas to Waldman, June 6, 1934, Thomas Papers.

destroy the party immediately, could do so at any time, Waldman asserted.<sup>54</sup> Even before he received Waldman's reply Thomas was convinced that the Old Guard lawyer would continue to attack the sponsors of the Declaration as favoring violence and illegality. He regarded such tactics as unethical and unscrupulous. Thomas was also gravely concerned over the bitter denunciation of the Declaration in the columns of the Jewish Daily Forward. The Forward had hinted that the opponents of the Old Guard might have been moved by antisemitic considerations. Thomas wondered whether Waldman and Abraham Cahan might go to the extent of splitting the party in their anger and resentment at the defeat of the Old Guard in Detroit. The Forward group, he felt, might like to set up a Social Democratic Federation of New York City, affiliate it with the L.S.I.<sup>55</sup> and use it as a bargaining counter with the A. F. of L., Governor Herbert Lehman and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. He was worried that the Forward would misrepresent the party's stand to the labor unions, particularly in the needle trades. Thomas believed that the bitterness of the Old Guard leaders was not over the Declaration of Principles. "Some of them are much opposed to it, but in reality what they fear, resent and hate is the loss of

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<sup>54</sup>Waldman to Thomas, June 9, 1934, ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Thomas wrote a confidential letter to Friedrich Adler, secretary of the L.S.I., mentioning the possibility of a split and asking whether a rump party could get recognition from the International. Thomas to Adler, June 15, 1934, ibid.

power which they experience." In a series of letters to his close associates Thomas described his misgivings and exhorted them to work strenuously to bring the "real issues" to the attention of party members.<sup>56</sup>

B. Charney Vladeck, manager of the Forward, wrote a confidential letter to Thomas appealing to him to put an end to the dangerous rift in the party's ranks.

Comrade Thomas, you know how deeply and sincerely I have been attached to you. You know how much I sacrificed to protect your leadership. You failed at Detroit and it is now up to you to assist in a new orientation. Before the Declaration of Principles goes to the members it must be clarified and modified. ...I consider the situation very grave.

Vladeck said that his heart bled to read some of the statements in Forward, but he wanted Thomas to remember that it was the "older comrades" who were the backbone of the party. "It is still the 'Forward' that gives the Party votes on election day. And it is still the oldtimers with whom Socialist work is not merely a duty or an adventure but a vocation."<sup>57</sup>

Thomas, however, had become thoroughly aroused by the continuing hostility of the Old Guard and the threatening tone of the Forward. He informed Vladeck that "the extraordinary

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<sup>56</sup>Thomas to Porter, June 7, 1934; Thomas to Senior, June 8, 1934; Thomas to Biemiller, Hapgood, Hoan, Krueger, Krzycki, and Senior, June 8, 1934; Thomas to Siegfried Ameringer, June 9, 1934, ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Vladeck to Thomas, June 14, 1934, ibid.

lengths to which ... some spokesmen of the Old Guard ... have gone in personal abuse, in misrepresentation, in implied threat of split, have created a situation which to my mind makes a modification of the Declaration look like capitulation...."<sup>58</sup> Thomas felt that the party would lose its soul if a majority could be bludgeoned into submission by a minority. "It would be a shell living almost wholly on its past and perhaps on such money as Forward might from time to time furnish."<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, opponents of the Declaration had embarked on a vigorous campaign to bring about its defeat in the referendum. Within four days after the convention they organized the National Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party, with George E. Roewer of Massachusetts as "national chairman," and Jasper McLevy, Louis Waldman, James Maurer, George Goebel, Edward Cassidy, and Emma Henry as vice-presidents. The group issued a call for a conference of opponents of the Declaration in Eastern states to meet in Philadelphia on June 24, 1934.<sup>60</sup> Louis Waldman was the guiding spirit behind the National Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party. He had returned from the convention with the conviction

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<sup>58</sup>Thomas to Vladeck, June 19, 1934, ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas to Samuel Friedman, June 15, 1934, ibid.

<sup>60</sup>New Leader, XVII (June 16, 1934), 10. Emma Henry was secretary of the state executive committee of the party in Indiana.



that even a split in the party would be preferable to the acceptance of the Declaration and submission to Militant domination.<sup>61</sup>

The Waldman group also served notice that it was not prepared to co-operate in any way with the newly elected National Executive Committee of the party. That was clearly demonstrated when Louis Hendin rejected an invitation to serve on the party's labor committee. Hendin, who was to serve as the executive director of the National Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party, declared that he was not touched by the "magnanimity" of the N.E.C. in offering him the appointment. It would have been much more consistent if the N.E.C. had followed the policy it had begun in Detroit of eliminating from the party those who stood for democratic socialism as opposed to pseudocommunism, he declared. Hendin said further that he did not include Thomas in his criticism because he was no longer the leader of the party, but the unwitting tool of Maynard Krueger and his associates who were either "political lunatics or communist agents."<sup>62</sup>

The New York state executive committee of the party,

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<sup>61</sup>"I did not want to see the Socialist Party split; I had done everything possible to prevent it. But neither did I want it to remain intact if it was to become a vast conspiracy against the peace and security of the United States, and this possibility was very real in the light of the Detroit Declaration of Principles." Waldman, Labor Lawyer, 271-72.

<sup>62</sup>Hendin to N.E.C., June 10, 1934, Thomas Papers.



dominated by the Old Guard, unanimously resolved to repudiate the Declaration. The United Hebrew Trades adopted a resolution appealing to Socialists to defeat it in the referendum. To carry these appeals for a revolt against the Declaration to party members outside New York, the Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party circulated several thousand copies of a pamphlet entitled The Crisis in the Socialist Party.<sup>63</sup> Some wind was taken out of the sails of the Committee's activities when a group of Socialist lawyers, headed by William A. Gunnea, submitted their opinion on the legality of the Declaration. (Gunnea was held in high esteem in party circles as the lawyer who had defended Eugene Debs.) "After an examination of the statutes and decisions of the United States pertaining to sedition, and of the various states pertaining to criminal syndicalism, anarchy and sabotage, we are of the opinion that at the present time and under the present law the declaration does not violate the law and is not inhibited by any statute,"<sup>64</sup> the lawyers stated. Undeterred by that statement, the "preservers" of the party went ahead with their conference in Philadelphia.

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<sup>63</sup>Marx Lewis, "Friendly Unions Line Up Against Declaration," New Leader, XVII (June 23, 1934), 7.

<sup>64</sup>"Statement of Committee of Lawyers," American Socialist Quarterly, III (July, 1934), 58. The committee was composed of William A. Gunnea, Leon M. Despres, Joseph M. Jacobs, Meyer J. Myer and John F. Sullivan. Their report was dated June 15, 1934.

Two hundred Socialists from Eastern and Midwestern states attended the Philadelphia conference. Only persons believed to be in sympathy with the Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party had been invited to the meeting and reporters were not permitted to cover the proceedings. Louis Waldman could not attend the meeting owing to indisposition. Whether as a result of his absence or of the desire of non-New York delegates to avoid any extreme measures, the conference concluded its deliberations with a resolution calling for unity in the party. At the same time the conference appealed to party members to defeat the Declaration.<sup>65</sup>

Encouraged by the sentiment against a split that seemed to be developing in party circles, a group of "centrists" led by Matthew Levy held a meeting in New York City and formed themselves into the "Committee for a United Socialist Party."<sup>66</sup> Thomas was heartened by that development. Some of the Militants had been urging him to stand firm and fight the Old Guard to a finish. Paul Porter wrote to Thomas that a left wing organization must be set up in each party branch so that the Old Guard would not get any by default if a split should materialize. "I know and appreciated your wish to remain apart from any faction within the Party. ...But no longer is there a middle road. ...I think you should take active command

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<sup>65</sup>New York Times, June 25, 1934, p. 23; New Leader, XVII (June 30, 1934), 5.

<sup>66</sup>Levy to Senior, June 27, 1934, Thomas Papers.

of the Left Wing fight for the Declaration," Porter added.<sup>67</sup> Another Militant criticized the submission of the Declaration to the group of lawyers. Thomas told them that he favored a course of moderation as a means of restoring unity in the party.

I am anxious to get a party, not to make a magnificent gesture, and if a mere matter of wording will hamper us in the work of building a party, then I care. ... We have a difficult fight on our hands here in New York in which grandstanding might be easier and emotionally more satisfactory than anything else. I want to adopt tactics which will carry with us honest though somewhat bewildered middle-of-the road comrades.<sup>68</sup>

In pursuance of such an objective Thomas moved that the N.E.C. should exercise its power to make an editorial change in the statement in the Declaration that promised loyal support to any Socialist who might come into conflict with the law as a result of antiwar activities. Thomas suggested that the statement should be changed so that the party's support would be limited only to those whose antiwar activities were "not in contravention of Socialist principles." Such a change, he felt, would remove the criticism that saboteurs and terrorists would get into the party in war-time to use it as a base of operations. In order to remove any impression that the Declaration had sanctioned violence, Thomas suggested that a

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<sup>67</sup>Porter to Thomas, June 17, 1934, Thomas Papers. See also Haim Kantorovitch, The Socialist Party at the Cross Roads (New York, 1934). Kantorovitch accused the Old Guard of using unethical methods.

<sup>68</sup>Thomas to Glen Trimble, June 13, 1934, Thomas Papers.

sub-committee of the N.E.C. should publish a statement outlining the "historic party position against physical force, anarchy and terrorism of individuals whether in war or peace."<sup>69</sup>

The Waldman group was, however, in no mood for any such compromise. Their object was apparently the complete defeat of the Declaration as a means of discomfiting the new N.E.C. and Thomas. Waldman's intentions were clearly demonstrated during the New York state convention of the party held on June 30 and July 1, 1934. The convention was controlled by the Old Guard and defeated every resolution and all but one of the candidates put forth by its opponents. It was also reported that if Thomas's name was proposed for nomination as the party's candidate for United States Senator, Waldman would set up an Old Guard representative to defeat him. The report proved to be correct when, on the second day of the convention, Waldman proposed Oneal in opposition to Thomas for the Senatorial nomination. A bitter debate ensued in which Thomas was assailed as "phrase monger," "thinly veiled communist," and even as a "supporter of racketeering" in a local labor union. While such diatribes were being flung at Thomas, Oneal apparently became very unhappy. When the debate ended Oneal announced that he would withdraw his candidacy in order to preserve party harmony. If Oneal had not, on his own initiative, withdrawn from the race, it was certain that

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<sup>69</sup>Thomas to Senior, June 25, 1934, ibid.

Thomas would have been defeated.<sup>70</sup> While fifty eight delegates voted in favor of Thomas, thirty eight voted against him and fifteen abstained. Even after Oneal had withdrawn, the Waldman group could not bring itself to make Thomas's nomination unanimous.

Following the convention, the Waldman group intensified their efforts to defeat the Declaration. The Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party, which had rechristened itself, after protests from Thomas, as the Committee for the Preservation of Socialist Policies in the Socialist Party, began the publication of a journal, the Socialist Voice, and distributed it widely among party members. The foreign language federations, controlled by the Waldman group, openly worked for the defeat of the Declaration. The Jewish Socialist Verband instructed the editorial staff of its organ, Die Wecker, to take a position opposed to the Declaration. The board of the New Leader issued similar orders to its editorial staff.<sup>71</sup> In the N.E.C. Oneal moved that a substitute declaration drawn up by the Old Guard should be submitted to party members along with the Declaration of Principles adopted by the Detroit convention. The N.E.C. ruled the motion

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<sup>70</sup>New York Times, July 1, 1934, p. 16; New Leader, XVII (July 7, 1934), 2. Thomas wrote to Senior that his nomination was made after "one of the most disgraceful Conventions you have any idea of." July 2, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>71</sup>"Report of Sub-Committee on Manner of Conducting Referendum," July 18, 1934, ibid.

out of order.<sup>72</sup>

In his weekly column in the New Leader, Thomas appealed to Socialists not to exaggerate the minor differences among them but to pay heed to the ideals that they cherished in common.

We are united in our steadfast and utter condemnation of capitalism.

We are united in the knowledge that capitalism and its evils cannot be cured by some panacea, such as the money doctors and others suggest.

We are united in our knowledge that the only hope for mankind is in a new society, the Socialist society, in the sharing of abundance in a federation of cooperative commonwealths of mankind.

We are united in knowing that this new society will not be achieved without struggle by workers with hand and brain.

We are united in our desire to do all that in us lies to carry on that struggle without the homicidal mania of war and to preserve the highest values for which democracy stands.

We are united in our belief that true internationalism is consistent with national autonomy and that the internationalism of Communism is today carried out largely in the interests of Russian nationalism.

We are united in our insistence that within the great body of workers with hand and brain our relations must be relations of true democracy and not the dictatorship of one group.<sup>73</sup>

The debate continued in the party branches and locals, but as the weeks passed by Thomas began to feel a little more

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<sup>72</sup>H. Kelso (assistant to Senior) to N.E.C., July 31, 1934, ibid.

<sup>73</sup>New Leader, XVII (July 21, 1934), 8.



confident than before that a split in the party might not come about as a result of the dispute over the Declaration. Early in August, 1934, he wrote to the secretary of the Labor and Socialist International that the danger of a split had definitely passed.<sup>74</sup>

On October 17, 1934, the national office of the party announced the results of the referendum--5,993 in favor of the Declaration and 4,872 against it.<sup>75</sup> Less than fifty per cent of the members of the party had exercised their franchise. In New York the Declaration was defeated by a margin of 346 votes, but solid support from Wisconsin saved the day for it.

The publication of the results of the referendum did not by any means end the factional struggles in the party. The New York Times reported that "Right Wing" members were planning concerted action to carry on the fight and that some of them felt it would be impossible to remain in the party if the Declaration were to be regarded as the official program of the party.<sup>76</sup> "The right is very sore but somewhat impotent," Thomas wrote to the national secretary, Senior. "I do not want a split. ...Our problem is to be patient without capitulating in New York to a minority, and a rather incompetent

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<sup>74</sup>Thomas to Adler, August 10, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>75</sup>Senior to N.E.C., October 17, 1934, ibid.

<sup>76</sup>New York Times, October 18, 1934, p. 19.

...minority at that."<sup>77</sup>

Sober and thoughtful men in all the factions of the party were grieved at the fratricidal struggle. William M. Feigenbaum, a veteran Socialist and Old Guard leader, appealed to Thomas to work for unity in the party.

I want to work for Socialism. I am sick and tired of fighting my own comrades. Norman, you are the only man with sufficient authority to compel both sides to listen. ...become the agency for reconciliation.

...I have given my whole life to Socialism. If the party collapses there will be nothing left in life for me to live for. I am making this a frantic appeal to you, Norman....<sup>78</sup>

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The adoption of a Declaration of Principles by the Socialist party laying down what it would do to capture power, defeat counter-revolution, and fight against war was by no means an isolated phenomenon in the international socialist movement in the early 'thirties. The world wide depression, the program of national planning undertaken by the Soviet Union and the rise of fascism gave rise to intense discussion on the subject of the "road to power" in many European Socialist parties.

Following the defeat of German Social Democracy, some

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<sup>77</sup>Thomas to Senior, October 23, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>78</sup>Feigenbaum to Thomas, October 19, 1934, ibid.



German Socialists analyzed the causes of their defeat in a pamphlet entitled New Beginnings. They asserted that their party's decline and fall were due principally to its willingness to compromise with bourgeois parties and its misplaced faith in gradualism and capitalist democracy. Leaders of the defeated Austrian Social Democratic party wailed that they should have been prepared to take over power instead of having remained on the defensive. Two questions thus appeared to be clearly posed to socialists everywhere: Could they afford to be unready to take over power in the event of chaos? Could they afford to pay undue homage to the forms of bourgeois democracy?

Such questions provoked intense controversy in the British Labour party. The Labour party was the strongest and best-organized unit in the International, and the controversies within its ranks were not without their influence on American Socialists. The Labour party expelled the Independent Labour party after it began to advocate united action with the Communists and acceptance of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>79</sup> The expulsion of the I.L.P. did not end the debates in the party. Sir. Stafford Cripps and G. D. H. Cole organized the Socialist League as a left-wing group in the party and began to expound plans that the

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<sup>79</sup>"The I.L.P. and the Comintern," World Tomorrow, XVI (August 31, 1933), 486-87; "The I.L.P. Moves Communistward," XVII (February 1, 1934), 53.

next Labour government should adopt. They declared that the Labour government should resolutely prevent attempts by capitalist interests to sabotage its basic measures of socialization. To ensure such a course, the Labour government should enact an Emergency Powers Act, giving it authority to control the entire economic life of the nation. The House of Lords should be abolished in order to prevent the obstructionist tactics of the owning classes in that chamber. So decisive would be the power of the Labour government and the popular support behind it that no king would dare to stand in its way.<sup>80</sup> (Indeed Sir Stafford Cripps publicly urged the abolition of monarchy.) The slow and cumbersome procedure of parliamentary action should be radically changed, the Socialist League urged.

"I think hope in England lies with the Socialist League and not with the I.L.P.," declared Norman Thomas, in a letter to one of his associates.<sup>81</sup> But neither Thomas, nor the Militants, nor the R.P.C. paid adequate attention to what happened in Britain after the enunciation of the Socialist League's proposals. The Tories used them as a handy club with which to assail the Labour party. The anti-Labour newspapers and Conservative politicians warned the British people that

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<sup>80</sup>H. N. Brailsford, "Dictatorship?" World Tomorrow, XVI (September 14, 1933), 515-16. Brailsford was a leading member of the Socialist League.

<sup>81</sup>Thomas to Biemiller, September 11, 1934, Thomas Papers.

Labour was laying plans to subvert parliamentary democracy and install a Russian-type dictatorship. "The Tory Party has ready an ample budget of quotations, torn from their contexts, which will be used at the next election to terrify the simple-minded electors," wrote a Socialist Leaguer.<sup>82</sup> Within the Labour party itself there were strong criticisms of the League's proposals and the Trades Union Congress decisively repudiated "dictatorship" as a means of implementing a Socialist program.<sup>83</sup> Many American Socialists failed to draw any "lessons" from the Tory counter-attack and the reluctance of British trade unionists to accept radical manifestoes.

Besides the issue of how to capture power, socialists in Europe and America were also concerned about the prevention of war. In Great Britain, the Oxford Union voted 275 to 153 in favor of a motion that "this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and country."<sup>84</sup> The Labour party, at its annual convention in 1933, unanimously adopted a resolution pledging itself to "take no part in war and to

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<sup>82</sup>Brailsford, "Dictatorship?" World Tomorrow, XVI (September 14, 1933), 514-16. See also "Democrats and Dictators," New Statesman & Nation, VI (September 30, 1933), 780-81.

<sup>83</sup>"British Labor Pleds Along," World Tomorrow, XVI (September 14, 1933), 508; "Battle of Hastings," New Statesman & Nation, VI (September 30, 1933), 377-78.

<sup>84</sup>"Pacifism at Oxford," World Tomorrow, XVI (March 15, 1933), 245.

resist it with the whole force of the Labor Movement...."<sup>85</sup>

The resolution was so bold and emphatic that it created a significant impact on American Socialists. Some of them, including Thomas, believed that the time had come for a similar declaration by the Socialist party of America.<sup>86</sup>

The criticism could be made that the Declaration committed the Socialist party to policies that it was hardly equipped to fulfill. Was the Declaration merely a grandiose gesture? Could such a gesture serve to strengthen a political party? Writing on that general theme in 1935 the veteran Socialist, Karl Kautsky, answered in the negative. Kautsky declared that no party must be called upon to do what might not be in its power to accomplish.

A party that nurtures any such erroneous belief may easily fall into a situation in which it is confronted with a test under which it cannot stand up. Such a party is then placed before the alternative of dodging the test because it lacks the power to meet it, which may easily make it appear cowardly or ridiculous, or it may try to meet it, nevertheless, and thus bring about the destruction of its own organization. We should never arouse expectations or undertake obligations which may maneuver us into any such position.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>The Labour Party: Report of the 33rd Annual Conference (London, 1933), 185-88. Sir Charles Trevelyan moved the resolution and P. Noel Baker and Hugh Dalton made supporting speeches.

<sup>86</sup>Norman Thomas, "If War Is to be Averted," World Tomorrow, XVI (October 26, 1933), 585-86.

<sup>87</sup>Karl Kautsky, "Socialism and the League of Nations," New Leader, XVIII (November 16, 1935), 5.

CHAPTER XI  
COMRADES NO MORE

There was a time when Socialists used to sing at their rallies, with fervor and enthusiasm, a song entitled "Comrades Ever."

That name so true and strong, title endearing,  
Let it resound in song, our life course cheering,  
Bound by a deathless tie, a cause that cannot die;  
Hark, Hark, the welcome cry--We're Comrades Ever.

The "welcome cry" was rarely heard after the Detroit convention of the party. The struggle over the Declaration of Principles injected bitterness and animosity among rival groups of Socialists. The final adoption of the Declaration after a referendum of the party membership did not restore harmony. Indeed, divisions in the party became sharper and more pronounced as controversies continued on several issues, old and new.

The New York Old Guard, reduced to impotence on the new National Executive Committee, refused to reconcile itself to its subordinate position. Old Guard leaders openly declared that they would not be bound by the Declaration of Principles. They charged that the policies of the Militants and the N.E.C. subverted the cardinal principles of democratic socialism. The N.E.C.'s attitude towards new Communist proposals for a united front, its invitation to "unattached radicals" to join the party, and its stand regarding the activities of the Revolutionary Policy Committee were characterized by the

Old Guard as reckless moves that would make the party a prey to Communist machinations. In course of time Old Guard leaders accused the N.E.C. and the Militants of being advocates of "dictatorship and armed insurrection." They condemned Norman Thomas for giving "aid and comfort" to those who, in their opinion, were trying to destroy the party. The Militants, in turn, persuaded themselves that the party could make no progress unless the Old Guard leaders were forced out.

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The controversy over the united front had been brought to a temporary lull following the Madison Square Garden incidents in February, 1934. But towards the middle of the year the Communists dramatically changed their tactics and their renewed approaches to the Socialist party again provoked bitter wrangles among Socialists.

As late as April, 1934, Earl Browder, general secretary of the Communist party, had demanded a "united front from below" directed against Socialist leaders.

A united front with Norman Thomas and S.F. leaders to develop strike struggles of the workers would be immediately wrecked by the statement of Norman Thomas, "Now is not the time to strike." No, it is clear, unity behind these gentlemen means a united surrender to the capitalist attacks. ...We need a united fighting front of the workers against the capitalists and all their agents. But that means that unity must be built up, not with these leaders on their present policies, but against them. That means not a united front from the top, but a

united front built up by the workers from below....<sup>1</sup>

On the eve of the Detroit convention of the Socialist party, the Communist chieftain addressed a letter to the delegates exhorting them to demand a united front. "Your leaders have taken you," he declared, "they are taking you today, along the same sad road travelled by the German and Austrian social democracy. We appeal to you, workers in the Socialist Party, to call a halt to any further steps along this path towards death and destruction."<sup>2</sup> The appeal, with its gratuitous insult to the Socialist leadership, was not brought up for discussion at the convention.

Shortly after the convention, the Communist party again made a bid for a united front, but its approach was significantly different from its earlier moves. The communication, calling for united action, was not addressed to rank and file Socialist party members as was the case on previous occasions. Earl Browder's letter of June 19, 1934, was addressed to the National Executive Committee of the Socialist party, to the very men whom he had so often excoriated as the leading social

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<sup>1</sup>Earl Browder, "The Revolutionary Way Out," Communism in the United States, 51-52. Speech delivered to the central committee to the eighth convention of the Communist party.

<sup>2</sup>Earl Browder to "members of the Socialist Party and the delegates at its national convention," May 28, 1934. Archives of the Socialist Party.

fascists of the land.<sup>3</sup> It is open to question whether the American Communist leader originated so radical a departure from established Communist practice. The Communist International had set in motion the "Great Turn," and the world came to know of it when, on June 23, 1934, the conference of the Communist party of France addressed an offer to the permanent national board of the SFIO, the Socialist party of France, for united action against the Fascist threat. Fearful of the growing menace of fascism, the Comintern had decided upon a change in its line, and newspapers across the world took note of the fact when the French Communist party made its move.<sup>4</sup> The American Communist party had made an identical move four days earlier.

Browder declared in his letter that the new N.E.C. claimed to be genuinely "left" and could, therefore, no longer offer any excuse for not collaborating with the Communist party on issues that concerned "the most immediate and vital interests of all toilers. "The Communist Party," he added, "reiterates its readiness to develop such a united front of struggle on any or all of the issues raised in our letter to the convention.... We stand ready to meet with the National Executive Committee, or with any of the local organizations

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<sup>3</sup>Earl Browder (on behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Party) to the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, June 19, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>4</sup>For an analysis of the shift in the Comintern line and its implications, see Borkenau, European Communism, 151-62.



or groups for the purpose of taking up those questions."<sup>5</sup>

The Daily Worker toned down its bellicose attacks against Socialist leaders and repeatedly stressed the urgency of a united front between the two parties.<sup>6</sup>

In the Socialist N.E.C., the Browder letter immediately provoked serious divisions. Thomas felt that "this definite Communist invitation" should be viewed favorably. He urged that the party should undertake further negotiations if the Communists gave a "definite assurance" that they would "stop the efforts to use united action to destroy us."<sup>7</sup> Krzycki, Hapgood, and Daniel favored a similar course of action. But Hoan was strongly opposed to any "dillydallying" with the Communist party which was "simply a rubber stamp for the CP of Moscow." O Neal emphatically declared that all Communist offers should be ignored unless the L.S.I. itself was able to conclude a satisfactory agreement with the Comintern.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Browder to N.E.C., June 19, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>6</sup>"The Communist Party, U.S.A., just like its brother Party in France, has issued repeated united front calls to the Socialist Party on the basic issues now confronting the working class in the fight against fascism and imperialist war." "Still No Answer on the United Front," Daily Worker, July 11, 1934, p. 6. See also Earl Browder, "A Serious Word to the Socialist Party," Daily Worker, July 14, 1934, pp. 1, 5.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas to Senior, July 3, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>8</sup>Senior to N.E.C., July 3, 1934; O Neal to Harold Kelso (assistant to Senior), July 9, 1934, *ibid.* An elder statesman of international socialism, Emile Vadervelde, warned socialists to be on guard against "Greeks bearing gifts" and added that "under the pretext of the united front, manoeuvres are carried out with the avowed object of forming nuclei in and disrupting  
(continued on next page)

While the N.E.C. members thus began a fresh debate on the vexed issue, Browder addressed a personal letter to "Comrade" Thomas offering to meet with unofficial Socialist representatives. He hoped that such "preliminary conversations" might remove obstacles to "a positive decision on the part of the N.E.C."<sup>9</sup> In yet another communication he offered to conclude an agreement "for restraining and establishing limitations upon mutual criticism...."<sup>10</sup> Thomas promised to raise the matter at the N.E.C. meeting scheduled to be held in Milwaukee early in September. He emphasized that while united action by Socialists and Communists against war and

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the Socialist forces...." "The International and the Communists," International Information (Zurich, Switzerland), XI (July 28, 1934), 378-79.

<sup>9</sup>Browder to Thomas, August 17, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>10</sup>Browder to Thomas, August 24, 1934, *ibid.* Here again Browder was merely following the Comintern line. Bela Kun member of the Presidium of the Comintern, set forth the new line in a series of articles written towards the end of July. Kun wrote: "We wish to declare openly and unreservedly: The renunciation of polemics against the Social-Democratic Parties, during the period of common struggles against the offensive of capital, against fascism and imperialist war, is a concession. ...We are making this concession despite the fact that we are firmly convinced that our polemics against the supporters of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie are not only well founded but that such polemics constitute an indispensable part of workers' democracy. ...In accordance with our program we have effected a turn in our tactics by so altering the form of our struggle as to address our proposals of unity not only to the Social-Democratic workers but also to the leaders of the Social-Democratic Parties." "The Most Burning Question --Unity of Action," Daily Worker, September 7, 1934, p. 6; September 24, 1934, p. 6.

fascism and for specific measures of reform would be "enormously desirable," such a course would be fruitless so long as the Communists subscribed to the theory of social fascism and followed a destructive policy towards organized labor.<sup>11</sup>

When the N.E.C. met in Milwaukee, a Communist deputation led by Robert Minor presented a request for a united front. After a bitter discussion, the N.E.C. decided, by a vote of seven to four, to appoint representatives to conduct negotiations with an official committee of the Communist party. Hoan, Hoopes, Graham, and Oneal vigorously opposed the move. The debate continued even after the adoption of the motion and the N.E.C. finally reversed itself. It resolved to postpone further action on the issue till its December meeting. The N.E.C. resolution declared that the Socialist party would observe the working of the united front in France and take note of any decisions that the Comintern Congress might formulate before making a final decision on the desirability of negotiations with the Communist party.<sup>12</sup>

The R.P.C. criticized the N.E.C. for rejecting the "very friendly" approach of the Communist party, and Old Guard leaders denounced the N.E.C. for not taking decisive action

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas to Browder, August 21, 1934; Thomas to Browder, August 26, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>12</sup>New Leader, XVII (September 8, 1934), 11; New York Times, September 4, 1934, p. 8; "Socialist Leaders Reject United Front," Daily Worker, September 5, 1934, p. 6.

to end united front negotiations. In the New Leader, O Neal characterized the N.E.C.'s action as "an extraordinarily inept performance." Pointing out that the American Federation of Labor had taken a stringent attitude towards Communist maneuvers, O Neal declared that organized labor would regard as an unfriendly act any attempt on the part of the Socialist party to cooperate with the Communists.<sup>13</sup> The New York State Executive Committee of the party denounced the N.E.C. and instructed O Neal to inform the Socialist International that the N.E.C.'s action was "without warrant from the party."<sup>14</sup>

The Old Guard's outburst was, to a considerable extent, a misrepresentation of the N.E.C.'s action. The N.E.C. did not decide to negotiate with the Communists but to postpone further consideration of the matter. Yet Waldman and O Neal attempted to spread the impression that the N.E.C. had virtually extended a welcoming hand to the Communist party. Their statements merely served to provide ammunition to opponents of the party. In Wisconsin, for instance, Philip La Follette charged that the Socialists had joined hands with the Communists. Thomas wrote him an angry letter of protest and criticized him for his "extraordinary recklessness with regard

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<sup>13</sup>James O Neal, "United Front Maneuvers," New Leader, XVII (September 15, 1934), Special Declaration Section, 2.

<sup>14</sup>"Minutes of Joint Meeting of State Executive and New York City members of State Committee," September 18, 1934, Thomas Papers.

to facts."<sup>15</sup> Thomas was so provoked by the statements of Waldman and O Neal that he came to believe that they were prepared even to break up the party if they could not retain the dominant role in its councils.<sup>16</sup>

Communist leaders kept the issue alive by further appeals for a united front. An uprising of Spanish workers in Catalonia and Asturia against the rightist-Catholic regime of Gil Robles early in October, 1934, had stirred socialists, Communists, and liberals all over the world.<sup>17</sup> The Comintern was seriously perturbed by the fascist threat in Spain and named Marcel Cachin and Maurice Thorez of the French Communist party to conduct negotiations with the Socialist International on the question of aiding the Spanish workers.<sup>18</sup> On October 10

<sup>15</sup>Thomas to Philip La Follette, September 17, 1934, ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas to Adler, November 5, 1934, ibid.

<sup>17</sup>The Spanish government ruthlessly suppressed the insurrection, but its actions prepared the ground for the emergence later of the Popular Front. See Sturathal, Tragedy of European Labor, 275-76.

<sup>18</sup>In November, 1934, Emile Vandervelde and Friedrich Adler, representing the L.S.I., held discussions with Cachin and Thorez. Following the talks, the L.S.I. announced that each of its constituent parties was free to act "in accordance with its complete autonomy." The L.S.I. thus turned down the proposal for joint action by the two Internationals. For a report on the negotiations, see "Full Report of Conversations between Representatives of Communist International and Labor-Socialist International on United Front for Spanish Workers," Daily Worker, December 15, 1934, pp. 5-6. See also Bela Kun, "Second International Spurns Unity Proposals to Aid Spanish Workers," Daily Worker, November 1, 1934, p. 8; November 2, 1934, p. 8; Earl Browder, "The Second International Again Refuses the United Front," Daily Worker, October 25, 1934, pp. 1, 6; William M. Feigenbaum, "The L.S.I. on the United Front," New Leader, XVII (January 5, 1935), 4.

Browder wrote to Clarence Senior calling for joint action by the Socialist and Communist parties to express solidarity with the Spanish workers.<sup>19</sup> The Communist chief simultaneously instructed every unit in his party to make similar proposals to corresponding committees of the Socialist party.

Viewing the Browder move as yet another attempt to disrupt the Socialist party, Oneal offered a motion seeking to direct party branches not to undertake negotiations of any kind with Communists. The motion was defeated on a "mail vote," Hoan, Hoopes, and Graham supporting Oneal's demand.<sup>20</sup> Hoan made no secret of his irritation with those members of the N.E.C. who favored collaboration with "the shell called the Communist Party." "How a majority of the N.E.C. can be determined to inject this assinine [sic] question, well knowing in advance that it will divide our party and drive a cleavage through it, is more than I can understand and something I cannot forgive," he declared, in his comment on the Oneal motion.<sup>21</sup>

In the N.E.C. itself the most persistent advocates of the united front were Powers Hapgood and Franz Daniel.

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<sup>19</sup>Browder to Senior, October 10, 1934, Thomas Papers. It is interesting to note that Browder's appeal preceded by three days the announcement of the Comintern move in the columns of Pravda. Pravda's report, in turn, was reproduced from the Humanité of Paris. See New York Times, October 14, 1934, Sec. I, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup>Senior to N.E.C., October 20, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>21</sup>Hoan to Senior, October 16, 1934, ibid.

Krueger, Krzycki, Shadid, and Coolidge generally supported Thomas's contention that united front on specific issues was possible and desirable. But after the defeat of the Oneal motion, Thomas took stock of the situation and came to the conclusion that no useful purpose would be served by a prolongation of the controversy over the united front. He felt that the N.E.C., at its next regular meeting, should definitely announce its unwillingness to carry on any negotiations with the Communist party. In a lengthy communication to his colleagues, Thomas described why he had reached such a conclusion. He also explained why he had consistently supported the idea of appointing a committee to confer with representatives of the Communist party.

In taking this position I want to make it perfectly clear that I am still of the opinion that logically and ideally our best course would be to appoint a committee to confer with the Communist Party. Remember that conference as to where we stand is not an agreement on a united front. To hold conference is simply a recognition of the magnitude of the issues involved and the duty that is on all our shoulders to lessen rather than increase division. ... In life it often happens that what seems the logical and ideal thing to do in a case like this is not the wisest thing to do.

Thomas said that the Socialist party desired the largest measure of unity in the labor movement. If organized labor was vehemently opposed to a certain course of action, it would be foolish for the party to persist in that course of action, unless it was a matter of vital principle. "Negotiations with the Communist Party do not fall under that head."

Thomas admitted that the general opinion among party members was against any collaboration with the Communists. If the N.E.C. decided on negotiations with the Communists, there was certain to be a demand for a referendum of the party membership. Controversy over the issue was bound to weaken the party and gravely jeopardize its effectiveness. "For myself I am sorry that <sup>what</sup> seems to me the logical way to proceed does not at present command that degree of support which makes it wise to press it," Thomas declared.<sup>22</sup>

If Thomas had come to such a conclusion several months earlier, a fertile source of controversy might have been avoided. Unfortunately for the party, however, factionalism had become deeply rooted, and the Old Guard was unwilling to accept in good faith Thomas's changed attitude. They had found "anti-communism" a very handy club with which to attack Thomas, the Militants, and all their other critics in the party. They appeared to be fully resolved to continue their attack on "Communism" within the party as part of their campaign to win back the power that they had lost at Detroit.

Passions were aroused to a considerable pitch as the N.E.C. gathered for an important session in Boston early in December, 1934. A Communist deputation consisting of Clarence Hathaway, James Ford, and Nat Sparks vainly sought

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas to N.E.C., October 22, 1934, ibid.



an interview with the N.E.C. The Committee discussed the united front issue at considerable length. Hapgood moved that a committee of three should be set up to confer with authorized representatives of the Communist party. Graham offered a substitute resolution that demanded outright rejection of any united front negotiations with the Communists till the next national convention of the Socialist party. Hoan supported Graham and Oneal wanted the prohibition to apply to all Communist splinter groups as well. Thomas stated that he favored the appointment of a committee only because he wanted to get the Communists on record, "black on white." He wanted to prove that it was the Communist party that made a real united front impossible.

The Hapgood motion for the appointment of a committee was defeated by eight votes to two. Only its sponsor and Franz Daniel voted for it. Voting on the Graham resolution demanding an end to all negotiations with the Communist party resulted in a tie. Hoan, Hoopes, Coolidge, Oneal, and Graham voted for it while Thomas, Daniel, Krzycki, Hapgood, and Krueger opposed it. Thomas opposed it because he felt that an outright prohibition of united action for all time would merely "look like the 18th amendment in its nature and consequences." In order to resolve the deadlock, Hoopes and Krueger went to work on a compromise resolution, which was finally adopted with only three dissenting votes. Daniel and Hapgood opposed it on the ground that it closed the door to

all negotiations, while Oneal opposed it on the ground that it left the door open for local united front efforts.<sup>23</sup> The

The resolution as finally adopted by the N.E.C. definitely proclaimed that there were to be no further negotiations with the Communist party or the so-called splinter groups<sup>24</sup> till the next convention of the Socialist party. The resolution thus expressed the sentiments that had for long been voiced by Graham, Hoan, Hoopes, and Oneal. But it also contained a rather vague statement about the procedure that party locals and branches should follow in embarking on any united front activity with the Communists. "Before any branch or local of the Socialist Party shall take part in any united front activity with the Communist party or the so-called splinter groups, the consent of the State Executive Committee in organized, and of the National Executive Committee in unorganized, states should be obtained," the resolution laid down.<sup>25</sup> What Krueger and Hoopes had in mind were emergency cases

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<sup>23</sup>For an account of the debate at the N.E.C. meeting, see William M. Feigenbaum, "Socialists Start Move for Labor Party," New Leader, XVII (December 8, 1934), 3.

<sup>24</sup>Jay Lovestone and Charles S. Zimmerman, representing the Communist Party (Opposition), met the N.E.C. earlier and presented proposals for united action. The N.E.C. decided to turn down their offer. For an account of the negotiations from the Lovestoneite point of view, see Where We Stand: Programmatic Documents of the Communist Party Opposition (New York, 1934).

<sup>25</sup>For the text of the resolution, see "The Socialist Stand on the United Front," New Leader, XVII (December 8, 1934), 6.

involving civil rights, strikers' relief, and the like where local united action might become unavoidable. To cover such cases they incorporated a statement in the resolution that, in effect, forbade locals to undertake any united action with the Communists without prior sanction from the prescribed authorities.

Despite the fact that the N.E.C. had finally accepted their point of view and had ended further united front negotiations, Old Guard leaders denounced the resolution in virulent terms. Gerber, Kobbe, Lee, and Waldman of the New York State Committee, Sarah Limbach and Birch Wilson of the Pennsylvania State Committee, and Benjamin Gebiner of the Jewish Socialist Verband issued a statement declaring that the action of the N.E.C. would have the effect of "drawing the party nearer to the Communists."<sup>26</sup> At a well attended meeting in New York City, the State Committee of the party warned locals and branches not to enter any united front with the Communist party or splinter groups.<sup>27</sup> Thomas tried to explain in his New Leader column that the N.E.C. decision could in no sense be construed as taking the party closer to the Communists.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>"Strong Dissent Filed Against N.E.C. Rulings," New Leader, XVIII (December 8, 1934), 7.

<sup>27</sup>"New York Socialists Ban All United Fronts with Communists," New Leader, XVII (December 15, 1934), 6, 8.

<sup>28</sup>Norman Thomas, "The United Front Situation," New Leader, XVII (December 8, 1934), 8.

In the Forward, Louis Hendin described the N.E.C.'s decision in terms that profoundly disturbed Thomas. In a strongly worded letter to the editor Thomas condemned the article, and, indirectly, Forward itself. "If I thought that that article in its tone, style, and substance represented the point of view of the Forward Association I should conclude that the Association was intent upon paralyzing, if not splitting the Party and was to that end adopting the tactics of Communist controversy."<sup>30</sup>

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The Old Guard was so deeply suspicious of the N.E.C.'s stand on the united front issue because of its fear that any contact with the Communists could only result in injury to the Socialist party. The Old Guard's animosity was directed not solely towards the official Communist party but towards the various communist splinter groups as well. Old Guard leaders were, therefore, deeply disturbed when the N.E.C. decided to issue an invitation to "all unattached radicals" to join the Socialist party. They regarded the invitation as a deliberate move by the Militant-controlled N.E.C. to "colonize" the party with agents of the Communist party and the other "sects."

After the Detroit convention many Militants thought that

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<sup>30</sup>Thomas to the Jewish Daily Forward, December 7, 1934, ibid.

it would be a good idea if "unattached revolutionists" could be brought into the Socialist party in order to make it an "inclusive" organization. Paul Porter suggested to Thomas that the party should invite "such left-wing" groups as the I. W. W., the Trotskyites, the Lovestoneites, and the American Workers' party to join it en masse.<sup>31</sup> Thomas himself was aware that Benjamin Gitlow and a few other former Communists had been trying to enter into the Socialist party.<sup>32</sup> Thomas wrote to Hoan, Hoopes, Krzycki, Krueger, Daniel and Hapgood--his colleagues on the N.E.C.--asking their opinion on the desirability of admitting them into the party. "I have worked with some of them including Gitlow, and have considerable confidence in them," Thomas stated. "Their point of view is not altogether mine but I think we can well afford to have them in the Party."<sup>33</sup> Thomas added that the New York party organization might reject their applications, in which

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<sup>31</sup>Porter to Thomas, July 29, 1934, ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Gitlow was expelled from the Communist party in 1929 along with Jay Lovestone. He broke up with Lovestone after some time and began his quest for another base of operations. "In 1934," he wrote later in his autobiography, "the Socialist Party began to show, what I considered then signs of life. I was still a Communist. The fight in the Socialist Party interested me because the issues between the Left Wing and the Right Wing were being drawn sharply." I Confess, 577. To prepare the ground for his entry into the Socialist party Gitlow began publication in June, 1934, of a journal entitled Labor Front.

<sup>33</sup>Thomas to Daniel, Hapgood, Hoan, Hoopes, Krueger, and Krzycki, August 17, 1934, Thomas Papers.

case they would appeal to the N.E.C.

None of the men to whom Thomas addressed his query, raised any serious objections to the entry of Gitlow and other ex-Communists into the party. Hean declared that the party could have them if they came in with good intentions, though he was averse to forcing any party local to take them against their will. Hoopes suggested that the applicants must be admitted as individuals and not as a group and that care must be exercised to ensure that they were motivated by no disruptive purposes. The subject of an invitation to "unattached radicals" was broached at the N.E.C. meeting in Milwaukee. Thomas presented a declaration which was adopted with only one dissenting vote.

The "invitation" proclaimed that a united party of workers was needed to wage effective war against war, fascism, exploitation, and a disintegrating capitalism.

Some of you have been members of various parties which you have been compelled to leave because their tactics have been so badly adapted to the achievement of the great end you seek. Some of you have not in recent years been members of any party. You have been homeless. To you the Socialist Party offers a welcome, not as groups or as potential factions, but as loyal comrades in the great cause of achieving Socialism in our time. It welcomes you into a fellowship where free discussion and criticism of differences of opinion and viewpoints are encouraged with the expectation that discussion will be carried on within the limits of party discipline.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Labor and Socialist Press Service, October 19, 1934, pp. 1-2.

Following the N.E.C.'s announcement, Gitlow and his associates held a meeting in New York and declared that they had decided to seek admission to the Socialist party. In a "statement of policy" the group stated that the Socialist party's adoption of the Declaration of Principles served as a stimulus to revolutionary development and expressed "the revolutionary mood of the best sections of the Socialist workers."<sup>35</sup>

Oneal and Waldman were enraged by the Gitlow pronouncements. Oneal declared that he had been completely misinformed about the real intent of the N.E.C.'s invitation to unattached radicals. He had thought that the invitation had reference to Socialists who had gone over to the Non-Partisan League, and to technocrats, La Follette men and farmer-labor groups. Oneal warned that the entry into the party of men like Gitlow was bound to increase and intensify factional squabbles. "Do we want some more fights? I think the mass of the rank and file are sick of fights and will advise any of these sects to continue their fighting outside the Socialist Party," he added.<sup>36</sup>

Waldman announced that the attempt of Gitlow and his associates to enter the party provided a complete vindication of the fears that he had expressed about the implications of the Declaration of Principles adopted at the Detroit

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<sup>35</sup>New York Times, October 30, 1934, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup>New Leader, XVII (November 17, 1934), 5.

convention.

I have always charged that the Detroit declaration was a step in the direction of Communism. The people who sponsored and supported it have seen fit to write into the fundamental party declaration doctrines which are compatible with the position taken by the Communists.

Waldman said that Socialists who believed in democracy would never agree to be "in the same political house" with the Communists.<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately for the party the controversy over the Gitlow application broke out in the midst of an election campaign when the party's prospects appeared to be none too bright. Thomas was busy campaigning in New York when he was appraised of Waldman's charges. He replied that the N.E.C. had not offered any specific invitation to the Gitlow group, but had made a general appeal to all those who desired the co-operative commonwealth to throw in their lot with the Socialist party. Waldman's response was a direct attack on Thomas himself as the instigator of the move to draw "Communists" into the party.

To gain his point Thomas apparently is willing to make a saint out of Stalin, and a mild radical out of Trotzky. He suddenly decided that there is no difference between Ben Gitlow, Communist candidate for Vice President in 1924 and 28 and his followers and the Socialist party.

Waldman charged that "the militant leaders of the national organization of the Socialist party are seeking the admission

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<sup>37</sup>New York Times, October 30, 1934, p. 10.



of the Gitlow group in order to augment their own forces within the party and by that means of colonization overcome the sober and wellconsidered judgment of the majority in each of the organized States which have voted against the Detroit declaration."<sup>38</sup>

Thomas was outraged by the nature of the Waldman attack and its timing. In a letter to James Maurer he stated that the election campaign in the state had suffered "frightfully" as a result of Waldman's charges. Thomas asserted that Gitlow had definitely renounced the Communist party and its tactics and had worked creditably with A. F. of L. unions in New Jersey. "What I fear is that some elements in the Party are desperately seeking any issues on which to split the Party....," Thomas added.<sup>39</sup>

Old Guard leaders proceeded to demonstrate that they intended to follow up their words with action. The New York State Committee of the party adopted a resolution instructing all local organizations not to admit into membership any person favoring communism. It also decided to set up a committee to survey party branches and "report on the advisability of carrying out a reorganization that would eliminate members who are Communist in theory and conduct."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>"Left Wing Plot Seen by Waldman," New York Times, November 3, 1934, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup>Thomas to Maurer, November 5, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>40</sup>New York Times, November 12, 1934, p. 14.

of Waldman directed a thinly veiled threat at the new National Executive Committee. "We have tried and will continue to try to do all in our power to maintain the unity of the party, but there is a point at which we must draw the line. We cannot and we will not countenance, in this State at least, the embracing by Socialists of the Communist philosophy and tactics," he declared. To add weight to his threat he induced the State Committee to announce that it would explore ways and means of forming a state and national labor party. While the Militants argued about the advisability of this, the Old Guard leaders thus served notice in unmistakable terms on Norman Thomas and the N.E.C. that they intended to fight for the elimination of "Communism" and "Communists" from the party and that they would not hesitate even to bolt the party if their plans were thwarted. The question, however, arose of how men who were "Communist in theory and conduct" were to be detected. Waldman had called the Declaration of Principles a "communistic" document. Would the Old Guard regard those who had favored the Declaration as "Communist in theory and conduct"? Would they be purged from the party as a result of the "reorganization program"? Many Militants were disturbed by such thoughts. They felt that any concession to the Old Guard on the issue would only invite new demands from that quarter. They, therefore, defended vehemently the right of party members to hold and propagate any opinions consistent with the constitution

of the party and its official declaration of Principles. Some Militants urged that the N.E.C. should take disciplinary action against Waldman for his statements. Amicus Most urged Thomas to try to get Waldman removed from the Public Affairs Committee of the party. Thomas felt that it would not be "good strategy" to take any such action against Waldman. He thought that while Waldman had done much harm to the party, any disciplinary action against him would only serve to make him a martyr.<sup>41</sup>

While the Militants argued about the advisability of disciplinary action against Waldman, they failed to bestow serious attention to the danger to the party to which he had drawn attention. They failed to comprehend that the "unattached radicals" from communist splinter groups might organize new factional groups in the party and take advantage of divisions among older Socialists in order to strengthen their own position. Such indeed proved to be the strategy of the Trotskyites who began infiltrating into the party. The party was to pay dearly later for the policy that the Militants and Thomas sponsored during this time. The Old Guard also failed to realize that lumping all their opponents together as "Communists" was a short-sighted and disastrous approach.

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<sup>41</sup>Thomas to Amicus Most, November 20, 1934; "Memorandum on Problems before the N.E.C." November, 1934, Thomas Papers.

The activities and utterances of members of the Revolutionary Policy Committee served to intensify the fears of the Old Guard about "communistic" trends within the party. After the Detroit convention the R.P.C. set itself up as an organized faction, elected its own officers, and began publication of the Revolutionary Socialist Review.<sup>42</sup> An editorial in the Review proclaimed that it would be dedicated "to the clarification of revolutionary socialist principles and to the building of a movement within the Socialist Party for the purpose of securing their adoption as the official party program."<sup>43</sup> It asserted that the R.P.C. was entirely opposed to the "bald opportunism" of the Militants. The R.P. C. condemned the Militants for compromising on principles and identifying themselves with such "reformists" like Norman Thomas. "They have done nothing to dispel the idea, fast becoming prevalent, that Norman Thomas is the unquestioned leader of the lefts," it charged.<sup>44</sup> In the columns of their journal, R.P. C. members discoursed on such subjects like "the road to power," "dictatorship of the proletariat," and "proletarian unity."

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<sup>42</sup>The executive committee of the R.P.C. was composed of the following: J. B. Matthews, chairman; Francis A. Henson, acting secretary; Irving Brown, William Chamberlain, David Felix, Howard Kester, W. W. Norris, Roy Reuther, Ruth Shallcross, Leo Sitke, and George Streater, members.

<sup>43</sup>"Why the RSR?" Revolutionary Socialist Review (Memphis, Tenn.), I (November, 1934), 3-4.

<sup>44</sup>"On the Declaration of Principles," mimeographed, September 20, 1934.

Neither Thomas nor the large body of Militants who followed his lead was happy over the activities of the R.P.C. Thomas and the Militants were also convinced that there might be some Communist and Lovestoneite agents in the ranks of the R.P.C. At the same time Thomas felt that there were several well-meaning and earnest young men in the R.P.C. capable of rendering good service to the party. He hoped that by judicious handling they could be won over to constructive labors in behalf of the party.<sup>45</sup>

At the N.E.C. meeting in Boston in December, 1934, Oneal demanded that action should be taken against the R.P.C. for propagating dangerous and destructive doctrines. In support of his charge he quoted from an article in the R.P.C. journal. The article declared that "Workers' Councils organized in direct response to a growing revolutionary situation shall constitute the basic unit of organs by which the working class can carry through an armed insurrection." Oneal emphasized that the statement was an incitement to insurrection and was contrary to the principles of the Socialist party.

Thomas was taken aback by Oneal's disclosure. He felt that statements like those quoted by Oneal could only bring on misunderstanding about the goals and objectives of

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<sup>45</sup>Thomas to Mary and Harry W. Laidler, November 21, 1934, Thomas Papers. Thomas added that the activities of the R.P.C. had done injury to the party and that he would, under no circumstances, agree to fight its battles.

the party and provide ammunition to the Old Guard's "Red scare" campaign. Thomas decided that the best way for him to mitigate the effect of Oneal's charges was to take the lead in censuring the R.P.C.<sup>46</sup> He declared, therefore, that he was "shocked beyond words." "These people have arrogated to themselves the right to commit the party to a program that will endanger their own members," he added.<sup>47</sup> Thomas supported Oneal's motion condemning any advocacy of armed insurrection and called for a committee to investigate the R.P.C. He hoped that such a committee, while having a beneficial impact on the "good people" in the R.P.C., might also serve to deflate the Old Guard charges of an organized conspiracy within the party. In the course of the debate on the motion Daniel and Hapgood argued that the R.P.C. document had referred to armed insurrection only in a revolutionary situation. Krueger expressed himself in favor of tabling the motion. But the N.E.C. adopted it, along with the Thomas amendment. The resolution condemned the advocacy of armed insurrection as a "dangerous departure from Socialist principles and tactics" which would lead the workers into unnecessary dangers and

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<sup>46</sup>Thomas offered this explanation in a letter to Franz Daniel who was reported to have been angered by Thomas's outburst against the R.P.C. Thomas to Daniel, December 5, 1934, *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*New Leader*, XVII (December 8, 1934), 6.

expose the movement to the intrigues of agents provocateurs.<sup>48</sup> The N.E.C. appointed a sub-committee headed by Devere Allen to investigate the activities of the R.P.C. and report at its next meeting.

The R.P.C. loudly condemned the N.E.C.'s decisions as a surrender to the Old Guard. One of the leaders of the R.P.C. Francis Henson, indignantly wrote to Thomas that what his group advocated was merely "an expression of the Communist manifesto in terms applicable to the present situation in America."<sup>49</sup> Daniel and Haggood were also angry with Thomas. In a confidential memorandum Thomas set forth his stand on the R.P.C. He warned that any reckless statements by the R.P.C., spurred on by questionable elements within its ranks, might prove to be disastrous for the party. Thomas emphasized that the party was "in an immensely critical situation," and that a split either from the right or the left would practically destroy it and set back indefinitely the formation of any farmer-labor party.<sup>50</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr, after reading the R.P.C.'s document, came to the same conclusions as Thomas.

It seems a darned shame that the socialist

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<sup>48</sup>"Party's Resolution on the Revolutionary Policy Committee," New Leader, XVII (December 8, 1934), 7.

<sup>49</sup>Henson to Thomas, December 12, 1934; Thomas reiterated his criticisms in his reply. Thomas to Henson, December 26, 1934, Thomas Papers.

<sup>50</sup>"Memorandum on the R.P.C.," December, 1934, ibid.

movement, its unity and effectiveness, should be threatened on the one hand by a romantic parliamentarism and on the other hand by a romantic revolutionism which really amounts to insurrectionary communism. In neither is there any political realism. Won't we ever learn to think a little more carefully and realistically about politics and make our thought a little less an expression of personal emotion. Some of this political thought serves psychiatric-religious purposes rather than the purposes of statesmanship. Too darn bad.<sup>51</sup>

Old Guard leaders professed to be dissatisfied with the N.E.C. decision and demanded positive action against the R.P.C. Oneal denounced the Revolutionary Socialist Review as "a crazy output of moonstruck dandies."<sup>52</sup> "Toleration of this play-boy stuff is the real disloyalty to the Socialist movement and the working class," he added.<sup>53</sup> As a step towards liquidation of the R.P.C., the New York State Executive Committee expelled some of its members in Buffalo on the charge that they believed in armed insurrection. The action provoked an outcry from R.P.C. men and Militants. Thomas was disturbed by the development and believed that the method followed by the Old Guard was wrong. "I am willing to go very far," he wrote to Senior, "to save the Socialist Party from being tied up to a wholly dangerous flirting with the

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<sup>51</sup>Niebuhr to Thomas, December 11, 1934, ibid. Thomas told "Reinie" that his letter did him "a world of good." He expressed the hope that Niebuhr could "do something with some of the really fine spirits in the RPC...." Thomas to Niebuhr, December 14, 1934, ibid.

<sup>52</sup>James Oneal, "Armed Nonsense of the R.P.C.," New Leader, XVIII (March 9, 1935), 2.

<sup>53</sup>James Oneal, "No Compromise with Infantile Sickness of Armed Insurrection," ibid., 5.



notion of armed insurrection. I am convinced, however, that it is entirely possible to manage the situation so as to hold the best members of the R.P.C. for the Party....<sup>54</sup>

When the N.E.C. met in Buffalo in March, 1935, Devere Allen presented an adverse report on the R.P.C.'s doctrines and urged that the advocacy of armed insurrection "or similar methods" should be deemed incompatible with membership in the Socialist party. Oneal demanded that unless the issue was decisively settled and the "insurrectionists" eliminated, the party would face a split in 1936. Hapgood pleaded that the democratic right of any party member to advocate any doctrine and to make converts should not be jeopardized. The N.E.C. finally adopted Hoan's motion declaring that advocates of communism and violence would be ineligible to be members of the party.<sup>55</sup>

The R.P.C. denounced the N.E.C. in strident terms and characterized its resolution as a "red-baiting decision." It charged that the N.E.C. lacked any decisiveness "except when confronted with actions against the revolutionary elements in the party."<sup>56</sup> The Old Guard, on the other hand, felt that the N.E.C. did not go far enough in chastising the R.P.C.

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<sup>54</sup>Thomas to Senior, January 22, 1935, Thomas Papers.

<sup>55</sup>New Leader, XVIII (March 30, 1935), 5.

<sup>56</sup>Evaluation of the Meeting of the National Executive Committee (New York, 1935), 4.

The R.P.C., which was never strong in any state organization of the party, disintegrated rapidly after it was denounced by the N.E.C. But the issue of "insurrectionism" continued to plague the party. The relations between the Old Guard and the Militants continued to deteriorate and the Old Guard leaders and the New Leader fell into the habit of condemning their opponents as supporters of armed insurrection.<sup>57</sup>

Did Waldman and Oneal really believe that a group of "insurrectionists" had infiltrated into the party? Did they really believe that Norman Thomas was giving aid and comfort to those who advocated "dictatorship and insurrection"? Waldman, Oneal, and other prominent Old Guard leaders occasionally made statements that were not on all fours with their frequent warnings against "armed insurrectionists." Waldman referred to the Militants contemptuously as "milk and water revolutionists." Condemning the "Thomas dual party machine,"

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<sup>57</sup>When the New Leader invoked the memory of Hillquit to support the contention that the Socialist party should never sanction resort to force under any circumstances, Hillquit's widow issued a statement offering a different interpretation of her husband's views. She stated that Hillquit believed that, regardless of whether the Socialists came into power as a result of a coup d'etat or by a series of legislative enactments, they could maintain power only with the support of the people. "As a Social Democrat, he believed in the rule of the majority. He hoped that when the Socialists will have the majority of the people with them, the capitalist minority will concede its defeat. But if the minority will try to oppose it by using violence, the Socialists will know how to use force against force." Vera Hillquit, "A Personal Note," New Leader, XVIII (May 4, 1935), 11.

Oneal declared that the Militants and other allies of Thomas were not revolutionists at all.

Not that we think that all these elements are revolutionary or even too revolutionary. They are not revolutionary at all. They consist of a motley collection of the Communist splinter groups, Y.W.C.A. secretaries, contributions from impossible-to-classify groups, theological students feeling the Call of God, ghosts living in a fog zone between Socialism and Communism, intellectuals obsessed with a "leadership" complex, depression babies lacking basic knowledge of Socialist philosophy and the history of the labor and Socialist movement, deflated professionals looking forward to a 'career' in the movement, and advocates of 'armed insurrection' who haven't a popgun in their possession and if they face one would scot under the bed.<sup>58</sup>

As the factional conflict mounted in intensity each side harbored the fear that the other was planning a coup to seize complete control of the party machinery. "Practically everybody in New York talks about a split as being inevitable," wrote a New York Socialist to Clarence Senior. He added that both among Old Guard leaders and the Militants there was a tendency "to let somebody else worry about the Socialist Party."<sup>59</sup> Thomas acknowledged that owing to internal dissensions the party was virtually overcome by "creeping paralysis."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>James Oneal, "Is it 'Trumped Up'?" New Leader, XVIII (July 13, 1935), 7.

<sup>59</sup>Jack Sullivan to Senior, February 12, 1935, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>60</sup>Thomas to William Feigenbaum, February 26, 1935, Thomas Papers.

It looks as if we had escaped or delayed a split only to fall a victim of paralysis. With a few shining exceptions practically everywhere the party is losing, not gaining morale. ...Already to an amazing extent we have lost what I may call the cultural field to the Communists in spite of their appalling mistakes. We are rapidly losing in many parts of the country in the political field to Long, to Dr. Townsend, to Upton Sinclair, and God knows who else. ...Among other things, as Chairman of the Finance Committee, I find it a virtual impossibility to raise money from friendly sources because of the general belief that we are dead or dying.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Thomas to McLevy, Allen Freese, Hoopes, Hoan, Benson, and Biemiller, [February, 1935], ibid.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SPLIT

In January, 1935, the National Executive Committee ordered the suspension of the charter of the Socialist party of Indiana. The action was taken while a referendum sponsored by the State Executive Committee of Indiana was in progress. The S.E.C. called upon party members to vote on the questions of repudiating the Declaration of Principles adopted at the Detroit convention and of disaffiliating the Socialist party of Indiana from the national organization. The referendum was clearly a secessionist move.<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Hoan, chairman of the committee on organization of the N.E.C., heard reports that several "loyal" party members in Indiana were refusing to vote in the referendum on the ground it was illegal. Consequently, the secessionists were likely to win and were determined to sever their connections with the national organization, the mayor learned. Hoan immediately instructed Clarence Senior to obtain legal opinion on the implications of such a development. The national secretary found out that if the referendum resulted

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<sup>1</sup>Following the adoption of the Declaration of Principles, the Socialist party of Oregon disaffiliated itself from the national organization on the ground that the Declaration would subject it to legal difficulties under the criminal syndicalism laws of Oregon. The N.E.C. took a conciliatory attitude towards the Oregon organization. It appointed James D. Graham to allay the fears of Oregon Socialists and bring them back into the fold.

in a victory for the secessionists, the loyal group in Indiana would have legal difficulties in getting on the ballot under the name "Socialist Party." Thereupon/<sup>he</sup> summoned an emergency meeting of the committee on organization, and the committee resolved to suspend the charter of the Socialist party of Indiana.<sup>2</sup> In letters to the N.E.C., the S.E.C. of Indiana, and to the membership of the party in the state, Hoan and Senior explained the circumstances under which the committee on organization had acted.<sup>3</sup>

The suspension of the Indiana charter immediately became a subject of fierce controversy within the party. Thomas supported Hoan's decision "most heartily and emphatically."<sup>4</sup> The Old Guard leaders, on the other hand, condemned the action as a flagrant violation of the party's constitution.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup>Report to the National Convention, May 23-26, 1936 (Chicago, 1936), memorandum 26. The pages of the Report are not numbered.

<sup>3</sup>Hoan to N.E.C., January 28, 1935; Hoan and Senior to the Indiana State Executive Committee, January 30, 1935; Hoan and Senior to the membership of the Socialist party in Indiana, January 31, 1935, Thomas Papers.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas to Senior and Hoan, January 30, 1935, ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Clarence Senior argued that the N.E.C. had legal and constitutional grounds for its action in suspending the Indiana charter. He pointed out that in 1919 the N.E.C. revoked the charters of the Russian, Lithuanian, Lettish, Hungarian, Polish, Ukrainian, and South Slavic federations on the ground that a "self-constituted group" in those organizations was "waging war against the Socialist party and the policies of the party formulated in convention and endorsed by referendum." The N.E.C. followed up its action against the foreign language federations by revoking the charters of Massachusetts, Ohio, and Michigan. Morris Hillquit and James Oneal, members  
(continued on next page)

New York State Executive Committee contended that under the constitution, the N.E.C. ought to have given the Indiana organization thirty days notice to explain its referendum move and could have taken action against it thereafter only at a regular meeting. The New Leader Board announced that the journal would be "neutral" in the controversy and refused to print Norman Thomas's regular column on the ground that he had expressed support for the N.E.C.'s action.<sup>6</sup> Thomas thereupon announced that he would withdraw his column from the journal. He said that the New Leader, as the accredited organ of the party could not remain neutral on an issue involving secession. The right of secession, he asserted, was not a constitutional right. If the N.E.C. had waited for thirty days as suggested by the New Leader, the Indiana organization would have left the party and would have disregarded any summons to explain its rebellious

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of the N.E.C. at that time, voted in favor of the revocation of the charters of the offending state organizations. Senior also pointed out that the wording of the charter given to every state organization specifically recognized the N.E.C.'s right to suspend or revoke it. The form of the charter was: "Your application for affiliation with the Socialist party has been granted, and your organization has been entered on the roll of the party as the state organization of \_\_\_\_\_, provided that your organization shall issue no platform or utterances in conflict with the national platform and will not institute any rules or regulations in conflict with the provisions of the national constitution. The national committee reserves the right to suspend or revoke this charter on account of violation of the above provisions." Report to the National Convention, May 23-26, 1936, memorandum 29.

<sup>6</sup>"The Indiana Case," New Leader, XVIII (February 9, 1935).



conduct.<sup>7</sup>

The New Leader Board openly declared war on the National Executive Committee.

The New Leader will uncompromisingly combat those elements and groups within the party who advocate the acceptance of Communist doctrines including the theory that armed insurrection is a proper Socialist method of achieving Socialist aims.

...The New Leader will continue likewise to combat the effort of those elements which now likewise dominate the National Executive Committee to draw into our party a so-called "revolutionary stream" of dissident Communists, and thereby to transform it into a Communist party bearing the Socialist label.

The New Leader combats and will continue to combat the usurpation by the present National Executive Committee of powers which no previous executive has claimed, which have not been conferred by the national Constitution or national convention or referendum but which it is seeking to use in such a way as to suppress all opposition and establish a virtual dictatorship.<sup>8</sup>

The Old Guard had thus reached the point of charging the National Executive with usurpation, promotion of Communism within the party and advocacy of armed insurrection. Oneal wrote a pamphlet entitled Some Pages of Party History in which he made similar accusations. Oneal called upon the party members to tell the N.E.C., "Obey the Constitution or we will recall you and elect others that will." The Oneal pamphlet

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<sup>7</sup>Thomas to the Board of the New Leader, [February, 1935], Thomas Papers. The Board replied that it could not sit by "supinely and see the party broken up."

<sup>8</sup>"Statement to Our Readers by the New Leader Board of Directors," New Leader, XVIII (March 9, 1935), 1.



was supposedly intended only for circulation among party members. But the Daily Worker got hold of a copy and gleefully ran the full text in seven instalments.<sup>9</sup>

The charges by the Old Guard leaders and the New Leader incensed Daniel Hoan. Though he had no love for the Militants, he was disgusted by what he regarded as systematic vilification and misrepresentation of the N.E.C. by the Old Guard. In a letter to William Feigenbaum, the mayor declared that "New York" was attempting to "indict, undermine and wreck if possible all faith in the N.E.C. because of a mere suspicion. ... All of this indicates to us but one idea that instead of one Daniel De Leon, we have 5 or 6 De Leons in New York who propose to rule or ruin."<sup>10</sup>

Since the Detroit convention, the New Leader had been developing into a purely factional organ of the Old Guard. Militant leaders like Jack Altman, the Delson brothers, and Amicus Most began laying plans for starting a journal to express their point of view. In January, 1935, they held a "caucus" and decided to collect funds for the purpose.<sup>11</sup> Max

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<sup>9</sup>Daily Worker, March 12, 1935, p. 3; March 13, 1935, p. 3; March 14, 1935, p. 3; March 15, 1935, p. 3; March 16, 1935, p. 3; March 18, 1935, p. 3; March 19, 1935, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>Hoan to Feigenbaum, February 26, 1935, Thomas Papers. It is interesting to note that Hoan referred to the Old Guard as "New York."

<sup>11</sup>Herman Wolf to Maynard Krueger, January 29, Archives of the Socialist Party.

Delson wrote to "left wingers" in various parts of the country asking for support to a projected journal to be named The Socialist Call.<sup>12</sup> Thomas was not ready to offer much encouragement to the Militants; he expressed fears that the starting of a rival publication might intensify factionalism in New York.<sup>13</sup> Daniel Hoan warned the Militants that their venture was doomed to failure.<sup>14</sup> He pointed out that his own Milwaukee Leader was constantly in financial difficulties. When the party was not able to have successful local papers, there was no sense in planning for a national journal. "I recall the story of the Irishman who would not pick up a Five Dollar gold piece because he was on his way to California where he was convinced he could shovel gold into wheelbarrows," the mayor commented.<sup>15</sup>

The New Leader's stand on the Indiana issue made Thomas change his mind, and he decided to offer his support to the Militants for starting their journal. The first issue of the Socialist Call made its appearance on March 23, 1935, and its first editorial was a thinly veiled broadside against the

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<sup>12</sup>Delson to "Dear Comrade," January 29, 1935, ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas to Senior, February 1, 1935, Thomas Papers.

<sup>14</sup>Arthur McDowell of Illinois requested the mayor for help on behalf of the Militants. He informed Hoan that the Socialist Call would serve a useful purpose as a national propaganda journal.

<sup>15</sup>Hoan to Arthur McDowell, February 28, 1935, Archives of the Socialist Party.

New Leader.

Journals calling themselves 'Socialist' have failed in that they have confused socialism with reform. They have in recent years lived in eternal fear of offending labor leaders, and have therefore kept silent in the face of reaction and racketeering within the unions. In so doing they have damaged the reputation of the Socialist movement, and have lent aid and comfort to the enemies of labor. They have failed to distinguish between the "liberalism" of Roosevelt and revolutionary socialism. There is need of a Socialist organ that can differentiate between reforms for the preservation of capitalism, and socialism.<sup>16</sup>

The journal carried greetings from Thomas. "It comes out at a time when we desperately need an able propaganda paper, 100 percent loyal to the Socialist party as an aggressive nationwide organization," he declared.

In the N.E.C. Thomas offered a motion to add the Socialist Call to the "accredited list of Socialist journals."

Oneal angrily denounced the motion and its sponsor.

The Call is the organ of a minority faction which Thomas has helped to build and of which he is the leader. He wants to give this faction the blessing of the N.E.C. Moreover, the militant faction with its Communist allies in the party is more than a

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<sup>16</sup>Socialist Call, I (March 23, 1935), 4. In fairness to the Socialist Call it must be stated that in subsequent issues it did not carry on a running fight with the New Leader or the Old Guard. It was much less susceptible than the New Leader to name-calling. Jack Altman, the Delson brothers, and Bruno Fischer were officially associated with the journal when it made its appearance. Some months later the following were announced as members of the editorial board: Murray Baron, David P. Berenberg, Albert Sprague Coolidge, Robert Delson, David Felix, Benjamin Gitlow, Aaron Levenstein, Saul Parker, Abraham Peristein, Glen Trimble, August Tyler, Herbert Zam, Jack Altman, and Samuel Romer.

faction. It has developed into a dual party organization.... Norman Thomas ... pretends before the general membership to be above factions and he is more responsible for the tragic situation in New York than any other member.... He has directly encouraged this faction ...; he is its father-confessor .... No more inept and mediocre leadership has been the lot of the movement in any country.<sup>17</sup>

On the motion of Graham, the N.E.C. decided to postpone the question of the accreditation of the Socialist Call.

The Militants cut themselves entirely aloof from the institutions controlled by the Old Guard. They established the Call Association to manage the affairs of the Socialist Call and the Call Institute to serve as an educational center. The Old Guard undertook retaliatory measures in order to strengthen their hold over party machinery in New York. Even before the Socialist Call had been started, the New Leader Board and the Forward Association had changed their articles of association in order to guard against their being "captured" by the Militants.<sup>18</sup> The Old Guard leaders then sponsored an

<sup>17</sup>New Leader, XVIII (May 11, 1935), 4.

<sup>18</sup>Waldman was principally responsible for such actions. "After Detroit it was obvious that the militant Socialists controlled the Socialist Party. I saw that all that they had to do in order to gain control of the valuable property in New York was to revoke the New York State charter and expel all state organizations controlled by the Social Democrats or the Old Guard. Since there was always a minority of militant Socialists in each of these corporate organizations, these properties involving millions of dollars in property value and cash reserves would quickly fall into the hands of the militants. To prevent this financial coup, mechanics had to be devised and legal techniques worked out. This task ultimately fell to me. All during 1935 and the early part of 1936 my office was converted into a meeting place for the various committees and members of the organization threatened by the

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amendment to the state constitution to provide for the election of State Committee members in primaries instead of by party membership.<sup>19</sup> Fearful of the Militant influence among the members of the Young Peoples' Socialist League, they refused to implement a clause in the party's national constitution making "Yipsils" fulfilling prescribed qualifications eligible for regular membership at the age of 18. When the Y.P.S.L. executive in New York refused to abide by the directive of the City Executive Committee to expel some alleged "Communists," and when it adopted instead a resolution repudiating the New Leader, the C.E.C. ordered a reorganization of the group and locked up its offices.

Despite its oft-repeated devotion to the constitution of the party, the Old Guard did violate it by denying entry into the party for qualified Y.P.S.L. members. Its action was prompted by fears that the Militants might pack the party membership with new members from the ranks of the Y.P.S.L. The anger and indignation that the move provoked among the Militants indicated that, perhaps, the Old Guard was not far

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18 (continued)  
Militants. Constitutions and bylaws were modified in such a way as to prevent control falling into the hands of Norman Thomas' super-revolutionists." Labor Lawyer, 273.

19The change was to prove disastrous for the Old Guard in the primary elections held in 1936.

20"Why the YPSL of New York was Taken Over by the Local," New Leader, XVIII (March 23, 1935), 9.

wrong in its surmise. It was now the turn of the Militants to appeal to the constitution. They went to work vigorously to arouse opposition to the Old Guard's action, and very soon representatives of the state organizations of Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, and fifty-two delegates to the New York Central Committee of the party called upon the N.E.C. to revoke the charter of the New York state organization.

The N.E.C. responded to the demand with remarkable alacrity. It directed the New York S.E.C. to appear before it and show cause why the state charter should not be revoked "in view of the failure of the present organization to ... obey the orders of the National Executive Committee..., in particular the order requiring admission to the party of qualified persons at the age of eighteen." The New York organization fired back an angry reply and accused the N.E.C. of attempting to wreck the party. "We are unalterably opposed to turning the Socialist Party in the direction of Communism," the State Executive Committee of New York declared.<sup>21</sup> The New Leader let loose a vigorous blast at the N.E.C. in an article entitled "Stop These Party Wreckers!"

This is unsufferable insolence, a violation of democracy and a burlesque reign of terror which began with the raid on the Indiana organization. It is a deliberate attempt to deliver the state organization to an alliance of militants and Communists over the heads of a big majority of party members in New York

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<sup>21</sup>"The N. Y. State Organization Challenges N.E.C. Authority," New Leader, XVIII (March 23, 1935), 9.

State.<sup>22</sup>

When the N.E.C. met in Buffalo in March, Jack Altman presented formal charges against the New York organization on behalf of the Militants, while Aaron Levenstein appealed to the N.E.C. to overrule the move to reorganize the Y.P.S.L. in New York. The N.E.C. also received communications from the state organizations of New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Michigan, and Massachusetts demanding revocation of New York's charter.<sup>23</sup> Hapgood, Daniel, and Coolidge favored immediate revocation, but Hoan and Graham warned that such an action would certainly provoke a demand for a referendum of the party membership. Finally the N.E.C. adopted a compromise motion proposed by Daniel Hoan. The resolution stressed the need for harmony in New York and proposed an eight-point program to be implemented by the two rival "groups" in New York.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>"Stop These Party Wreckers!" New Leader, XVIII (March 16, 1935), 11.

<sup>23</sup>"N.E.C. at Buffalo Confronted by Party Paralysis," New Leader, XVIII (March 30, 1935), 5.

<sup>24</sup>The Hoan resolution laid down the following terms: 1. both groups should adhere to the resolutions of the N.E.C. providing for the ineligibility to membership in the party of advocates of communism and violence; 2. the New York State Committee should issue a statement accepting the Declaration of Principles adopted at Detroit, while reserving the right to advocate changes in it; 3. local, state and national constitutions should be rigidly enforced; 4. the New York State Committee should rescind its resolution forbidding locals from accepting qualified Y.P.S.L. members as regular members of the party; 5. party members, committees, and journals should not to issue public statements attacking the integrity of comrades, the party itself, or of duly

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The New York S.E.C. objected to its being treated as a "group," and reiterated its assertion that the N.E.C.'s action was a violation of the national and state constitutions of the party.<sup>25</sup> The N.E.C. then appointed a committee of enquiry to visit New York to study the situation at first hand. Oneal promptly charged that the "snooper committee" was stacked against New York and that its members were hand-picked by Thomas.<sup>26</sup> As the enquiry committee was about to begin its work in New York, the Daily Worker carried the report of a speech that Earl Browder had made a few days earlier. The report quoted Browder as stating: "We want to build a strong left wing in the Socialist Party, influence its development." The New Leader presented it as complete proof of its allegations that its opponents were stooges of the Communist party. "COMMUNIST LEADER ADMITS ALLIANCE WITH SOCIALIST PARTY" screamed a banner headline.

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constituted committees; 6. Local and State Committees in New York should deal promptly with all questions in dispute on organization and membership in a democratic and constitutional manner; 7. Y.P.S.L. of New York City should be reinstated on the basis that it should conform to the decisions of the Local. Y.P.S.L. should not be required to support any Socialist paper that engaged in factional warfare; 8. If the New Leader restored its former constitution and ceased to be a factional organ, the Socialist Call should be discontinued. Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>"New York Replies to N.E.C.," New Leader, XVIII (May 11, 1935), 7, 9.

<sup>26</sup>James Oneal, "Party Crisis Grows as Socialists Strive to Save Their Organization from Disruption," New Leader, XVIII (June 15, 1935), 3-4.



The mask has been thrown off. The Communist Party, through Earl Browder, official spokesman of the Kremlin in Union Square, now openly admits what has long been suspected.

The devastating internal warfare in the Socialist party is a deliberate plant of the Communist party for its own purposes.<sup>27</sup>

In another article William Feigenbaum described how the "Left wing" had "wrecked" the party in a number of states.<sup>28</sup> "Shall we be a real party, or shall we be a pious sect?" asked Algernon Lee in yet another article.<sup>29</sup> The attacks launched by the Old Guard leaders were provocative in the extreme. Expressing the point of view of the Militants, Aaron Levenstein criticized the "scare story" in the New Leader and declared that it was pathetic that "some Socialists should be willing to combine the perversions of the Communist Browder with the red-baiting of a Hearst to the detriment of the party."<sup>30</sup> "The New Leader's controversial style shows

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<sup>27</sup>"Communist Leader Admits Alliance with Militants in the Socialist Party," ibid.

<sup>28</sup>William M. Feigenbaum, "Left Wing Covers States with Party Wreckage," ibid.

<sup>29</sup>"Shall We Be a Real Party, or Shall We Be a Pious Sect?" ibid., 10.

<sup>30</sup>Aaron Levenstein, "Truth Finally Revealed with Daily Worker's Aid," Socialist Call, I (June 22, 1935), 8. See also David Berenberg, "Facts about New York and About the Nation," ibid.

To cite Browder's statement as proof that an alliance existed between the Communist party and the Militants was hardly an example of fair reporting and comment. Communist leaders had spoken on several previous occasions about the growth of leftist sentiment within the Socialist party and  
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that some of our Old Guard friends who are so opposed to Communism have nothing to learn from Communists in the method of fighting," commented Norman Thomas.<sup>31</sup>

The situation in New York appeared to have reached a crisis. The bureau of the Labor and Socialist International was seriously perturbed and urged that "nothing should be left undone" to maintain the unity of the party.<sup>32</sup> Daniel Hoan and Darlington Hoopes, who were not directly involved in the squabble, exerted themselves in an effort to bring about a truce. As a result principally of pressure from them, the N.E.C. at its meeting in New York in July appointed a sub-committee to hold an informal conference with a group of nine members of the New York State Committee. After prolonged deliberations

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of the "spontaneous" demand for a united front from rank and file party members. There was nothing startlingly new in the Browder statement quoted by the New Leader. For instance, in a speech delivered on February 23, 1935, Browder declared that he saw a "genuine Left trend" among the rank and file members of the Socialist party. Earl Browder, "What is Happening to the Socialist Party of America," Daily Worker, March 9, 1935. Browder often had a few sympathetic words for the R.P.C. but had always denounced Thomas and the Militants at least as severely as he did the Old Guard leaders. The Central Committee of the Communist party, in a resolution adopted in January called for a continuing fight against Old Guard Socialists. But the party wanted an even stronger struggle against Thomas. It declared that "an extremely intensive struggle must be carried on against the middle trend represented by Thomas...." "Immediate Tasks of Communist Party, Units and Members," ibid., January 26, 1935, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup>Norman Thomas, "A Statement on the Party Situation," Socialist Call, I (June 29, 1935), 8.

<sup>32</sup>Adler to O Neal, Thomas and Senior, July 16, 1935, Thomas Papers.

the joint meeting produced a "harmony pact" outlining an eight-point program for ending factionalism in the party. The N.E.C. accepted the pact, Allen, Krueger, Hapgood, and Daniel dissenting. The program was virtually the same as was adopted by the N.E.C. at its Buffalo meeting. As an obvious concession to the Old Guard the "harmony pact" specifically reiterated that advocates of communism and of violence were ineligible for party membership. The terms were defined as applying to those who practiced or advocated 1. violent insurrection; 2. dictatorship or abandonment of democracy either within the party or as a method of achieving socialism; 3. subjection of the party to bureaucratic discipline from abroad, as that imposed by the Third International; and 4. the use of deceitful, disruptive or underground tactics even as a means to a worthy end.<sup>33</sup>

The Old Guard welcomed the harmony pact and the New Leader carried laudatory articles about the N.E.C.'s actions.<sup>34</sup> The New York State Committee unanimously approved the pact.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup>"How the Party's Peace Pact was Drafted in Committee," New Leader, XVIII (July 20, 1935), 3; "N.E.C. Members Debate Points of Harmony Pact," ibid.

<sup>34</sup>William M. Feigenbaum, "N.E.C. Meeting Paves Way for Harmony in the Party," ibid.; 1. Algernon Lee, "A Victory for the Whole Socialist Party," ibid.; "A Program for Conciliation," ibid.; George I. Steinhardt, "The Party is Reunited," New Leader, XVIII (August 3, 1935), 2.

<sup>35</sup>"N. Y. Socialists Approve Party's Harmony Pact," New Leader, XVIII (July 27, 1935), 15.

The Socialist Call, however, declared that it was disappointed with the decision of the N.E.C. Delson, Altman, and their colleagues among the Militants regarded the N.E.C.'s action as, in a way, a capitulation to the Old Guard. The Militants feared that the Old Guard leaders would raise the issue of "Communism" before long and would employ it to drive them out of the party. The Militants had, perhaps, hoped that the N.E.C. would take a stern stand that would force the Old Guard to bolt the party. "The action of the NEC," declared an editorial in the Socialist Call, "is a turn to the right, away from the spirit of the Detroit convention. This episode, however, cannot for any length of time hamper the progress of revolutionary socialism."<sup>36</sup> The straggling remnants of the R.P.C., disowned alike by the Old Guard and the Militants, issued a pamphlet "evaluating" the N.E.C.'s decision and condemning it as a "surrender" to the Old Guard.<sup>37</sup>

The "harmony pact" was, however, destined to be short-lived. A struggle developed in the New York Local of the American Federation of Labor about which Militants and the Old Guard took diametrically opposite views. The New Leader carried long articles by office-bearers of the Local accusing Maynard Krueger and some other Militants of joining hands with the Communists and other left wingers to sabotage the

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<sup>36</sup>"The NEC Decision," The Socialist Call, I (July 20, 1935), 4.

<sup>37</sup>The NEC Neither "Practical" Nor "Just" (New York, 1935).

organization. Krueger and Biemiller vehemently denied the accusations.<sup>38</sup> The pact evaporated into thin air when the Old Guard came to know that Norman Thomas had agreed to debate Earl Browder in Madison Square Garden.<sup>39</sup> The City Executive

<sup>38</sup>Abraham Lefkowitz, "Communists Wreck the Teachers' Union," New Leader, XVIII (September 7, 1935), 1-2. The New York Local of the A.F.T. was for long the victim of factional squabbles. Dr. Henry R. Linville and Lefkowitz battled for ten years against attempts by Lovestoneite "progressives" and Communist-inspired "rank and filers" to fight their battles within the organization. In 1933 John Dewey was invited to investigate the situation in the Local, and his report condemned the activities of the rival Communist groups. See "Dewey Report Backs Linville Group in Union," New Leader, XVIII (September 14, 1935), 1. In 1935 the Executive Board of the Local appealed to the Executive Council of the A.F.T. to rescind its charter so that they could reorganize the Local, leaving out Communist elements. The convention of the A.F.T. held in Cleveland in August turned down the appeal, despite a telegram from Green calling for a revocation of the charter. Linville and Lefkowitz charged that Krueger had captured control of the convention by setting up several "paper locals" and by an alliance with "left wing" and reactionary elements. In a reply to Lefkowitz, Biemiller asserted that it would be contrary to trade union democracy to eliminate members purely on the basis of their political beliefs. Andrew J. Biemiller, "Biemiller Denies Charges by Lefkowitz on Teachers," New Leader, XVIII (September 14, 1935), 3. Oneal answered that the Communists in the Local were sought to be removed not for their opinions but for their activities. James Oneal, "Where the Socialist Party Stands on Union Issues," ibid., 4. Thomas expressed the view that Lefkowitz was confronted with "an undoubted evil" in the Local, but that the method that he adopted for curing it was wrong. Thomas to Senior, September 10, 1935, Thomas Papers.

<sup>39</sup>The Communist party suggested the debate as part of its campaign to bring about a "Popular Front" in the United States. The campaign was in line with the decisions of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in July-August, 1935. The Congress directed all Communist parties to intensify the tactic of "united front from above," and to seek alliances with the leaders of social democratic and even right wing parties in the fight against fascism. The American Communists were also interested in intensifying the divisions  
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Committee of New York disapproved of the debate and directed Thomas to withdraw from the affair. Thomas declined to do so and pointed out that he had debated many Communists in previous years. He emphasized that the debate would serve as a defense "against the continual pressure of the Communists under their new line upon Socialists."<sup>40</sup> The City Executive regarded Thomas's action as a flagrant violation of party discipline. The Socialist Call in an editorial called upon the N.E.C. to thwart the actions of a "dwindling sorehead minority that would prefer to ruin the party if it cannot rule it...."<sup>41</sup>

The N.E.C., at its meeting in Chicago between October 11 and 13, ruled that the Thomas-Browder debate did not violate party discipline. The committee censured the New Leader for publishing one-sided articles about the crisis in the New York

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in the Socialist party. Browder tempted the Militants by offering them the entire proceeds from the sale of tickets to the meeting. The Socialist Call and the national office of the party needed funds urgently and the Militants accepted the Communist invitation.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas to Gerber, October 8, 1935, Thomas Papers. A political debate in Madison Square Garden was an unprecedented affair. The Browder-Thomas debate drew a capacity crowd of over 20,000 paying admission charges ranging from 40 cents to \$3.30. Thomas had the better of the argument, but Browder's objective of intensifying the division between the Old Guard and the Militants was also fulfilled. For the full text of the debate, see Which Road for American Workers, Socialist or Communist? (New York, 1936).

<sup>41</sup>"An Open Letter to the National Executive Committee," Socialist Call, I (October 12, 1935), 4.



Local of the American Federation of Teachers. As a final shot at the Old Guard, the N.E.C. elected Devere Allen as its representative on the L.S.I. executive, in the place of O Neal.

The Chicago decisions led the Old Guard leaders to conclude that the N.E.C., acting in collaboration with the Militants, was determined to drive them out of the party. They therefore braced themselves for swift action to tighten their control over party apparatus in New York state. Their opportunity arose when the Militant minority on the New York City Central Committee blocked a motion to expel a member on a charge of belief in "armed insurrection." By a vote of 69 to 47 the Central Committee adopted a resolution favoring an immediate reorganization of party branches "so as to put an end to factional organizations and disruptive activities, enforce the orders of the National Executive Committee and the State Committee concerning the ineligibility to party membership of those advocating violence, armed insurrection or dictatorship as a means of achieving Socialism, and put Local New York in condition to carry on effective work." The resolution authorized the C.E.C. to appoint officers to carry out the reorganization program.<sup>42</sup> The Executive Committee promptly labelled the Socialist Call, the Call Association, and the Call Institute as "dual organizations" and ordered all party members to sever their connections with them. Failure

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<sup>42</sup>"Dual Organization Banned by New York Socialist Party," New Leader, XVIII (November 14, 1935), 2.

to do so would be regarded as a violation of party discipline, the Committee warned.<sup>43</sup> "The issue ... is clear: Shall Communists in the party remain and more Communists come in, or shall those in be put out and the doors be closed against others who seek admission?" declared Oneal.<sup>44</sup>

The Old Guard's action was a declaration of war against the Militants, coupled with a demand for unconditional surrender. When the City Central Committee endorsed the directive of the executive by a vote of 48 to 44, the Militants led by Max Delson staged a walk out. Adjourning to the offices of the Socialist Call, they announced their decision to constitute themselves as the real "City Central Committee" of New York. Norman Thomas addressed them and promised his support to their efforts to win official recognition from the party. A few days later, Militant delegates from 36 branches in the city held a meeting and decided to request all locals in New York State to send representatives to a conference in Utica.<sup>45</sup>

The Socialist Call, in an editorial, expressed relief at the turn of events.

The long struggle is over. The reactionary elements that thought they could suppress freedom of thought and expression within the Socialist Party

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<sup>43</sup>New Leader, XVIII (December 7, 1935), 2.

<sup>44</sup>James Oneal, "The Issue in Local New York," New Leader, XVIII (November 30, 1935), 4.

<sup>45</sup>Socialist Call, I (December 14, 1935), 2, 12.



have read themselves out of party control. Now that the air has been cleared the Socialist Party in New York can at last begin to function.<sup>46</sup>

In a long "Letter to the Membership" the journal set forth a series of "charges" against the Old Guard. It accused Waldman, Oneal, Lee, and Gerber as "party wreckers" who had flouted the authority of the party, waged a consistent campaign of vilification against the national office and the N.E.C. and had slandered the leadership of the national organization as "Communist" and "Un-American."<sup>47</sup> Norman Thomas declared that the responsibility for splitting the party lay squarely on the shoulders of the Old Guard.

...we are not splitting the party; we are saving it from petty tyrants who would destroy it. We are not denying democracy; we are saving it from the lawless dictatorship of the Old Guard-Forward coalition. The position of these party wreckers is clear. They are trying vainly to tear down a party they can no longer control. ...They are capable of reacting only to hate of Communism and fear of losing their power in the party. ...It is no longer right wing against left, but democratic, aggressive, inclusive Socialism against a weird combination of sectarianism, love of power, and desire to reduce the Socialist party to a little group to use for bargaining with labor politicians and even with old party office

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<sup>46</sup>"The Job That Lies Ahead," Socialist Call, I (December 14, 1935), 6.

<sup>47</sup>"A Letter to the Membership," ibid., Sec. II, 2-3; See also Aaron Levenstein, "The Old Guard Fights by Slander and Lies," ibid., 3; Haim Kantorovitch, "The Old Guard," ibid., 1, 4.

holders who have jobs to give out.<sup>48</sup>

Thomas refuted the charge that the opponents of the Old Guard were the allies of the Communists. "We are not giving over the party to Communism but saving it for Socialism," he asserted. Old Guard remnants in New York, he said, were no more than a mere sect. "Like Shakespeare's Touchstone, they can say of that little sect, 'a poor thing, but mine own.'"<sup>49</sup>

The Militant-sponsored Utica conference voted to turn itself into an emergency convention of the Socialist party of New York. It elected temporary officers and instructed them to appear before the N.E.C. to claim recognition as the official state committee of New York.<sup>50</sup>

The Old Guard charged that the Militants had seceded from the party. The New Leader accused them of being the tools of the Comintern, and alleged that the Daily Worker had

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<sup>48</sup>"A Letter from Thomas to the New York Party," ibid., 3. Lee was incensed by Thomas's statement that the Old Guard hankered to bargain with "labor politicians." "How do you like the logic?" he asked. "It is all right to bargain with the Communists, to arrange debates with them, but it is wrong to fraternize with the labor movement, to seek a healthy fruitful relation with organized labor."

<sup>49</sup>Socialist Call, I (December 14, 1935), 12.

<sup>50</sup>Socialist Call, I (January 4, 1936), 6. David P. Berenberg, "21 New York Locals Vote to form New State Organization," ibid., 7. Thomas wrote to a number of party branches appealing to them to send delegates to the conference. For an Old Guard interpretation of the Utica meeting, see August Claessens, "Bolters in Utica Conference Present Tragi-Comedy," New Leader, XIX (January 4, 1936), 2.

become the virtual official organ of the "splitters."<sup>51</sup> Particularly bitter were the Old Guard attacks on Norman Thomas. Oneal assailed Thomas as an unprincipled opportunist.<sup>52</sup> Lee denounced Thomas as the "Lost Leader" who had schemed for three years to drive the Old Guard out of the party.<sup>53</sup> In the foreign language federations the Old Guard took the offensive against Thomas and the Militants. The organ of the Finnish Federation, Raivaaja, accused Thomas of having flirted with the Communists and consistently given aid and comfort to the Militants.<sup>54</sup> Old James Maurer issued a statement condemning the "betrayers of the cause," while Frederic Heath, one of the founders of the Social Democracy, condemned the actions of Norman Thomas and the N.E.C.<sup>55</sup>

The Forward Association setup a committee consisting of

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<sup>51</sup>"Big Membership Meeting Pledges Loyalty, Denounces Secessionists," New Leader, XVIII (December 14, 1935), 1, 2. "Militant Bolt is Backed by Communists--Daily Worker Becomes Virtual Official Organ of Splitters," New Leader, XVIII (December 21, 1935), 10.

<sup>52</sup>James Oneal, "Questions for Norman Thomas," New Leader, XVIII (December 28, 1935), 7.

<sup>53</sup>"Algernon Lee's Notable Speech at Cooper Union," New Leader, XIX (January 4, 1936), 2.

<sup>54</sup>Raivaaja, December 7, 1935, translation from the Finnish, Thomas Papers. On a latter occasion the same journal stated that Thomas imagined himself to be a great man but failed to realize that it was his association with the party that had lifted him out of his obscurity as a pastor in New York. January 15, 1936, ibid.

<sup>55</sup>New Leader, XVIII (December 27), 3.

Joseph Weinberg, Adolph Held, and B. C. Vladeck to explore ways and means of avoiding a split in the party. Vladeck earnestly appealed to Thomas to champion the cause of harmony:

I am willing to stake my reputation on the statement that if the present split in the Party is permitted to continue, you will not be building a better party but a worse one. ...Comrade Thomas: Mark my word. If the present breach is not healed up, there will be no Socialist Party to speak of in New York City and if one should come, you will not be in it. And in spite of all differences of opinion and the accumulation of personal resentments and personal squabbles, I think there is still room in the Party for all of us.<sup>50</sup>

The Forward Association's attempt proved fruitless. Neither the Old Guard nor the Militants was willing to arrive at a compromise except on terms of a virtual surrender by the rival group. Thomas too saw little prospect of a real compromise with the Old Guard.

When the N.E.C. met in Philadelphia early in January, 1936, Thomas and the Militants were hopeful that they would be able to obtain recognition for their own "state committee." The Old Guard "state committee" refused to send a representative to the N.E.C. meeting and characterized the proceedings as a farce. At the meeting itself, Devere Allen moved that the Militant "state committee" should be recognized as the official organization of the party in New York. Krueger and Hapgood supported the motion, but Hoopes and Coolidge expressed the view that a further attempt should be made to

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<sup>50</sup>Vladeck to Thomas, December 13, 1935, Thomas Papers.

resolve the differences between the two rival groups. Towards that end Hoopes moved that the N.E.C. should suspend the charter of the New York state organization and that a committee of fifteen, broadly representative of all the segments of the membership in New York, should be appointed to implement the task of reorganizing the party.<sup>57</sup> The motion prescribed that any member would be eligible to enter the reorganized party provided he declared his willingness to abide by the constitution of the party, the Declaration of Principles, and party decisions arrived at by a majority. After the completion of the reorganization, regular officers would be elected by duly qualified members.<sup>58</sup>

Oneal made a bitter attack on the Militants and Thomas and presented a resolution urging that formal charges be presented to the New York "state committee" (Old Guard) and thirty days be allowed for a reply. The motion was voted down, while the Hoopes motion was passed, with only Oneal and Graham dissenting. Accusing the N.E.C. majority as "betrayers of their trust," Oneal stalked out of the meeting hall.<sup>59</sup>

The Militants professed to be somewhat disappointed that

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<sup>57</sup>Daniel Hoan did not attend the meeting but sent a letter in which he suggested the setting up an impartial committee to tackle the situation.

<sup>58</sup>"Socialist NEC Lifts Charter in New York State," Socialist Call, I (January 11, 1936), 3-4.

<sup>59</sup>"Protests Against Action of the N.E.C.," New Leader, XIX (January 11, 1936), 2-4.

their "state committee" was not officially recognized but welcomed the action of the N.E.C. on the ground that it would prevent any undemocratic actions that the Old Guard might engineer.<sup>60</sup> Thomas declared that the N.E.C. decision certainly did not imply a purge of any group but offered a means of attaining unity.<sup>61</sup> However, Old Guard representatives appointed by the N.E.C. to serve on the reorganization committee refused to associate themselves with the task. The New Leader exhorted party members not to register "with the Thomas commissars set up by the usurping National Executive Committee."<sup>62</sup> The Old Guard also sponsored an "Eastern States Socialist Conference" which adopted a resolution, demanding that the N.E.C. should rescind its decision suspending the New York state charter within 30 days. The resolution warned the N.E.C. that if the demand were not fulfilled within the stipulated period, the conference would be reconvened "to take such action as may be deemed necessary."<sup>63</sup>

In the N.E.C. Graham moved that the suspension of New

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<sup>60</sup>"The Philadelphia Decision." Socialist Call, I (January 11, 1936), 6.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>62</sup>"S. P. Members will not Register with Usurpers," New Leader, XIX (January 18, 1936), 3.

<sup>63</sup>Emil Limbach to N.E.C., January 22, 1936, Thomas Papers. Representatives of the state organizations of Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Maryland, and of the Jewish, Finnish and Italian Federations attended the conference. The New York Old Guard group played host to the gathering.

York's charter should be rescinded. "Here are Devere Allen and Norman Thomas--two ordained ministers who on a Sabbath morning have expounded from the pulpit the teachings of the lowly Nazarene, ... doing things that will create hate, malice and ill will among comrades," Graham said.<sup>64</sup> The N. E.C. turned down his motion and sent a courteous but firm letter to the Eastern States conference reiterating its determination to proceed with the reorganization program.<sup>65</sup>

Primaries for the election of delegates to national and state conventions were scheduled to take place in April, and the Old Guard leaders were confident that they could score a decisive victory. Waldman issued a public statement in which he stated that the enrolled Socialist voters of New York could be depended upon to "distinguish between Communism, even if it is of the milk-and-water variety which the Socialist left-wing advocates, and social democracy."<sup>66</sup> The Militants accepted the challenge and both sides began to prepare furiously for the trial of strength.<sup>67</sup> The Old Guard organized a "Committee of One Thousand" to support its ticket and made "Communism and dictatorship" the principal issue

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<sup>64</sup>Graham to Senior, January 30, 1936, ibid.

<sup>65</sup>"N.E.C. Reaffirms Raid on New York Socialists," New Leader, XIX (February 15, 1936), 3.

<sup>66</sup>New York Times, February 10, 1936, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup>New York Times, February 12, 1936, p. 9.

in the campaign.<sup>68</sup> The New Leader carried stories of how the "party splitters" faced certain defeat in the primaries.<sup>69</sup> On the eve of the election, the Old Guard staged another session of the "Eastern States conference." The conference urged New York Socialists to vote for the Old Guard slate in the election.<sup>70</sup> Addressing the Conference, Waldman described the supporters of Thomas as a "hopeless minority" and predicted that they would be defeated.<sup>71</sup>

The Militants expressed confidence that the Socialist voters would "administer the deserved rebuke to the Old Guard."<sup>72</sup> Thomas was their trump card, and he made several speeches in support of the Militant slate.

The elections resulted in a victory for the Militants. Thirty candidates on the Militant slate won election as delegates to the national convention, while only 12 Old Guard nominees emerged successful. The Militants elected 77 state

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<sup>68</sup>James Maurer, Jasper McLevy, and Theodore Debs, brother of Eugene Debs, endorsed the efforts of the Committee of One Thousand. See New York Times, March 9, 1936, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup>See, for instance, "Party Splitters Face Defeat in The Primaries," New Leader, XIX (March 28, 1936), 1.

<sup>70</sup>"Socialists Rally to Rescue Party from Disruption," New Leader, XIX (April 4, 1936), 1, 7.

<sup>71</sup>New York Times, March 29, 1936, p. 26.

<sup>72</sup>"A Primary Fight," Socialist Call, II (April 4, 1936), 4. Harold Laski, the British Socialist, expressed the hope that the Old Guard would be "resoundingly beaten" in the primaries; ibid.



committeemen as against the Old Guard's 54.<sup>73</sup>

"Our Old Guard friends say they believe in democracy. Well, the verdict of democracy is in favor of the reorganized Socialist Party of New York State set up by the N.E.C.," declared Norman Thomas, commenting on the outcome of the elections.<sup>74</sup> The Old Guard came out with a familiar answer-- it was all the work of Communists. In a front page editorial, the New Leader declared: "There was no primary contest in the Communist Party. The Communist contest was in the Socialist Party." The editorial asserted that the dues-paying Socialists of New York had really voted for the Old Guard ticket. They had really given their mandate to the "real Socialists" on the Old Guard slate. "This mandate we accept. The majority of a few hundred votes which the final returns may show for the Thomas group in no way affects this mandate...",<sup>75</sup> the editorial added.

Louis Waldman served notice that his group would bolt the party if the national convention scheduled to be held in Cleveland, Ohio, in May, refused to seat the Old Guard delegation from New York. To reinforce his threat, he announced that he would support President Roosevelt for re-election if the convention nominated an unacceptable

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<sup>73</sup>Socialist Call, II (April 18, 1936).

<sup>74</sup>Norman Thomas, "Socialism Winner in Primary Sweep," Socialist Call, II (April 11, 1936), 6.

<sup>75</sup>"The Battle Continues," New Leader, XIX (April 11, 1936), 1.

candidate.<sup>76</sup> "If the Cleveland convention resulted in the emergence of "a covertly bolshevistic, undemocratic, essentially anti-labor party, masquerading under the Socialist name, loyalty to Socialist ideals will forbid us to support it," the New Leader warned.<sup>77</sup>

Evaluating the developments within the party, Thomas came to the conclusion that a split would take place at Cleveland. He rationalized that such a result might not prove harmful to the party in the long run. "...I would rather have a party somewhat smaller numerically but more united in spirit and more enthusiastic about fighting for Socialism than to have a larger party with divisions still unhealed," he wrote to Harry Laidler. "We might in the end gain more votes by the activities of this small and unified party free from the incubus that Waldman and others have put upon it," he added. Thomas could see no prospect of a compromise unless the "malcontents" were prepared to return to the party without any conditions except an assurance of their right "to a voice and vote in Party proceedings."<sup>78</sup>

Thomas began to lay plans to ensure that a sufficient number of delegates to the convention would be committed to support the N.E.C.'s actions. He assigned the task to

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<sup>76</sup>New York Herald-Tribune, May 7, 1936, clipping, Thomas Papers.

<sup>77</sup>"What Socialists Think About Unions' Endorsement of Roosevelt," New Leader, XIX (May 16, 1936), 1.

<sup>78</sup>Thomas to Laidler, May 18, 1936, Thomas Papers.

Maynard Krueger and advised him to "play up" Waldman's statement threatening to support Roosevelt.<sup>79</sup> He instructed his associates to be ready with a plan on what should be done if the Old Guard obtained enough support from the Wisconsin delegation to have its way on "really significant issues."<sup>80</sup> He suggested that they should keep on good terms with the Wisconsin delegates and hold consultations with them.<sup>81</sup>

The 19th convention of the Socialist party began in Cleveland on May 23, 1936. On the previous evening the N.E.C. voted to seat the Militant delegation from New York as the official delegation from the state with the proviso that "in the event of a motion challenging the validity of the entire course of action of the National Executive Committee toward New York State, no delegates from New York may vote." Old Guard leaders held a strategy meeting and finalized their course of action. Anxious to profit by any split that might take place, leaders of the Communist party and the splinter groups also arrived in Cleveland. Earl Browder told reporters that he would be glad to see a ticket with Thomas and himself as standard bearers. To counteract

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<sup>79</sup>Thomas to Krueger, May 4, 1936, ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Thomas to Allen, Altman, Felix, Hall, Krueger, and Sullivan, May 11, 1936, ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Thomas to Senior and Krueger, [May, 1936], ibid.

the effect of Browder's statement, Thomas forcefully repudiated the offer and, in a nation-wide radio address, denounced the "weird opportunism" of the Communist party.<sup>82</sup>

When the proceedings of the convention began it became clear that anti-Old Guard groups constituted a majority. There were rival delegations from New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Texas and in each case the convention voted to recognize the anti-Old Guard delegation.<sup>83</sup> The convention adopted the N.E.C.'s recommendation in favor of seating the Militant delegation from New York headed by Norman Thomas. The delegates also voted in favor of a debate on the New York controversy and laid down that in any voting that might take place on the issue, representatives from New York should not participate. At this point the Old Guard delegation led by Waldman entered the hall, and pandemonium reigned as rival groups broke out into cheers and boos. On the motion of Thomas, the convention asked the Old Guard delegates to take their seats on the platform.

James Oneal made a long speech in the course of which he demanded that the N.E.C.'s action in suspending the charter

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<sup>82</sup>For an account of the Communist party's efforts to run a joint Socialist-Communist ticket in 1936, see Chapter XIII.

<sup>83</sup>The Old Guard charged later that the N.E.C. had packed the convention with "Thomas rubber stamps." "Paper Locals in 25 States Packed Cleveland Convention," New Leader, XIX (May 30, 1936), 2.

of the New York organization should be declared null and void. He charged that the N.E.C. had become an "executive oligarchy" and had attempted to impose its dictatorship on the party. Members of the N.E.C. majority had become the allies of Communists and insurrectionists, O'Neal said.

Jasper McLevy of Connecticut lent powerful support to the Old Guard cause. He accused the N.E.C. of having acted in an arbitrary manner and asserted that state organizations had a right to formulate their own policies relating to membership and discipline.<sup>84</sup>

Devere Allen presented N.E.C.'s side of the controversy and called upon the delegates not to be misled by the charges that had been levelled against the Committee. Daniel Hoan declared that the N.E.C. had not violated the party's constitution and had tried its best to find an amicable settlement to the New York dispute. He criticized the Old Guard for its uncompromising attitude and for its unwillingness to offer concessions to younger party members. Norman Thomas made a sharp attack on the Old Guard leaders. He said that the "state committee" controlled by the Old Guard had been given several opportunities to be heard but had disregarded them. He demanded that Waldman should frankly tell the

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<sup>84</sup>McLevy Lashes N.E.C. Dictators," New Leader, XIX (June 6, 1936), 9. O'Toole and Polin (Maryland); Van Essen and Williams (Pennsylvania); and Bearak (Massachusetts) supported the Old Guard's position during the debate.

delegates whether he had decided to give his support to Roosevelt in the presidential campaign. Thomas refuted the Old Guard charge that the troubles of the party had started with the adoption of the Declaration of Principles and alleged that the confusion and misapprehensions in the public mind concerning the Declaration were due to the reckless misrepresentations of men like Waldman.<sup>85</sup>

In a speech reflecting scorn and indignation, Waldman denounced the Militants and the N.E.C. and appealed to the convention to seat all the 44 delegates of his group. He said that he was not begging them to seat his group but only demanding what was rightfully their due.

We do not want any compromise. The delegation of New York is not on the auction block. ...We have no bargains. We are either right or wrong. If we are right, the 44 delegates of the state of New York must take their places in this convention.

Waldman said that false and malicious charges had been flung at the Old Guard by its enemies. He was ready to accept the challenge of the detractors of veteran Socialists. "We shall pillory you for what you are, for your opportunism, for your insincerity, for your lack of conviction," he added.

The Old Guard chieftain said that he had been criticized

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<sup>85</sup>"National Party Convention Ends Party Conflict," Socialist Call, II (May 30, 1936), 6. Hapgood (Indiana), Holmes (Pennsylvania), Neissner (New Jersey), Belof (Kansas), McDowell (Illinois), Dullaa (Ohio), Burt (Illinois), and Harlof (Massachusetts), supported the N.E.C.'s actions.

for using strong language against the N.E.C.

Yes, we did. Since when has it become a crime to criticize the National Committee of the Socialist Party? Why, to hear these left wingers talk they would make you believe that the National Executive Committee is the General Staff of the Revolution, military in conception, dictatorial in power, omnipotent in strength, while the membership in the states were mere serfs subject to their command and bound to obey their orders.

Waldman appealed to the convention to declare null and void "the mistake, the error, yes, the crime of the National Executive Committee" in suspending the charter of the New York organization.<sup>86</sup>

When the long debate finally came to an end, Darlington Hoopes offered a motion to the effect that both the contending delegations from New York should be seated with half a vote each. The proposal was defeated by a weighted membership vote of 11,097 to 3,527. Hoan offered another compromise proposal that called for the seating of 32 Militant and 12 Old Guard delegates in accordance with the results of the primary elections. The offer was contingent on the delegates pledging loyalty to the decisions of the convention, recognizing the authority of the N.E.C., and joining the New York state organization recognized by the N.E.C. Several delegates, including some Militants, asked Waldman whether he was prepared to accept the terms of the Hoan compromise. Waldman remained silent. The motion was then defeated by a

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<sup>86</sup>"Waldman Indicts Party Wreckers," New Leader, XIX (June 6, 1936), 7, 10. The text of the speech, as published

(continued on next page)



vote of 10,201 to 4,393. Oneal then offered a resolution calling for the repudiation of the N.E.C.'s action in suspending New York's charter, but it was defeated by 9,322 to 4,397. The convention finally endorsed the actions of the N.E.C. by a vote of 9,449 to 4,809.<sup>87</sup>

The convention's decision meant that the Old Guard had lost its long war against the N.E.C. and the Militants. Opponents of the Old Guard broke into loud cheers as their victory was announced. Suddenly some one called for the singing of the Internationale and most of the delegates jumped on their feet to sing the Socialist anthem. Angry boos interrupted the singing as delegates discovered that Waldman and Lee were remaining seated. "I would not rise to sing a song of solidarity with a group of delegates who have just voted to break the Socialist party," Waldman said.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> (continued)

in the New Leader was liberally interspersed with notations indicating "applause." But in describing the Cleveland convention in his autobiography Waldman wrote: "The Communists and Militant Socialists had done their work well. The convention was stage managed with all the totalitarian showmanship of a Hitler demonstration. The cheering and booing squads were even better organized than they had been at Detroit." Labor Lawyer, 274.

<sup>87</sup> New York Times, May 25, 1936, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. Lee wrote that he remained seated because the enemies of the Old Guard used the anthem as a song of "exulting hate." New Leader, XIX (May 30, 1936), 8. The Militants replied that the anthem was sung in response to the greetings conveyed by a fraternal delegate from Mexico.



Waldman and some of his supporters then walked out of the convention hall. Reassembling in another place they announced their determination to organize a new party. They elected a committee composed of Waldman, Julius Gerber, and August Gerber (New York), Sidney Yellen (Ohio), Edward Thompson (New Jersey), Harry Plampin (Texas), Benjamin Cohen (Missouri), and Jacob Siegel (Illinois) to make a report on matters connected with the organization of the new party. The result of their labors was the establishment of the Social Democratic Federation. Old Guard delegates joined in singing the Internationale, and many had tears in their eyes as finally they broke their ties with the Socialist party with which they had been associated for many long years.<sup>89</sup>

The party of Eugene Debs and Meyer London, of Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit was split in two.

The bulk of the delegates from Connecticut and Pennsylvania, despite their sympathy for the New York Old Guard, did not join the walk out.

After long, and sometimes bitter, debates the Socialist convention adopted several resolutions and a campaign platform.<sup>90</sup> Harry W. Laidler proposed the name of Thomas as the party's nominee for the presidency of the United States.

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<sup>89</sup>New York Times, May 25, 1936, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>90</sup>The resolutions and the platform are described in appropriate places in Chapter XIII.

McLevy loudly demanded that he should be recorded as voting against the nomination, and many delegates from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Connecticut joined him in opposing Thomas.<sup>91</sup> The convention, however, nominated Thomas by an overwhelming majority. George Nelson, a Wisconsin farmer, was unanimously named as the party's vice-presidential candidate.

Thomas, Hoan, Hoopes, Allen, Daniel, Krueger, Coolidge, and Hapgood were re-elected as members of the new N.E.C. Max Raskin of Milwaukee, George Rhodes of Reading, and Max Delson of New York were elected to serve terms on the Committee.

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"Despite all the predictions of our enemies," wrote Jack Altman, the Militant leader, "the Socialist Party has emerged from the Cleveland Convention more unified, more determined to build a powerful party, and with its self-respect retained."<sup>92</sup> Thomas declared that Socialists could be proud of the work of the convention. He argued that no split had taken place at Cleveland. "There was no split. The New York Old Guard could not walk out because it never walked in."<sup>93</sup> Waldman spoke in a different vein. "Thomas

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<sup>91</sup>New York Times, May 26, 1936, pp. 1, 18.

<sup>92</sup>Jack Altman, "An Evaluation of the Socialist Convention," Socialist Call, II (June 6, 1936), 7.

<sup>93</sup>Norman Thomas, "Socialists Face Basic Issues as Other Parties Dodge Them," Socialist Call, II (June 6, 1936), 12.

won a nomination but lost a party," he said. The New Leader prophesied that the Socialist party under Thomas's leadership was doomed to extinction. "Actually," the journal commented, "the party emerged from the convention in a state of complete chaos, no longer even a respectable skeleton of a unified political body."<sup>94</sup>

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The two years between the Detroit and Cleveland conventions were a melancholy period for the party. In the elections held in 1935, only Reading and Bridgeport recorded significant gains. In both cities Socialists won every important municipal office. In Milwaukee in 1936, Daniel Hoan won re-election as mayor by his narrowest margin since 1920. In the rest of the country the party lapsed into a state of suspended animation. Internal squabbles served to undermine such influence as the party had in the labor movement. The task of raising finances became extremely difficult as the impression became widespread that the party was dying.<sup>95</sup> The Communist party, in its new Popular Front

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<sup>94</sup>"Thomas Convention Splits in Left Wing Row; Loyal Socialists Plan New Party," New Leader, XIX (May 30, 1936), 1, 7.

<sup>95</sup>Thomas to McLevy, Allen, Freese, Hoopes, Hoan, Benson, and Biemiller, [February, 1935], Thomas Papers.

"make-up," was able to attract many middle class "liberals" in urban areas. In September, 1935, William Feigenbaum wrote to Thomas that the Socialist party was "licked." "The Communists have us beaten everywhere. Unless a miracle happens, we will be annihilated next year and the Communist will take our place as the principal revolutionary party in America."<sup>96</sup>

The "panacea" movements of Dr. Townsend, Father Coughlin, and Huey Long proved attractive to a far greater number of lower middle class and low income groups than the Socialist party. In some states party members themselves became attracted to such movements. The New Deal measures and the personality of President Roosevelt also led to defections from the Socialist party. In 1935, for the first time since 1927, the party's membership began to decline. "The fact that for many years no constant educational work was carried on among the party membership ... meant that the party was badly prepared to meet such onslaughts," wrote the national secretary, Senior, accounting for the decline in the membership.<sup>97</sup> Old Guard leaders charged that the decline was due to the "suicidal" policies of the N.E.C. and the Militants while Militants asserted that the party had actually been strengthened by the elimination of weak and unsure elements.

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<sup>96</sup>Feigenbaum to Thomas, September 13, 1935. ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Memorandum from the National Secretary to N.E.C. [late 1935], ibid.

The split of 1936 caused a sharp decline in the party's membership. From 19,121 at the end of 1935, it fell to 11,922 at the end of 1936.<sup>98</sup> Those that had left the party were mostly men who had been associated with it for several years. They were lost to the movement, ironically enough, at a time when Norman Thomas was proclaiming from many a platform and in numerous articles the need for an "inclusive" farmer-labor party. The Cleveland convention resulted in the exclusion of Old Guard Socialists from the party and paved the way for the inclusion of Trotskyites--"the pharisees of the revolution."

American Trotskyites, led by James P. Cannon, were anxiously awaiting an opportunity to effect a "French Turn"<sup>99</sup> and enter the Socialist party. Individual members of the group began to join the party and the Y.P.S.L. The Socialist Appeal published from Chicago was principally controlled by those who had supposedly severed their connections with the Trotskyites.<sup>100</sup> Ernest Erber, editor of the Socialist Appeal,

<sup>98</sup>See Table II, Appendix A.

<sup>99</sup>Term given to the maneuver of Trotskyites to enter socialist parties, after its successful implementation in France. The New Leader reported before the Cleveland convention that as early as January, 1936, Leon Trotsky had ordered his followers to enter the Socialist party.

<sup>100</sup>The Socialist Appeal, while supporting the Militants in the fight against the Old Guard, constantly condemned them for their alleged "surrender to expediency" "compromises on questions of revolutionary principle," and alliance with "the Hoan-Hoopers centrists."

won election as national chairman of the Y.P.S.L.

Before the Cleveland convention, the Trotskyite faction in the party was not at all strong. It could easily have been isolated and overcome by party leaders--if they had been united. In their intense dislike of the Old Guard, many Militants did not bother to scrutinize too closely the antecedents and intentions of the new entrants into the party. The action of the Old Guard leaders in labelling all their opponents as Communist stooges served only to make the path easier for the potential infiltrators. While the Old Guard and Militant leaders were battling it out, advance groups of the Trotskyites were able to consolidate their beachheads in the party.

The Trotskyites first joined the American Workers' party organized by A. J. Muste and other leaders of the Congress for Progressive Labor Action. They used the new party as an instrument for furthering their objective of bringing about an organic union with the Socialist party. Their journal, the New Militant, made little secret of its eager anticipation of a split in the Socialist party. After the Cleveland convention, the National Committee of the American Workers' party dissolved the organization and directed its members to enter the Socialist party.<sup>101</sup> The New Militant declared that by expelling the Old Guard, the Socialist party "becomes the best

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<sup>101</sup>"Statement of National Committee," New Militant, II (June 6, 1936), 1, 3.

rallying ground for the revolutionary forces in building the party of American proletarian revolution."<sup>102</sup>

James Cannon wrote several years later that his objective in 1936 was to lead his group out of its political isolation. "The fusion with the Muste organization, and later entry into the Socialist Party, were carried with the deliberate aim of breaking out of propagandic isolation and stagnation and finding a road to wider circles. These actions brought hundreds of new recruits to the party, and gave us the possibility of expanding our activities," Cannon stated.<sup>103</sup> In 1936 the Militants and Thomas could have known by the past behavior of the Trotskyites and by a study of their articles in the New Militant that their desire to enter the Socialist party could not have been prompted by altruism or a sudden conversion to the ideals of Debs, Berger, London, and Hillquit.<sup>104</sup> The Militants, perhaps, believed that they could effectively prevent the Trotskyites from acting as an

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<sup>102</sup>"Workers Party Calls All Revolutionary Workers to Join the Socialist Party," ibid., 1, 3.

<sup>103</sup>James P. Cannon, The Struggle for a Proletarian Party (New York, 1943), 7-8.

<sup>104</sup>In several articles the New Militant employed communist-style polemics against the Militants and Norman Thomas. See "Socialist Party Turns to the Right," I (December 15, 1934), 3; "Old Guard Swamps Militants at SP Meet," I (July 20, 1935), 1, 4; "'Soc. Call' Whines at N.C. Decision," I (July 27, 1935), 4.

organized faction within the party. They were taken in by the apparent willingness of Trotskyites to submit to every condition that they laid down.<sup>105</sup> They took their promises at face value and admitted them into the party--a decision that they were soon to regret.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Writing in 1944, James Cannon gave the following account of his negotiations with the Militants in 1936: "The negotiations with these papier-mache heroes were a spectacle for gods and men. ...I believe that in all my long and ... checkered experience, which has ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous, and vice versa, I never encountered anything so fabulous and fantastic as the negotiations with the chiefs of the 'Militants' caucus in the Socialist Party. ...They were inexperienced and untested. They were ignorant, untalented, petty-minded, weak, cowardly, treacherous and vain. And they had other faults too.... Our problem was to make an agreement with this rabble to admit us to the Socialist Party. In order to do that we had to negotiate. It was a difficult and sticky job, very disagreeable. But that did not deter us. A Trotskyist will do anything for the party, even if he has to crawl on his belly in the mud. We got them into negotiations and eventually gained admission by all sorts of devices and at a heavy cost. ... We received no welcome, no friendly salute, no notice in the press of the Socialist Party. Nothing was offered to us. Not one of the leaders of our party was offered so much as a post as branch organizer by these cheapskates--not one.... When, a little later, the leaders of the Socialist Party began to repent of the whole business ... it was already too late. Our people were already inside the Socialist Party and beginning their work of integrating themselves in the local organizations." Quoted in Bell, "Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Egbert and Persons, eds. Socialism and American Life, I, 386-87.

<sup>106</sup>Thomas told the writer that he did not hold any discussion with J. P. Cannon before the entry of the Trotskyites into the Socialist party. He did meet a few others and "some of them were good men." Thomas felt at that time that he could not count on their words. His acquiescence in the decision to admit Trotskyites into the party was one of his biggest mistakes, he added. Interview with Thomas, September 14, 1954.

The Trotskyites were expelled from the Socialist party in August, 1937.



As the Trotskyites came into the party, the exodus of older Socialists was accelerated. The Jewish Socialist Verband and the Finnish Socialist Federation, the two largest language federations, disaffiliated themselves from the party. The Forward Association, by a vote of 76 to 26, withdrew its endorsement from the Socialist party and appealed to its members to join the Social Democratic Federation. From his sickbed James Maurer warned Pennsylvania Socialists against the "Communist invasion."<sup>107</sup> Shortly afterwards, bitterly assailing Thomas and the N.E.C., Maurer resigned from the Socialist party.<sup>108</sup> In August, 1936, the state convention of the Socialist party of Pennsylvania by a vote of 58 to 32 resolved to disaffiliate itself from the national organization.<sup>109</sup> National secretary Senior charged that the convention had been "packed" by right-wingers and announced that "a state organization of the Socialist party no longer exists in Pennsylvania."<sup>110</sup>

The next blow to the party came from Connecticut. The state convention of the party, dominated by the McLevy group, decided to sever its connection with the Socialist party of

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<sup>107</sup>Maurer to "My Comrades in Berks County," June 25, 1936, Thomas Papers.

<sup>108</sup>Reading Eagle, July 7, 1936; p. 1.

<sup>109</sup>New York Times, August 16, 1936, p. 28.

<sup>110</sup>Press release by Senior, August 21, 1936, Thomas Papers.

the United States of America. Devere Allen, leader of the loyalists, announced that the charter of the state party had automatically passed to his group, and stalked out of the convention. Allen and his followers organized a new state committee but without the Bridgeport Socialists the party was only a ghost of its former self.<sup>111</sup>

Disturbing developments were also under way in Wisconsin. The Socialist party in the state had gradually been moving in the direction of an electoral alliance with the La Follette Progressives and the State Federation of Labor. At a conference of representatives from various groups for launching a new political organization, the La Follette group outvoted Socialists on many issues. The Socialists were not able to persuade the conference to permit them to retain their own party name in the electoral name. Thus in the 1936 elections Socialist candidates ran under the auspices of the Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation.<sup>112</sup>

The Socialist party was in very sad shape as it entered upon the electoral campaign of 1936.

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<sup>111</sup>Bridgeport Telegram, September 14, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>112</sup>See Olson, "Milwaukee Socialists," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), 524-29.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE CAMPAIGN GOES ON!

The factional quarrels in the Socialist party intensified after the Detroit convention in 1934 and culminated in the split at the Cleveland convention in May, 1936. During that period of bitter controversy there was little disagreement between the supporters of the Old Guard and those of Norman Thomas on various measures sponsored by the Roosevelt administration. It was only after the middle of 1935 that the Old Guard gradually began to change its tone towards the administration. The New Leader sought to present the point of view of organized labor, and on most issues its position was not far different from that of the Socialist Call.

There was no difference of opinion between the Militants and the Old Guard on the importance of organizing the share-croppers in southern states and focussing public attention on the defects of the administration's agricultural program. Thomas continued vigorously to support the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and to arouse public opinion to the plight of the share-croppers.

Provoked by Thomas's criticisms of the A.A.A., the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, asked the Socialist leader what exactly he would have done if he had become

President of the United States on March 4, 1933.<sup>1</sup> Thomas replied that his main criticism was not against what Wallace had done but against the "system."

Indeed, ... you are only honestly doing what the capitalist system has always done; namely seeking prosperity on a basis of scarcity of supply. ... The amount of cotton used in the United States for household and domestic purposes is grossly inadequate. ... I am abundantly justified in using the condition of cotton farmers to call attention to the shocking tragedy of capitalism; namely, the tragedy of nakedness and hunger in the midst of potential abundance.

On the question of what his program would have been if he were President, Thomas said that nothing could be done for farmers as farmers except in a carefully prepared national plan embracing the whole economy.<sup>2</sup>

In eastern Arkansas the S.T.F.U. encountered organized opposition from the planters. Many who joined the Union were evicted, and others were subjected to varying degrees of intimidation. Ward Rogers, a 24-year old F.E.R.A. teacher and an organizer for the Union, was arrested on a charge of "anarchy" and sentenced to six months imprisonment.<sup>3</sup> Rogers

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<sup>1</sup>Wallace to Thomas, December 19, 1934, Thomas Papers. Wallace stated that he was "greatly impressed" by Thomas's "earnestness" and "evident desire to bring about conditions which would produce the maximum of material welfare."

<sup>2</sup>Thomas to Wallace, December 21, 1934, *ibid.* Thomas conveyed to Wallace his "deep respect for the spirit you have shown in your most difficult task."

<sup>3</sup>Atley Delaney, "Rodgers Case is More in Offensive of Big Planters Against Union of Farmers," New Leader, XVIII (February 2, 1935), Sec II, 1.

appealed against his conviction, and his case received considerable publicity all over the country. As the evictions continued and as the offensive of the planters against the Union mounted, Thomas decided to visit Arkansas and study the situation at first hand.

Thomas toured Arkansas early in March, 1935, and addressed numerous meetings of share-croppers. He saw for himself that evictions were taking place in violation of the terms of the "contract" signed by the land owners. In the little town of Birdsong, Thomas had an opportunity to learn at first hand the difficult conditions under which organizers for the S.T.F.U. were forced to operate. He was scheduled to address a group of share-croppers who had gathered in front of a "colored" church. Several armed men hovered in the area. "Ladies and Gentlemen," began the chairman of the meeting. The armed men thereupon broke through the ranks of the gathering. "There ain't no ladies here and they ain't no gentlemen on the Platform," their leader shouted. Thomas asked them why they were disturbing a peaceful meeting. "There ain't gonner be no speaking here. We are citizens of this County and we run it to suit ourselves. We don't need no Gawd-Damn Yankee Bastard to tell us what to do and we want you to know that this is the best Gawd-Damned County on earth." One of them struck Thomas while another slugged John Herling, secretary of the Strikers' Emergency Relief Committee. One of the intruders, who identified himself as the deputy sheriff, asked Thomas to leave the town as he could not give protection

to the people who had gathered for the meeting. The intruders carried Thomas forcibly to his car and "escorted" him to the county line.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas came to believe that large scale violence might erupt unless immediate action was taken by the federal government to protect the rights of the tenants. He appealed to Chester Davis, A.A.A. administrator, to launch an "open investigation" of the situation in Arkansas, Texas and other cotton states. "I write earnestly," he declared, "because I think it will only be a miracle that will prevent bloodshed ... arising from the domineering arrogance of the planter class, unless public opinion and the federal government can take some sort of effective action."<sup>5</sup> Failing to get a satisfactory response from the Agriculture Department, Thomas wrote to Felix Frankfurter urging him to bring the plight of the tenants to the attention of President Roosevelt. Frankfurter replied that he did not know anything about agriculture and that it would not be proper for him to raise

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<sup>4</sup>"Norman Thomas Visits the Cotton Fields," mimeographed release by the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, March, 1935, Thomas Papers.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas to Rexford Guy Tugwell, March 28, 1935; Thomas to Chester Davis, March 22, 1935; Thomas Papers.

the matter before Roosevelt.<sup>6</sup>

Thomas wrote to several United States Senators, both Republican and Democrat, urging them to pay heed to the plight of the share-croppers and to safeguard their civil rights. He warned William Green, president of the A. F. of L., that he could not afford to remain a passive spectator of the events in the cotton belt. "As long as there is a reservoir of white and colored workers as badly exploited as these plantation workers the employers always have an advantage in the struggle with organized labor," Thomas declared.<sup>7</sup> Convinced that the salvation of the share-croppers, as of other exploited agricultural workers, lay only in their banding together in strong organizations, Thomas appealed to Senator Robert Wagner to extend the protection of his National Relations bill to agricultural workers. The condition of agricultural

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<sup>6</sup>Frankfurter to Thomas, March 27, 1935, *ibid.* Frankfurter's letter contained some interesting comments on his relations with Roosevelt: "You characterize me as a man 'supposedly high in official position or in the counsels of the Administration.' For this you have no basis except what you read in the papers. You know full well that a thousand newspaper repetitions do not make a thing so. ... My relations to Franklin Roosevelt are wholly unlike those of Colonel House to Woodrow Wilson. After he became Governor, Roosevelt talked with me from time to time about matters within my special field of knowledge, and he has done so from time to time since he went to Washington, but far less frequently than you probably suspect. His consultations and my comments have been restricted to matters about which I presumably know something through my professional studies."

<sup>7</sup>Thomas to William Green, April 3, 1935, *ibid.*

workers, Thomas wrote to Wagner, was worse than that of industrial workers. "A continuance of these conditions is preparing the way for a desperate revolt of virtual serfs. Unless the right to organize peacefully can be guaranteed we shall have a continuance of virtual slavery until the day of revolt," he added.<sup>8</sup> Wagner replied that agricultural workers had been excluded from the purview of his National Labor Relations Bill "only because I thought it would be better to pass the bill for the benefit of industrial workers than not to pass it at all, and that the inclusion of agricultural workers would lessen the likelihood of passage so much as not to be desirable."<sup>9</sup>

Thomas was convinced that the opposition of powerful Southern senators was holding back the Agriculture Department and even progressives like Wagner from rendering any real aid to the agricultural workers--"the Forgotten Men of the New Deal." In a letter to President Roosevelt, Thomas described the happenings in the cotton belt and voiced his opinion that high officials of the Agriculture Department were "frankly in fear of the powers of Southern Senators."<sup>10</sup> Roosevelt replied that an appraisal of the conditions that

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas to Leon Keyserling (secretary to Wagner), April 1, 1935; Thomas to Wagner, April 3, 1935, ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Wagner to Thomas, April 2, 1935, ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas to Roosevelt, April 9, 1935, ibid.



Thomas had described would have to follow careful investigations and that such investigations were under way. Roosevelt added that he discussed the matter with the officials of the Department and that none of them recalled having expressed misgivings "as to the attitude of Southern Senators toward measures designed to benefit their constituents."<sup>11</sup> In another communication, to Roosevelt, the Socialist leader stressed the need to protect "above everything else" the right of tenants and share-croppers to organize. "That is the dynamic force on which we must depend for real progress," he added.<sup>12</sup>

The administration's answer to the exposure of the shortcomings of the A.A.A. by Thomas and others was the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Bill enacted into law in 1937. The measure sought to stem rural decay through rehabilitation and resettlement.<sup>13</sup> The bill contemplated loans to enable tenants to buy farms of their own. In a memorandum to the Senate Committee on Agriculture in May, 1935, Thomas stated that the bill, as it stood, would impose an indefinite burden on the general public for the benefit of owners of land, and of mortgage holders rather than of tenant farmers. It would perpetuate, rather than end the evils of land speculation. Thomas added that the subsidization of an American peasantry

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<sup>11</sup>Roosevelt to Thomas, April 22, 1935, ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas to Roosevelt, April 23, 1935, ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Mitchell, Depression Decade, 215-17.

on subsistence farms was a step of dubious value.

It is simply a gesture by which the leading advocates of the Bill in the Administration would like to divert attention from some results of the AAA and in particular the enormous hypocrisy of Section 7 of the cotton contracts. It should at least be amended to allow the government to encourage cotton cooperatives under expert management. That is to say, whole plantations should be organized as units, socially owned, with good working conditions and security of status for the present tenants who should be trained in cooperation.<sup>14</sup>

Old Guard Socialists had no difference of opinion with Thomas on the share-cropper question, but their organ, the New Leader, gave little publicity to Thomas's actions on behalf of the share-croppers. Editor Oneal contented himself with penning an article on the subject entitled "Union of Pelf, Politics and Piety Backed By Brutal Terror, Enslaves Share Croppers of Arkansas."<sup>15</sup> When A.A.A. was struck down by the Supreme Court the New Leader commented editorially that only a Socialist cooperative society could introduce intelligent control in agriculture.<sup>16</sup> Three months later the Old Guard and the New Leader were vigorously calling for the re-election of Roosevelt.

After his victory in 1936, Roosevelt appointed a

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<sup>14</sup>Thomas to Senate Committee on Agriculture, May 1, 1935, Thomas Papers.

<sup>15</sup>New Leader, XVIII (April 20, 1935), 1, 2. See also "Slavery of Southern Share Croppers Revealed in Report," New Leader, XVIII (December 7, 1935), 1, 6.

<sup>16</sup>"Forty-Eight Little AAA's," New Leader, XIX (March 7, 1936), 8.

committee headed by Henry Wallace to report on "a long-term program of action to alleviate the shortcomings of our farm tenancy system." A representative of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, W. L. Blackstone, was appointed to serve on the committee. Its report, submitted in February 1937, declared that "one farm family out of four occupies a position in the Nation's social and economic structure that is precarious and should not be tolerated."<sup>17</sup>

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On the important problems that faced labor following the Supreme Court's action in invalidating N.R.A. there was little difference of opinion among the principal groups in the Socialist party. They welcomed the Wagner National Labor Relations Act which safeguarded labor's right to collective bargaining. "There are some changes I would like in the bill but I heartily approve of its general intention to eliminate Company unions," Thomas wrote to Leon Keyserling, secretary to Senator Wagner.<sup>18</sup> His principal complaint against the bill was that it left out agricultural workers and persons who were not engaged in "interstate commerce." The New Leader commented that while the Wagner Act had its good features it also contained provisions "that cause many workers and labor leaders

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<sup>17</sup>Farm Tenancy: Report of the President's Committee (Washington, 1936), 4.

<sup>18</sup>Thomas to Keyserling, April 1, 1935, Thomas Papers.

to have serious misgivings of its permanent value."<sup>19</sup> The N.E.C.'s resolution on the Wagner Act was drawn up by William Karlin and Matthew Levy, who belonged ideologically to the Old Guard camp. The resolution declared that the Wagner Act, despite its defects, "has the possibility of advantageous use by militantly aggressive labor organization." It warned, however, that the provisions of the Act might be construed by "an unfriendly board or reactionary courts" in an antilabor fashion. "Workers must remember," the N.E.C. declared, "that they would be given only what they have the right to command."

Socialists had proclaimed for a long time that the Supreme Court often served as a stumbling block on the path of social and economic progress. After the Court's action on the N.R.A. many labor and "liberal" organizations joined in a demand for an end to "judicial tyranny." The New Leader said that it was "a tragedy that society should be hampered by the dead hand of the past."<sup>20</sup> Norman Thomas called for "immediate and drastic action to end this government by judges." "The whole hope of change, of substantial change by peaceful methods depends upon an end of this judicial oligarchy, this government by the dead hand of a Constitution which is given living

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<sup>19</sup>New Leader, XVIII (June 22, 1935), 1.

<sup>20</sup>"Dead Hands Rule the Living," New Leader, XVIII (June 8, 1935), 8. See also "Unions Support Drive to Curb Supreme Court," New Leader, XIX (February 8, 1936), 1; Louis Waldman, "The Constitutional Crisis and Nation's Vital Needs," New Leader, XIX (February 18, 1936), 5.

power by the ... particular political and economic doctrines of the old men on the Supreme Court bench," Thomas said.<sup>21</sup>

Socialists launched a campaign for the adoption of a so-called "Workers' Rights Amendment" to the Constitution drafted by Hillquit and supported by Thomas during the 1932 campaign.<sup>22</sup>

The Amendment contained two sections.

Section 1. Congress shall have power to establish uniform laws throughout the United States to regulate, limit and prohibit the labor of persons under 18 years of age, to provide for the relief of the aged, invalided, sick and unemployed, in the form of periodical grants, pensions, benefits, compensations, or indemnities from the public treasury, from contributions of employers, wage earners and employees or from one or more such sources, and generally for the social and economic welfare of the workers of the United States.

Section 2. The power of the several states to enact social welfare legislation is unimpaired by this article, but no such legislation shall supersede, abridge or conflict with any act of Congress under this article.

The Workers' Rights Amendment was introduced in the Senate by Elmer Benson of Minnesota and in the House of Representatives by Vito Marcantonio of New York. The Pennsylvania and

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<sup>21</sup>Speech in Camden, N. J., January 7, 1936, Thomas Papers.

<sup>22</sup>The N.E.C. in 1930 accepted in principle an amendment to the national Constitution based on an amendment to the state constitution of California sponsored by Socialists of the Golden State in 1912. A draft prepared by Hillquit was adopted in 1931 and a revised version was adopted in January, 1932. At the suggestion of Thomas it was named the Workers' Rights Amendment. Resolutions in support of the Amendment were introduced in the Pennsylvania and Wisconsin legislatures. The move, however, did not get any significant public support till the Supreme Court's decision on N.R.A.

Wisconsin Assemblies adopted the Amendment, and numerous trade union locals and several state federations of labor endorsed it. The Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor appointed a committee to draft a constitutional amendment "to meet and overcome the objections to the enactment of social and economic legislation by the Congress of the United States as set forth in the Supreme Court decision."<sup>23</sup> Despite their belligerent tone, leaders of organized labor were ready to put their trust in President Roosevelt and expected with some degree of confidence that he would find a way out.

Militants and Old Guard leaders had little disagreement in their attitude towards the relief measures of the administration. Both the groups regarded them as grossly inadequate to meet the urgent needs of the unemployed. In January, 1935, President Roosevelt announced a new works program designed to take the Federal government out of the business of direct relief. Roosevelt declared that the Federal government owed a responsibility only to the "employables" who had been victimized by the depression. According to him the government had no responsibility to continue relief to those who had been unemployables before the depression. "Such people, in the days before the great depression, were cared for by local efforts--by States, by counties, by cities, by churches and by private welfare agencies. It is my thought that in the

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<sup>23</sup>"Labor Takes Lead in Fight to Amend Constitution; Moves for Speedy Revision," New Leader, XVIII (June 15, 1935), 1.

future they must be cared for as they were before," the President announced.<sup>24</sup> Roosevelt also stated that persons given employment under the proposed Works Progress Administration would be paid "security wages." Such wages turned out to be generally lower than the prevailing rates in private employment.

In a front page editorial the New Leader denounced the Roosevelt relief and wage program and exhorted organized labor to fight it to the "last ditch."<sup>25</sup> Waldman said that the President's "pauper wages" would please only the "bosses."<sup>26</sup> The Public Affairs Committee of the party declared that the move to put men to work on the so-called "security wages" meant that "the government itself becomes the outstanding destroyer of unions, the outstanding force in lowering the American standard of living." The statement warned that however good the President's intentions were, "he is putting us far on the road toward a Fascist regimentation of labor at low wages under government control."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Quoted in Mitchell, Depression Decade, 318.

<sup>25</sup>"'New Deal' Drops Its Mask," New Leader, XVIII (May 25, 1935), 1.

<sup>26</sup>Louis Waldman, "President's Pauper Wage Scale Pleases Organized Bosses of U. S.; But Workers Must Fight It Hard," ibid., 2.

<sup>27</sup>Press Release, January 7, 1935, Thomas Papers. Organized labor was also sharply critical of the President's message. At a great rally held in Madison Square Garden in New York City, George Meany, president of the State Federation of Labor, expressed concern that the "security wages" of

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As the W.P.A. program got under way, Socialists frequently criticized it on the ground that it did not even fulfill the expectations that had been aroused by the administration.

"The WPA is a farce," said Thomas, in December, 1935.

For months and months unemployed workers have been fed with promises and hopes, but now after almost a year of talk there are only a handful of men working. ... It is beginning to look as if the money would be held until campaign time as last year when jobs might be given out where they would do the Democrats most good. ... The entire WPA experience should be another warning to workers of what to expect from liberal reformers not committed to the idea that work and wages are more important than any other consideration.<sup>28</sup>

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One important issue on which significant differences developed between the Old Guard and supporters of Thomas was that of the party's attitude to a possible war against fascist powers. Such differences developed following Italy's wanton attack on Ethiopia in the early fall of 1935. Earlier, despite the controversies over the manner of war resistance adumbrated in the Declaration of Principles adopted at the Detroit convention, there was substantial agreement among the various groups that the party should relentlessly oppose war. Thomas, Laidler, and Altman, joined Waldman, Oneal,

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27 (continued)

W.P.A. workers would lower wages all around. New Leader, XVIII (May 25, 1935), 1.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas to Public Affairs Committee of the Socialist Party, [December, 1935], Thomas Papers.



and Lee in frequently expressing misgivings about the implications of the military expenditures of the Roosevelt administration.<sup>29</sup> Both Thomas and Oneal warmly endorsed the investigation into the activities of the munitions makers launched by a Senatorial committee headed by Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota.<sup>30</sup> Socialist speakers constantly warned that a dying capitalism might seek a way out of the depression by embarking on war. They emphasized that there could be no "good wars" and that the world could never be "made safe for democracy" by means of war. Such sentiments were by no means confined to the Socialist party of America, but were generally accepted by European socialist parties as well.

The menacing growth of fascism brought about a gradual change in the attitude of many European socialists. The question that confronted them was whether it was right and proper to regard bourgeois democratic regimes and fascist regimes with equal hostility. There was increasing support for the view that fascism constituted a clear and present threat to freedom and democracy and peace. The issue was brought into sharp focus following Italy's onslaught against Ethiopia. European socialists, in general, fearful of the

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<sup>29</sup>Harry W. Laidler, "America's Road to Peace," New Leader, XVIII (September 21, 1935), 5.

<sup>30</sup>New Leader, XVII (December 22, 1934), 8; James Oneal, "Profit Makers Today are Pikers Compared to War-Time Profit-eers," (December 29, 1934), 1.

designs of Hitler and Mussolini, supported the idea of "collective security" against fascism and the use of "sanctions" under the auspices of the League of Nations against Italy.

The Labor and Socialist International, the International Federation of Trade Unions, and the principal Socialist parties supported such a policy. Friedrich Adler, secretary of the L.S.I., exhorted socialists to steer clear of Tolstoyan pacifism and to support the sanctions program of the League of Nations. Adler declared that the League's action against the "Fascist warmongers" was "in complete harmony with the interests and desires of the international working class."

"The problem with which the world is confronted today is: The end of Mussolini or the end of the League of Nations. In such a case the working class can have no doubts," he added.<sup>31</sup>

In the Socialist party of America, Old Guard leaders quickly endorsed the L.S.I.'s point of view. But a majority of the N.E.C., led by Norman Thomas, adopted a radically different point of view. The N.E.C. condemned Italy's "piratical raid" on Ethiopia and called for a boycott of Italian goods by workers of the free world. It asserted, however, that neither war nor sanctions could destroy fascism. War was the inevitable by-product of "capitalist nationalism"

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<sup>31</sup>Friedrich Adler, "Labor and the World Crisis," New Leader, XVIII (November 2, 1935), 6-7.

and could be ended only by the elimination of capitalism. The primary duty of Socialists, the N.E.C. declared, was to intensify the fight against all capitalist governments, including the government of the United States.

We repudiate any policy of collaboration which supports and builds up capitalist nationalism in any country. ... War and Fascism must be fought simultaneously; we are opposed to all programs which rely on war by capitalist states to overthrow Fascist dictatorships. We urge clear-cut, uncompromising action by the workers against all warmaking capitalist governments, including the government of the United States. ... The foe against which the working class must struggle is the whole interlocking system of nationalism, militarism, capitalism and imperialism, of which the present crisis is only the most recent development.

The N.E.C. warned workers not to place any trust in the efficacy of economic sanctions by Britain and France to deter Italian fascism. "By an accident of imperialistic rivalry England also sees an enemy in Mussolini, and grasps the opportunity to throttle Italy by a ring of steel and gold, forged in the name of peace. The workers must not be caught in such a trap," the N.E.C. declared. The Committee exhorted the "youth of America" to resist the growth of the spirit of militarism, "preparedness," and industrial mobilization. It pledged them the party's wholehearted support for a "program of war resistance in a war emergency, including refusal to be conscripted for military service."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Text of resolution on War adopted by the N.E.C., October 14, 1935, Thomas Papers.

In a number of public speeches, Thomas expressed misgivings about the value of the League of Nations as an instrument for safeguarding peace.<sup>33</sup> He asserted that it would be inopportune for the United States to enter the League at a time when the policy of economic sanctions against Italy had increased the risk of a European war. He warned against the danger of the United States being drawn into a world war in order to bolster British and French imperial interests. "The minute the United States goes to war Fascism will win in the United States," he declared.<sup>34</sup> Thomas urged that "the most rigorous and far reaching neutrality" was the proper policy for the United States to follow. "If later we want to make exceptions it must be by solemn and formal act and not by power entrusted to the President," he said.<sup>35</sup>

Old Guard leaders sharply criticized the stand taken by N.E.C. and Thomas. The New Leader editorially condemned it as a manifestation of "super pacifism," and drew attention to the fact that it served virtually to isolate the party from the organized Socialist workers of Europe.<sup>36</sup>

The Cleveland convention of the party, held in May, 1936, adopted a resolution that, in effect, reiterated the point of view advocated by Thomas and his supporters on the N.E.C.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>In the British Labor party, Sir Stafford Cripps took a stand that was very similar to that of Thomas and the N.E.C.

<sup>34</sup>Socialist Call, I (February 1, 1936), 12.

<sup>35</sup>Socialist Call, I (October 12, 1935), 12.

<sup>36</sup>New Leader, XVIII (November 2, 1935), 6.

<sup>37</sup>"Resolution on War," American Socialist Monthly, V (July, 1936), 15-17.

Thomas, the Militants, and the Old Guard often expressed the view that the Socialist party should attempt to bring into existence a genuine farmer-labor party. At its Boston meeting in December, 1934, the N.E.C. appointed a committee to undertake a nationwide survey of sentiment in favor of an independent farmer-labor party. On the basis of the findings of the committee, the N.E.C. decided that the time was premature for the organization of such a party. In July, 1935, the party deputed observers to attend a conference sponsored jointly by the League for Independent Political Action and the "Farmer Labor Political Federation of the United States." The guiding spirits behind the conference were Congressmen Thomas R. Amlie (Wisconsin), George J. Schneider (Wisconsin); Byron Scott (California); Ernest Lundeen (Minnesota); and Vito Marcantonio (New York). The conference decided to organize a new political party to be known as the American Commonwealth Political Federation.<sup>38</sup> The Socialist party did not favor participation in the proposed Federation and the project itself proved to be still born.

Early in 1936 Communist leaders made several approaches to Thomas and the Militants urging the formation of a farmer-labor party of which the two parties would be component parts. The Communists even advocated a Thomas-Browder ticket in

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<sup>38</sup>Minutes of the Conference on the Formation of a New Party," Chicago, July 5, 6, 1935, Archives of the Socialist Party.

1936.<sup>39</sup> Thomas felt that an electoral alliance with the Communist party would hinder and not help the emergence of a genuine farmer-labor party.<sup>40</sup> He was also informed by reliable friends that the Communists intended to support Roosevelt in 1936. Early in February Thomas and four Militants held a meeting with a Communist group led by Browder and told them that they would not accede to the Communist request for a joint "Farmer-Labor ticket" prior to the 1936 elections.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile the Old Guard Socialist leaders watched with considerable interest the development of sentiment in favor of independent political action among trade union leaders. Following the Supreme Court's invalidation of N.R.A., many prominent union leaders including Sidney Hillman, Joseph Schlossberg, David Dubinsky and Francis Gorman publicly announced that organized labor needed a party of its own in order to safeguard its legitimate interests. It soon became clear, however, that the labor leaders wanted a new party to mobilize support for President Roosevelt. As the Old Guard leaders became convinced that there was no prospect of their regaining control over the party machinery, they began gradually to move

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<sup>39</sup>Thomas told the writer that Jack Stachel, the Communist leader, was the prime mover behind the Communist bid. Thomas added that he did participate in a discussion of the question with six Communists but dropped the matter shortly thereafter. Interview with Thomas, September 14, 1954.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas to Paul Porter, January 17, 1935, Thomas Papers.

<sup>41</sup>Thomas to Senior, February 7, 1936, ibid.

close to the union leaders. Criticism of Roosevelt was considerably toned down in the columns of the New Leader. In February, 1936, the journal carried an article condemning Norman Thomas for stating that the New Deal contained fascist trends. The writer, Harry Rogoff, charged that Thomas appeared to compete with the Communists in "hysteria and demagogy" and asserted that the New Deal had actually staved off the fascist threat in the United States.<sup>42</sup> The New Leader described as a "canard" allegations by Militants that Old Guard Socialists were planning to support Roosevelt for re-election.<sup>43</sup> Algernon Lee denounced the "lackeys of the Allen-Krueger-Thomas junta" for their "impudence" in spreading the "falsehood" that the Old Guard intended to endorse Roosevelt. Within a few weeks Waldman announced that if the Cleveland convention nominated an unacceptable candidate, his group would support Roosevelt. When, following the convention, David Dubinsky and other New York labor leaders organized the American Labor party, Waldman and his supporters joined it. The A.L.P. proclaimed its intention to mobilize labor and liberal voters for the re-election of Herbert Lehman and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Waldman, Lee, and their allies announced their dedication to the same cause. The New Leader published an article on

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<sup>42</sup> Harry Rogoff, "The Fascist Danger and the New Deal," New Leader, XIX (February 15, 1936), 5.

<sup>43</sup> "Roosevelt, his 'New Deal' and Policy of Socialists," New Leader, XIX (March 14, 1936), 5.



"Franklin D. Roosevelt: Friend of the Working Class."

Ironically enough, the Waldman group found that its enthusiastic support for Roosevelt and condemnation of Thomas's candidacy were virtually identical with the new "line" of the hated Communist party. The Communist party had turned the full circle and was vociferously denouncing all the critics of the President as fascists.<sup>44</sup> Thus the erstwhile Red

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<sup>44</sup>On November 30, 1934, for instance, the Daily Worker carried an article condemning Norman Thomas for stating that none of the quasi-fascist organizations in the United States was strong. The newspaper said that Thomas and his like "try to hide from the masses in this country, just as the Socialist leaders in Germany and Austria did, that it is the White House that is the central headquarters of the advance of fascism. And this is what makes it necessary to form the united front of all workers ready to fight against and not for the Roosevelt reactionary program, at their source, in the Roosevelt New Deal." "Socialist Leaders Comment on American Fascism," Daily Worker, November 30, 1934, p. 8. In 1936, the urgent necessities of Soviet foreign policy apparently called for a complete reversal of the attitude of the Communist party.

Earl Browder told the writer that the "Russians" did not even want a Communist party ticket to run against Roosevelt. Browder had to convince them that a separate Communist ticket would actually help Roosevelt and that the party could give open, though indirect, support to him. "I went to Moscow early in February, 1936," Browder told the writer. "As soon as I arrived, Dimitroff, unquestionably with the full support of the Russians, raised the question of supporting F.D.R. and not putting a separate C.P. ticket. I resisted it. I told them that if they wanted to assure Roosevelt's victory, Dimitroff's proposal was the worst way to do it. If we withdrew our ticket we could bring in about one million of our members and supporters to Roosevelt, but, in the process, Roosevelt would lose five million votes. It will frighten away the upper bourgeoisie. My line was that we should have our own ticket, and that we should campaign in such a way that it would get only the votes of the hard core."

"That line was my line," Browder continued. "I developed it on my own in the party. With final acceptance of that line my position within the American party was made unquestionable.

From that time

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hunters in the Socialist party found themselves walking in step with the Communist leaders. They found the Daily Worker training its guns on the men whom they had denounced as "armed insurrectionists," "hidden Communists," and "agents of the Comintern."

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As the presidential campaign of 1936 approached, it was widely believed that Roosevelt would easily win re-election. The Republican convention, held in Cleveland in June, nominated Alfred M. Landon, Governor of Kansas, as its standard bearer. The convention named Colonel Frank Knox as its vice-presidential candidate. Landon was by no means the most important or influential Republican figure on the national political scene. But a group of supporters, including newspaper publisher, William Randolph Hearst, had organized and sustained an energetic "boom" on behalf of his candidacy. He had been depicted as a "sound" governor who had balanced the budget, and as a Kansas Coolidge. Landon, however, did not have a dynamic personality. William Allen White, who had known Landon for several years, described him as a modest, honest and sensible person. "Fundamentally, he has nothing bad. He

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44 (continued)

on, the development of that line was so systematic and successful that nobody dared challenge it." Browder to the writer, September 9, 1954.

doesn't lie. He is more intelligent than the average. He is money honest and when he makes up his mind he has all the courage in the world and will go any distance without flinching. He has made a decent governor....<sup>45</sup>

Landon appeared to many as plain and colorless, particularly in comparison with Franklin D. Roosevelt who was renominated by the Democratic convention held in Philadelphia. "In the long history of political meetings there had never been anything just like the Philadelphia assembly of 1936," wrote Charles and Mary Beard in America in Midpassage.

With nominations a matter of routine and no tangled factional disputes to smooth out, the delegates stamped, cheered, and whistled in the assembly hall, amid the blare of bands and speeches amplified by the radio, accepting the fact that their function scarcely rose above the dignity of that performed by a rubber stamp.<sup>46</sup>

In accepting the nomination, Roosevelt declared that "in America we are waging a great and successful war. It is not alone a war against want and destitution and economic demoralization. ...it is a war for the survival of democracy." Roosevelt asserted that there was "a mysterious cycle" in human events. "To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny."

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<sup>45</sup>White to Harold L. Ickes, July 24, 1936, in Walter Johnson, ed., Selected Letters of William Allen White (New York, 1947), 366.

<sup>46</sup>Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, America in Midpassage, 2 vols. (New York, 1939), I, 313.

Roosevelt gave a tone of militancy to the Democratic campaign by assailing the "economic royalists" and by accusing them of trying to fasten a new despotism on the American people. Democratic orators represented the Republican party as the creature of Big Business and as the enemy of the measures of social reform embodied in the New Deal. Republican spokesmen denounced the New Deal measures as "socialistic," and charged that Roosevelt and his allies were planning to subvert the Constitution by destroying the independence of the judiciary. Democrats replied by asserting that the Republican party was seeking to "hide behind the flag and the Constitution."

A new "third party" was born during the 1936 campaign. Father Coughlin, the "radio priest," Gerald L. K. Smith, self-styled heir to Huey Long, and Dr. Townsend, advocate of old age pensions, joined forces to usher in the Union party. The party named Representative William Lemke of North Dakota, as its presidential candidate. Its platform promised immediate and substantial relief to the old, the unemployed, and the low-income groups. Its tone was nationalistic and "patriotic," and it promised to fight all those who might seek to undermine the Constitution of the United States. The new party appeared to have sufficient resources and popular support to make it the strongest "third party" of the campaign.

The Communist party waged a purely nominal campaign. Its presidential candidate, Earl Browder, attacked Landon as a fascist, "True, the camp of reaction and fascism stands forth

unmistakably gathered around Landon and the Republican banner. Landon's campaign, directed by Hearst from Rome and Berlin, raised every slogan of international fascism, was modeled closely on the example of Hitler," Browder declared.<sup>47</sup> The central issue of the campaign, according to Communist spokesmen, was "Fascism or Democracy." William Z. Foster charged that Norman Thomas aided "fascist demagogues" by failing to make a distinction between Landon and Roosevelt. Foster repudiated the Socialist party's claim to be a revolutionary party. "The revolutionary stature of a party can be measured by its attitude towards the U.S.S.R. This is because the Soviet government is the revolution in life, the crystallization in flesh and blood of revolutionary theory and practice," he asserted.<sup>48</sup> Foster applied his measuring rod to the Socialist party and found it deficient.

Norman Thomas was hardly optimistic as he embarked upon the election campaign. "It will be no fun running for the Presidency on the Socialist ticket," he wrote to Andrew Biemiller, early in May.<sup>49</sup> Thomas was convinced that

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<sup>47</sup>Earl Browder, "The Issues of 1936," in Talks to America (New York, 1937). Speech over the NBC network, November 2, 1936.

<sup>48</sup>William Z. Foster, The Crisis in the Socialist Party (New York, 1936), 65. Writing in 1954 Foster stated: "The position of the Communist Party in the 1936 elections, in line with its general attitude toward the New Deal, was one of objective, but not official support for Roosevelt," History of the Communist Party of the United States (New York, 1954), 333.

<sup>49</sup>Thomas to Biemiller, May, 8, 1936; Thomas Papers.

Roosevelt would win an overwhelming victory and that union leaders would throw their support to him. "There will be more and more Roosevelt sentiment which may approach the depth of feeling for Wilson in 1916, or even go beyond that." Thomas believed that despite all unfavorable factors, the Socialist party should wage a vigorous campaign if it were to survive as an educational or practical force.<sup>50</sup>

Thomas threw himself into the campaign with his usual energy and with complete disregard of the strain involved in continuous travelling and speech making. He covered 33 states and made 160 speeches, besides several radio talks. "Norman is tireder than I have almost ever seen him," Violet Thomas wrote to Clarence Senior. She asked whether his schedule could be so arranged that he would be enabled to spend a few nights in hotel rooms rather than in train berths. If payment for hotel rooms could not be made by the national office, she would be willing "to make a special contribution that I wouldn't want Norman to know about! He might think something else more important but his being helped just at this moment seems to be the imperative thing."<sup>51</sup>

It was an uphill task that Thomas faced in the 1936 campaign. The Socialist party could not get on the ballot in the states of Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Nebraska, New

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<sup>50</sup>Thomas to Krueger, May 4, 1936, ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Violet Thomas to Senior, September 19, 1936, Archives of the Socialist Party.

Hampshire, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Vermont. Restrictive election laws in some states, and the inability of party organizations to fulfill even minor requirements in others were responsible for such a state of affairs.<sup>52</sup> The party's campaign chest was emptier than it had been in 1932. The national office had to operate on what Secretary Senior described as "an extremely thin shoe string." The party had hoped to raise \$100,000 for the campaign but succeeded in collecting only \$33,823. Of the amount thus collected, the national office received only \$15,310, while state organizations retained the balance for their election expenses. The total amount that the national office was able to obtain from all sources was less than \$25,000.<sup>53</sup> (Between January 1 and December 31, 1936, the Democratic party's expenditure, as publicly acknowledged, was \$5,194,741. The Republican party topped that figure by an additional \$3,700,000).<sup>54</sup>

A "Labor League for Thomas and Nelson" was organized with A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, as chairman. The League was not able to make much headway in arousing enthusiasm for the Socialist ticket.

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<sup>52</sup>In 1928 the party was on the ballot in 43 states and in 1932 in 44 states.

<sup>53</sup>Memorandum from the National Secretary to N.E.C., November 16, 1936, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>54</sup>Quoted from a study of campaign expenditures by Louise Overacker, in Beard and Beard, America in Midpassage, I, 328-29.

Reports came into the national office of the party from numerous branches stating that trade union members "either had fallen headlong or were being firmly pushed into the Roosevelt camp." Socialist propaganda among farmers was even less successful than in 1932. "The work of the Farmer's League for Thomas and Nelson ... did not yield results," reported Clarence Senior, in his report to the N.E.C. after the elections.<sup>55</sup>

A number of leading educators, writers, and other "public figures" organized themselves into a "Thomas and Nelson Independent Committee." Among them were Franz Boas, Morris Cohen, Max Eastman, James T. Farrell, Louis B. Hacker, Julius Hochman, John Haynes Holmes, Sidney Hook, Freda Kirchway, Francis J. McConnell, Robert Morss Lovett, Lewis Gannet, William Pickens, James Rorty, William Van Wyck Brooks, and Art Young. The Committee did not register a significant impact on the public mind.

In 1932 the Socialist party had entered the political campaign with optimistic enthusiasm. The situation was almost the opposite in 1936. "Throughout the entire campaign," secretary Senior reported, "there was the feeling on part of most comrades that they were swimming upstream against a heavy current, whereas in 1932 they were swimming more or less with the current."<sup>56</sup> Despite the severe handicaps confronted by

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<sup>55</sup>Memorandum from the National Secretary to N.E.C., November 16, 1936, Archives of the Socialist Party.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

him and by the party, Thomas waged an energetic campaign.

"Socialism versus Capitalism" was the real issue of the campaign, Thomas asserted, in numerous speeches. He said that Roosevelt, Landon, and Lemke were equally dedicated to the preservation of the capitalist system. None of them had offered any proposal for solving the problem of recurrent business crises because such a solution was impossible within the capitalist framework.<sup>57</sup> The Socialist leader emphasized that it would be totally erroneous to hold that the difference between Roosevelt and Landon was that between democracy and fascism. Neither candidate was a fascist, but neither stood for true democracy.<sup>58</sup> Both were united in support of the capitalist order and sought to cure the malady from which it was suffering.

Bitterly as these parties quarrel, all of them are trying to cure tuberculosis with cough-drops. Their brands are different. They use different flavors and different drugs; some better, some worse. But neither the Landon, Roosevelt, Lemke, or Townsend brand and flavor can do the job.... The cure, the only cure, is Socialism.<sup>59</sup>

Thomas stated that the Republican party was reactionary, "in the strictest sense of the word." Republicans wanted the impossible--a return to the times of Coolidge or McKinley.

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<sup>57</sup>Speech at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 20, 1936, Thomas Papers.

<sup>58</sup>Speech at New York Herald-Tribune Forum, [September, 1936], Socialist Call, II (October 3, 1936), 12.

<sup>59</sup>"You Can't Cure Tuberculosis with Cough Drops," speech over the NBC network from Chicago, [1936], Thomas Papers.



Socialists, he said, were genuinely happy that there was no myth of a "reborn" Republican party to explode.<sup>60</sup> Thomas criticized Communists and labor leaders who attempted to spread the impression that Landon's election would hasten the advent of fascism in the United States. He said that it was "absurdly and dangerously misleading to call this modest, conservative, rather bewildered Kansan, a Fascist."<sup>61</sup>

The Socialist standard bearer repudiated the allegation that many of the New Deal measures were "socialistic." He said that the New Deal represented liberal capitalism, "a capitalism regulated by a more or less liberal government."<sup>62</sup> Roosevelt had as his objective not the destruction of capitalism but its rehabilitation, Thomas said. "Mr. Roosevelt has never professed to be anything else than a believer in the profit system with a desire to rehabilitate capitalism, all except the silk hat!"<sup>63</sup>

Thomas told labor audiences that he was seriously disappointed by the refusal of organized labor to support the political party that had consistently and vigorously espoused their cause. "It is not an empty or an arrogant boast, but

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<sup>60</sup>Speech during the 1936 campaign, ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Speech over radio station W.C.F.L., Chicago, October 16, 1936, ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Speech over radio station KOA, Denver, Socialist Call, II (October 10, 1936), 7.

<sup>63</sup>Speech at Minneapolis, October 6, 1936, Thomas Papers.

a simple statement of fact, that practically every bit of social and labor legislation which has been enacted into law by the older parties or which has now won labor's support, irrespective of parties, was first demanded by the Socialists," Thomas said. He added that many friendly labor leaders and liberals had told him that it was a mistake on his part to run against Roosevelt. He had reminded them that they had made similar criticisms when he ran against Al Smith for the presidency in 1928, and against James Walker for the mayoralty of New York City in 1929. Was he wrong to have exposed Smith and Walker as bogus friends of labor far earlier than the union bosses?<sup>64</sup>

Thomas criticized the philosophy and tactics of Labor's Non-Partisan League organized by Sidney Hillman, George L. Berry, and others to mobilize labor support for Roosevelt. He challenged the contention of some of its spokesmen that Landon's victory would be a calamity for organized labor. Such a belief represented a dangerous defeatism on the part of labor. Whoever was elected, labor would get only what labor was strong enough to take. A Landon victory might "put iron in labor's blood" and rally its support for a real farmer-labor party, Thomas declared.

Thomas said that the Non-Partisan League appeared to use two yardsticks--a good one for measuring Landon and the Republicans, and a very charitable one for measuring Roosevelt

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<sup>64</sup>Speech over radio station W.C.F.L., Chicago, October 16, 1936, ibid.

and the Democrats. Labor's acceptance of such a double standard would weaken it in judging and fighting against the drift towards war and fascism. Thomas conceded that Roosevelt, personally, had more to offer organized labor than Landon. "It is impossible, however, to vote for Roosevelt without voting for Garner and the Democratic ticket," Thomas said.

Garner, and the Southern Democrats, generally, are at least as reactionary as Landon, and they have a lot to say in Democratic councils. Have some of my labor friends not noticed the smell of tar about the person of some of their comrades on the Democratic band-wagon, fresh from a flogging party in Florida, in Arkansas, or in Alabama?<sup>65</sup>

Thomas asserted that the Roosevelt administration had done nothing to prevent the virtual denial of the right of organization to share-croppers in Southern states. He said that one of the President's closest Congressional lieutenants, Senator Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas, was allied with the planter interests of his state that had systematically attempted to suppress the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. It would be wrong for city workers to say: "Never mind these country folks. Roosevelt has helped us," Thomas warned. "What kind of a labor solidarity is that? What kind of good sense is that? How secure are you surrounded by these exploited workers?" he asked.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Radio talk in New York City, August, 1936, *ibid.* See also, Norman Thomas, "Why Labor Should Support the Socialist Party," American Socialist Monthly, V (July, 1936), 3-7.

<sup>66</sup>Speech at labor meeting, New York City, June 11, 1936, Thomas Papers.

The Socialist leader repeatedly charged that Roosevelt had remained silent in the face of mounting assaults against civil liberty--"the epidemic of loyalty oaths, the ride of the vigilantes in California, military law in Indiana, flogging and murder in Florida."<sup>67</sup>

"Not his fault," you may say? Well, maybe. But what has he done against it? When did he as President of his country and leader of his party speak against it? Did he ever put an anti-lynching bill on his must list? Did he protest when Democratic governors in 1934 made a new record in the use of military force against the textile strikers? ... The answer is No.

But he is the great humanitarian whom Socialists and radical workers must support or be dubbed the allies of fascism! While American labor shuts its eyes to the record which I have listed, American labor will never be free.<sup>68</sup>

Thomas emphasized that Roosevelt and other politicians of the two major parties, despite their frequent protestations of loyalty to the ideals of democracy, seldom exerted themselves to protect the rights of "minor" parties. Drawing attention to the difficulties that "minor" parties had to encounter to get on the ballot in many states, the Socialist leader said: "You cannot raise the slogan 'ballots not bullets' effectively, and then put so many difficulties in the way of ballots."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Radio talk in Spokane, Washington, October 4, 1936; radio talk in Topeka, Kansas, October 14, 1936, ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Speech on "Labor's Non-Partisan League," [1936], ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Speech before the Bar Association, Chicago, September 25, 1936, ibid.

Thomas charged that the sponsors of Labor's Non-Partisan League and the American Labor Party did not advance the cause of labor by uncritically supporting Roosevelt. They had set up organizations based on no ideology and on no adequate program. Their objective was nothing higher than securing the maximum possible support to Roosevelt. No real labor party, dedicated to serve the interests of workers of hand and brain, could evolve out of the League and the A.L.P., Thomas said.

The future of a labor party of the right sort in New York, to say nothing of the nation, depends far more upon our educational work, our organizational work, the Socialist vote in 1936, than on the number of voters who would rather vote for Roosevelt and Garner under a labor label than a Jim Farley or Tammany Hall-Democratic label. The Course Roosevelt himself will take in his next term depends far more upon what we make him fear than upon the blank check that Labor's Non-Partisan League would give him.<sup>70</sup>

Thomas criticized the Roosevelt administration for not making a complete break with "the old policy of imperialism." He said that under Roosevelt's leadership, the United States had spent a greater amount of money on its military forces than any other country of the world. The Socialist leader asserted that none of the other candidates for the presidency had offered an adequate program for neutrality and for "taking the profits out of war." He warned the American people against being complacent about the outbreak of a new world war. "The catastrophe most likely to overtake our troubled world, even before it is bogged down once more in deep economic depression,

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<sup>70</sup>Speech on "Labor's Non-Partisan League," [1936], ibid.

is new world war," he said.<sup>71</sup> Thomas added that American entry into any war, whatever its avowed cause or purpose, would usher in "the worst form of Fascism at home."<sup>72</sup>

Thomas said that Landon, Lenke, and Roosevelt were equally evasive on the constitutional issue. He assailed the "Liberty League lawyers" and their supporters for their opposition to any action that might diminish the authority of the Supreme Court.

Those who most zealously preach the religion of the Constitution with the Supreme Court as its high priest believe it least. They want us to do the worshipping while they take up the collection. Today the religion of the Constitution is the religion of those who are either blind to reality or who welcome the fact that under the Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court, especially in its recent decisions, there is no power, federal or state, effectively to curb economic exploitation.

Thomas urged the adoption of the "Workers' Right Amendment" sponsored by the Socialist party, the popular election of the President and Vice-President of the United States, and a revision of the Constitution to make the process of amending a relatively easier task.<sup>73</sup>

In a number of speeches before farm audiences, Thomas

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<sup>71</sup>Speech over the CBS network from San Francisco, October 1, 1936, Thomas Papers.

<sup>72</sup>Speech delivered on August 12, 1936; speech at Wilmington, Delaware, September 4, 1936; speech over the CBS network from San Francisco, October 1, 1936, *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup>Speech over the NBC network from Detroit, September 12, 1936, *ibid.* Speech in Royal Oak, Michigan, Socialist Call, II (October 3, 1936), 2.



declared that there was no truth in the allegation that a Socialist government would confiscate the land owned by cultivators. The Socialist party, he said, stood for the inauguration of a system of production for use. A Socialist government would protect the working farmer, but would end absentee landlordism in town and country. It would end corporation farming and the "monstrous" plantation system. In their place it would substitute co-operative farms under the guidance of experts. Thomas also pledged the party's support to crop insurance, soil conservation, and "socialized marketing."<sup>74</sup>

Thomas and his associates were worried that the Union party was likely to draw off a considerable volume of "protest vote" that might have come to the Socialist party. In a bold move to carry the war into the enemy's territory, Thomas accepted an invitation to address the Townsend Plan convention held in Cleveland in July. As cheers and boos alternated from the 11,000 delegates to the convention, Thomas declared that the "Plan" was impracticable and would never be implemented under capitalism.<sup>75</sup> As the campaign gathered momentum,

<sup>74</sup>"The Socialist Program for the American Farmer," 1936 ; "Wisconsin Farm Speech," 1936 , Thomas Papers.

<sup>75</sup>"Emancipate Youth from Work--Old Age from Fear," (Chicago, 1936). Stenographic report of the speech. "What a refreshing thing it is to find a presidential candidate with the guts to tell a great crowd of people, representing nobody knows how many votes, that their panacea is unworkable, their scheme impractical, their idol one of clay," commented the  
(continued on next page)

Thomas began to feel that the Union party contained seeds of "incipient fascism" and strongly criticized its leaders in a number of speeches. "It is populism born, too late, a populism which today has resemblance to fascism," he declared. "It is a party not democratically created, but handed down from on high, born full grown with candidates and a 15-point platform resembling the old Nazi platform in Germany. ...Better believe in Santa Claus and be done with it," he added. Thomas however did not believe that the Lemke movement constituted an immediate fascist threat. "His whole movement is dangerous as a portent, but it is not likely to get far this year. He may get some support from forces behind Landon, as a matter of political tactics in the fight against Roosevelt. ...The day may come when a future and more powerful Lemke will get more support from the same sort of interests and men to save their hides. But that day is not now at hand," Thomas said.<sup>76</sup>

In scores of speeches across the country, Thomas emphasized that capitalism could offer no short cut to prosperity. Even in 1929, "the year of our greatest so-called

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Des Moines Tribune. The Cleveland Press stated that "the most hostile among them must have felt some admiration for his courage and candor in telling them plainly what they least desired to know." For a newspaper man's first-hand report of the episode, see Thomas L. Stokes, Chip Off My Shoulder (Princeton, 1940), 418-19.

<sup>76</sup>Speech over the NBC network, August, 1936; speech at Fargo, North Dakota, October 7, 1936, Thomas Papers.



prosperity," several million American families had an annual income of less than two thousand dollars. The struggle for peace and freedom could not be won unless the system of capitalism, which rested on exploitation and scarcity, was ended. Real prosperity and abundance were attainable in a socialist society, Thomas declared.

...I want to say to you there is freedom and peace and plenty, there is a conquest of poverty, there is leisure, there is emancipation from the power of monopolistic control. It is an emancipation, a freedom, a peace, a plenty you have got to win by nothing less than by making America yours, by taking collectively and co-operatively the great sources of wealth into your hands and managing them democratically for the common good.

Let the experts work for you and not for the private owners. Let that be your slogan, and I think then that we shall win such victories as the imagination of man has scarcely dared to dream; I think then we shall break the shackles which now bind our freedom in a world where the few own what the many need.<sup>77</sup>

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The elections resulted in a landslide victory for the Democratic party. Roosevelt carried all the states of the Union except Maine and Vermont. Norman Thomas polled only 187,000 votes, the lowest Socialist vote in a presidential election. The Union party secured 892,000 votes and relegated the Socialist party to fourth place in the race.

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<sup>77</sup>Thomas, "Emancipate Youth from Work," 11.

The results of the election were a severe blow to the party. Thomas expressed disappointment that the American people were willing to put their trust in Roosevelt's "progressivism." He believed that it would have been "good horse sense" for voters to have given greater support to the Socialist ticket as a kind of warning. "But that kind of reasoning never seems safe to the average American voter. Hence, as I expected, our vote shows a sort of irreducible minimum of those who know that much is necessary than Roosevelt liberalism. I had thought that there might be a couple of hundred thousand more such people in America," Thomas stated.<sup>78</sup>

Thomas felt that the Socialist party had an important mission to perform, despite its overwhelming defeat in the election. "It seems to me more important than ever to keep together our Party," he wrote to his close associates, immediately after the election. "The magnitude of the Roosevelt victory does not in the least alter my opinion that our only hope is in positive Socialism which is something very different from the vague Rooseveltism or a trade union capitalism," he added.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Socialist Call, II (November 14, 1936), 12.

<sup>79</sup>Thomas to Senior, Altman, Trager, Laidler, Fox, Hillyer, Herling, and Hertzberg, November 6, 1936, Thomas Papers.

"Everything we do must be derived from our conviction that Socialism and only Socialism is the hope of the world,"  
said Norman Thomas.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Norman Thomas, "The Election of 1936 and Prospects for a Farmer-Labor Party," American Socialist Monthly V (December, 1936), 13.

## CONCLUSION

Writers on the subject of the Socialist movement in the United States are in general agreement about some of the basic causes for its weakness.<sup>1</sup> The relative success of American capitalism; its ability to provide a higher standard of living to the American people than that which prevailed in European countries; the absence of feudal restraints and of rigid class stratification; the greater opportunity that young men and women had to rise out of their class; the existence of a strong middle class--all these have been cited as factors inhibiting the growth of radical and Socialist movements in the United States.

The American political system and traditions militated against the growth of a third party. The deep-rooted faith of the American people in the two-party system, the absorption of popular interest in the quadrennial contest for the presidency, and the widely differing electoral regulations that were often designed to prevent a minor party from getting on the ballot, were formidable obstacles on the path of a third party movement.

Organized labor in the United States had always been cool towards socialism. The rise of a militant trade union movement was retarded by the existence of slavery and by the

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<sup>1</sup>For a good, brief discussion, see Norman Thomas, A Socialist's Faith (New York, 1950).

persistence of racial discrimination even after the Civil War. The great tide of European immigration enabled many employers to exploit national and linguistic differences and thereby prevent effective unionization. The character and personality of Samuel Gompers, and the philosophy of "pure and simple" unionism that he bequeathed to the American Federation of Labor, prevented the organic merger of the labor and socialist movements in the United States.

Labor, radical, and socialist movements in the United States were handicapped by their inability to offer young men an opportunity for personal and material advancement. "Able young men were neither driven by desperation nor enticed by opportunity into the American labor and radical movements."<sup>2</sup> The Socialist movement, with its slender financial resources and almost complete lack of political patronage, suffered even more owing to such a state of affairs than the trade union movement.

The coming of the Great Depression did not significantly counteract the effect of any of the factors that operated against the development of a powerful Socialist movement. The trade union movement itself was considerably weakened as a result of the Depression; workers who were fortunate enough to maintain their jobs did not want to run the risk of association with "radicals"; the unemployed were, on the whole,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

timid and fearful. The reaction of millions of Americans to the sufferings caused by the Depression followed a traditional pattern. They decided to "turn the rascals out" and elected a Democratic President and Congress in 1932.

The Socialist party possessed neither the organization nor the financial resources needed to build a great mass movement in the United States in 1932. Despite various handicaps, Norman Thomas waged a vigorous campaign and polled the second highest Socialist vote for the presidency. Four years later the party's fortunes had sunk so low that Thomas secured the lowest Socialist vote for the presidency. What were the reasons for such a catastrophic decline?

Was the party's decline due to the bitter factional squabbles that culminated in the split of May, 1936? Undoubtedly factionalism enfeebled the party, reduced its effectiveness, and drained away energies that might have been utilized to better advantage. But it is not easy to determine whether the party's internal difficulties had any significant effect in alienating potential supporters at the polls. In the Congressional elections of 1934, Thomas secured the highest Socialist vote for United States Senator in New York State. Throughout the entire period of the campaign, the party was rocked by bitter squabbles over the Declaration of Principles adopted at the Detroit convention. But, perhaps, his vote might have been still higher had there been no public display of disunity by members of various Socialist factions.

It would be difficult to pin responsibility on any single individual or group for the intensification of factionalism in the party. The two principal factional groups were the Militants, often supported by Norman Thomas, and the Old Guard, led by Waldman, Oneal, and Lee. The Militants were mostly newcomers to the party while the Old Guard Socialists had given long years of service to the movement. There was no middle group to serve as a connecting link between the younger Socialists and the veterans because the party had failed to attract recruits during the lean years of the 'twenties.

Old Guard Socialists were inclined to look with suspicion and distrust on the activities of the Militants. As Daniel Hoan once pointed out, they lacked the capacity to make concessions to younger elements in the party. "Whenever younger members come into the party," wrote Hoan in 1935, "they are slightly more to the left than older members and it is up to the older comrades to be big enough to make reasonable concessions in order to keep them within the party fold in the hope that in due time they would be seasoned."<sup>3</sup> The Old Guard was not prepared to make any such gesture to the neophytes.

The Militants, on the other hand, had an inadequate appreciation of the difficulties involved in keeping alive a minority party, in organizing its election campaigns, and in financing its activities. They had an inadequate comprehension

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<sup>3</sup>Hoan to William Feigenbaum, February 26, 1935, Thomas Papers.



of the party's history, the mistakes it had committed, and the obstacles that it had encountered. They believed in the necessity of "action" and they persuaded themselves into the belief that Old Guard Socialists had deteriorated into mere reformists.

Several external causes served to intensify the factional quarrels within the party. The collapse of the Social Democratic parties of Germany and Austria and the menacing rise of fascism in Europe had a tremendous impact on the international socialist movement. In the Socialist party of America, as in other Socialist parties, the developments in Europe gave rise to a spate of plans and programs on how to capture power and to overcome capitalist or fascist counter-revolution. Many of the plans that the Militants and others put forth during 1933 and 1934 had little relevance to the realities of the American situation. To those young Socialists, as Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out, politics became a romance, "unconsciously used as a way of satisfying personal emotional needs."<sup>4</sup> It was, however, a passing phase, and the Young Turks of 1934 could have been expected to develop into sober Socialists five or ten years later. Such was the feeling of Norman Thomas. But the Old Guard was unduly fearful that the activities of the "playboy revolutionists" would gravely jeopardize the future of the party.

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<sup>4</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, "A Criticism of the R.P.C. Program," Revolutionary Socialist Review, I (February, 1935), 18-20.



Another complicating factor was the obsession of many Socialists either in favor of or against the Soviet Union. In this respect, too, the Socialist party of America passed through the same experience as other socialist parties. Old Guard Socialists were extremely anti-Communist and anti-Soviet. They believed that Soviet Communism was a perversion and caricature of socialism. They were convinced that American Communists were merely the agents of the bureaucracy that had established its tyranny over Russia. Old Guard Socialists were vehemently opposed to the idea of a united front with the Communists under any circumstances. They asserted that a genuine united front against fascism and war could only arise if the party allied itself with organized labor.

The Militants and other "left wingers" were anxious to effect a united front, at least on specific issues, with the Communists. They talked about the importance of "proletarian unity" and believed that united action with the Communist party was urgently needed to stem the tide of fascism in the United States. Thomas supported their demand in the belief that the Communists would show themselves to be disruptors of any united front. Each faction obstinately clung to its own point of view, unmindful of the harm it caused the party.

The fratricidal conflict that followed the Detroit convention of 1934 was, to a considerable extent, a struggle for control of the party machinery. Thomas and his Militant allies succeeded in capturing a majority of seats in the National

Executive Committee, but failed to initiate a realistic program of political action and party building. They angered the Old Guard by favoring negotiations with the Communist party and by issuing an invitation to "unattached radicals" to join the party. American Trotskyites took advantage of the invitation and began gradually to infiltrate into the party. They did not, however, constitute any serious threat to the party. But the Old Guard raised a hue and cry about "Communism" in the party, and, in course of time, began to label all its opponents as Communist stooges, advocates of armed insurrection, and believers in dictatorship. Despairing of regaining control of the party machinery, Old Guard leaders began to move gradually towards closer collaboration with leaders of organized labor. Matters came to a head at the Cleveland convention in May, 1936, and the New York Old Guard, led by Waldman, seceded from the party. It was a rump party that Thomas led in the presidential campaign of 1936.

To what extent the Socialist party lost potential supporters as a result of its opposition to nationalistic "patriotism" cannot be accurately determined. As an outgrowth of its stand during the first world war, the party continued to proclaim its determination to refuse support to any future war. Socialists repeatedly denied that the first world war had been fought to make the world safe for democracy. They accused the American government of persisting in imperialistic conduct. They called for a reduction of expenditure on the military forces and the

abolition of the R.O.T.C. They denied the validity of the virtues of "rugged individualism" and asserted that America did not provide equal opportunities to all its citizens. The party completely underestimated the possibility of constructive utilization of such sentiments as national pride, traditions, and patriotism.

The most serious blow to the prospects of the Socialist party was dealt by Franklin D. Roosevelt. "His personality, his immense courage in managing his physical handicap, and his brilliant political achievements were unquestionably major factors in the arrest of the growth of socialism on the one hand or communism and fascism on the other," wrote Norman Thomas in 1950.<sup>5</sup> During the first Roosevelt administration, Thomas and other Socialists were highly critical of many New Deal measures and repudiated the allegation that they were socialistic. Thomas described them as, at best, inadequate imitations of the "immediate demands" that the Socialist party had advocated.

Thomas kept up a running fire of criticism against the inadequacies of many of the New Deal measures. To him they appeared to be mere cough drops that could hardly be expected to cure the tuberculosis with which capitalism was afflicted. In a recent evaluation of the New Deal, one of Roosevelt's "brain trusters" expressed almost identical sentiments:

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas, A Socialist's Faith, 97.

The New Deal was an inevitable result of the collapse of 1929. The strange thing about it, judged historically, was the weakness of the medicine prescribed for the sickness which beset us. This might or might not be laid to President Roosevelt. In the sense that he was an orthodox progressive, more skilled in politics than in economics, warm-hearted, in these matters, but not strongheaded he might be blamed. But who was wiser?<sup>6</sup>

Norman Thomas might not have been wiser than Franklin D. Roosevelt, but from a hundred platforms he had declared that the President had let slip a magnificent opportunity to initiate far-reaching reforms that would ensure "a more abundant life" to the American people. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Thomas and his Socialist colleagues were among the foremost popularizers during that period of the idea that increasing social control and economic democracy were essential to give meaning and substance to political democracy. They were also among the staunchest defenders of civil liberties and of minority rights. Few Americans were more zealous in the fight against "human exploitation" than Norman Thomas.

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<sup>6</sup>Rexford G. Tugwell, "The New Deal: The Rise of Business," Western Political Quarterly, V (September, 1952), 496.

## APPENDIX A: TABLE I

Party Membership: 1903-1928\*

Year	Membership	Presidential vote
1903	15,975	
1904	20,763	409,230
1905	23,327	
1906	26,784	
1907	29,270	
1908	41,751	424,483
1909	41,479	
1910	58,001	
1911	84,716	
1912	118,045	897,001
1913	95,957	
1914	93,579	
1915	79,374	
1916	83,284	585,113
1917	80,379	
1918	82,344	
1919	104,822	
1920	26,766	919,799
1921	13,484	
1922	11,019	
1923	10,662	
1924	10,125	4,826,471 (La Follette)
1925	8,558	
1926	8,392	
1927	7,425	
1928	7,793	262,805

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\*Memorandum from the National Secretary to the National Executive Committee, December 8, 1932, Archives of the Socialist Party.

TABLE II

Party Membership By States: 1929-1936\*

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
Alabama	--	1	1	12	22	16	10	3
Alaska	--	1	--	--	--	--	1	--
Arizona	20	1	12	108	56	116	88	12
Arkansas	--	8	4	64	49	134	173	74
California	384	580	435	918	1238	638	532	411
Colorado	72	106	73	138	78	127	135	119
Connecticut	239	195	236	411	740	781	939	651
Delaware	--	--	--	16	27	29	13	18
Dist. Columbia	26	20	21	70	46	48	34	62
Florida	35	15	25	71	140	155	188	104
Georgia	18	13	7	20	15	29	2	--
Idaho	21	2	2	55	20	30	42	57
Illinois	592	594	494	742	1207	1208	1104	719
Indiana	96	63	90	370	414	610	400	247
Iowa	38	30	64	98	84	142	128	65
Kansas	71	65	65	139	218	159	134	182
Kentucky	18	1	15	72	39	45	72	57
Louisiana	20	12	10	4	48	61	46	50
Maine	50	44	89	69	105	135	115	102
Maryland	66	82	67	158	226	273	193	110
Massachusetts	1093	1009	1012	1118	1257	1302	1149	747
Michigan	316	231	284	517	583	958	686	567
Minnesota	85	81	10	105	89	211	92	181
Mississippi	--	1	3	2	1	1	--	1
Missouri	35	22	46	239	497	704	323	223
Montana	23	142	151	270	133	410	373	88

(Continued on next page)

\*Report to the Special National Convention, Chicago, March 26-29, 1937,  
Archives of the Socialist Party.

(continued)

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
Nebraska	--	4	7	51	32	16	23	13
Nevada	6	8	4	8	6	7	2	2
New Hampshire	122	91	109	56	88	157	133	80
New Jersey	506	499	514	936	909	1026	639	342
New Mexico	--	1	27	51	129	106	16	12
New York	1748	2415	2739	3199	2983	3966	3817	1963
North Carolina	12	15	13	25	174	41	19	6
North Dakota	--	--	--	14	1	5	--	4
Ohio	516	544	416	713	894	810	739	531
Oklahoma	28	11	7	69	113	197	155	67
Oregon	96	83	62	93	111	130	--	1
Pennsylvania	1399	1331	1321	2403	2450	2750	3044	1945
Rhode Island	36	22	31	34	75	77	72	86
South Carolina	--	2	4	3	3	5	2	--
South Dakota	--	3	9	6	--	2	9	10
Tennessee	21	--	1	30	64	76	45	43
Texas	30	35	33	100	58	191	110	82
Utah	70	32	28	153	16	132	24	30
Vermont	41	31	45	71	68	51	95	24
Virginia	50	37	120	32	33	85	28	26
Washington	46	38	186	287	309	222	450	89
West Virginia	31	24	9	158	133	182	56	53
Wisconsin	1350	1196	1475	2467	2510	2341	2599	1636
Wyoming	15	5	9	67	56	45	72	25
Hawaii	1	1	3	--	--	--	--	2
Canada	--	--	1	1	1	1	--	--
Members-at-large	32	19	--	--	--	--	--	--
Associate Members	81	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Total 9560 9736 10389 16863 18548 20951 19121 11922

TABLE III

Membership in Language Federations, 1928-1936\*

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
Bohemian	#	80	125	106	90	80	91	105	99
Finnish	1868	1835	1602	1511	1193	1231	1307	1219	##
Italian	261	472	187	167	215	168	227	141	138
Jewish	637	1464	629	604	611	792	1290	1145	##
Jugoslav	659	1104	654	807	795	715	824	698	644
Lithuanian	31	14	48	53**	30	49	74	33	36
Polish	--	320**	200**	117**	75**	100	108	82	50#
<hr/> Total	3456	5291	3445	3365	3009	3133	3921	3423	967
Proportion of total membership	44%	55%	35%	32%	18%	17%	18%	18%	8%

# Not affiliated.

## Disaffiliated in May, 1936. Membership before disaffiliation: Finnish, 1137; Jewish, 606.

\*\*Based on dues stamps sold to the organization. Calculation on the basis of stamps actually distributed could not be made owing to inadequate reports.

\*Report to Special Convention, Chicago, March 26-29, 1937, Archives of the Socialist Party.



TABLE IV

The Party's Finances, 1932-1936\*

	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
Income from membership dues	\$ 6,724.99	8,184.99	9,183.19	8,391.00	5,611.21
Total income	\$56,352.67	36,415.37	47,780.47	38,209.27	42,738.61
Expenditure	\$56,465.65	36,294.27	48,033.13	38,022.34	43,006.04
Assets	\$13,195.66	11,083.11	11,384.55	9,412.99	9,903.16
Liabilities	\$16,707.30	14,384.18	18,327.95	19,820.76	25,405.72

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\*Report to the Special Convention, Chicago, March 26-29, 1937. Archives of the Socialist Party.

## APPENDIX B

## THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE FEDERATIONS

Seven "Foreign Language Federations" were affiliated to the Socialist party before the split of May, 1936. They were the Czechoslovak (Bohemian), the Finnish, the Italian, the Yugoslav, and the Lithuanian Socialist Federations, the Jewish Socialist Verband, and the Polish Socialist Alliance. In 1928 the membership of the Federations constituted 44 per cent of the total membership of the party, increasing to 55 per cent in 1930. The influx of native-born Americans into the party, following the onset of the Great Depression, gradually reduced the percentage to 18 in 1935. The Finnish, Jewish, and Yugoslav Federations were the strongest among the organizations in terms of membership, range of activities, and financial resources.

The Federations carried the message of the party to their members through their newspapers, periodicals, and pamphlets. Among the journals published by the Federations were the Spravedlnost (Czech), Rahivaja (Finnish), Parola (Italian), Der Wecker (Jewish), Proletarec (Yugoslav), and Robotnik Polski (Polish). The Federations were virtually autonomous organizations and their activities extended far beyond agitation and propaganda for socialism. Indeed their energies were mainly spent in educational and cultural activities among their respective linguistic and national groups. Some of them also administered benevolent societies for rendering a variety of services to their members. The most important of such societies was the Workmen's Circle with several thousand members. The Federations and their auxiliary organizations like the Circle formed an important source of financial support to the party.

After the Cleveland convention of the party in May, 1936, the Jewish Socialist Verband and the Finnish Socialist Federation disaffiliated themselves from the party. Those that remained in the party constituted only eight per cent of the total membership.

## APPENDIX C

## THE LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY\*

The League for Industrial Democracy grew out of the Inter-Collegiate Socialist Society which was founded in 1905. The Society was launched at a meeting of writers, social workers, labor unionists, and teachers held in lower Manhattan. Upton Sinclair, then a rising young novelist of 27, told the gathering that the Society would seek to promote an intelligent understanding of the problems relating to the working people among college men and women.

Among the founding members of the Society were Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Oscar Lowell Triggs, Clarence Darrow, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, William English Walling, B. C. Flower, Leonard Abbot, and J. G. Phelps Stokes. Jack London was elected as the first president of the Society. Harry W. Laidler became secretary of the Society in 1910. In 1921 the name of the organization was changed to League for Industrial Democracy. Norman Thomas joined it as co-executive director and conducted many of his activities under its auspices.

During the period 1932-36, the L.I.D. arranged a series of lectures in various parts of the country. The League also published numerous tracts and pamphlets, mostly by Laidler, on social, economic, and political issues. Chapters of the Student League for Industrial Democracy were established in 125 colleges and universities.

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\*See Harry W. Laidler, "Fifty Years for the L.I.D.," Socialist Call, XXIII (April, 1955), 15-18.

## APPENDIX D

SOCIALIST PARTY PLATFORM, 1932<sup>1</sup>

We are facing a breakdown of the capitalist system. This situation the Socialist party has long predicted. In the last campaign it warned the people of the increasing insecurity in American life and urged a program of action which, if adopted, would have saved millions from their present tragic plight.

Today, in every city of the United States, jobless men and women by the thousands are fighting the grim battle against want and starvation, while factories stand idle and food rots on the ground. Millions of wage-earners and salaried workers are hunting in vain for jobs, while other millions are only partly employed.

Unemployment and poverty are inevitable products of the present system. Under capitalism the few own our industries. The many do the work. The wage-earners and farmers are compelled to give a large part of the product of their labor to the few. The many in the factories, mines, shops, offices and on the farms obtain but a scanty income and are able to buy back only a part of the goods that can be produced in such abundance by our mass industries.

Goods pile up. Factories close. Men and women are discharged. The nation is thrown into a panic. In a country with natural resources, machinery and trained labor sufficient to provide security and plenty for all, masses of people are destitute.

Capitalism spells not only widespread economic disaster, but class strife. It likewise carries with it an ever present threat of international war. The struggle of the capitalist class to find world markets and investment areas for their surplus goods and capital was a prime cause of the world war. It is today fostering those policies of militarism and imperialism which, if unchecked, will lead to another world conflict.

From the poverty, insecurity, unemployment, the economic collapse, the wastes and the wars of our present capitalistic order, only the united efforts of workers and farmers, organized in unions and cooperatives and, above all, in a political

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<sup>1</sup>Harry W. Laidler (ed.), Socialist Planning and a Socialist Program (New York, 1932), 243-48.

party of their own, can save the nation.

The Republican and Democratic parties, both controlled by the great industrialists and financiers, have no plan or program to rescue us from the present collapse. In this crisis, their chief purpose and desire has been to help the railroads, banks, insurance companies and other capitalistic interests.

The Socialist party is today the one democratic party of the workers whose program would remove the causes of class struggles, class antagonisms and social evils inherent in the capitalist system.

It proposes to transfer the principal industries of the country from private ownership and autocratic, cruelly inefficient management to social ownership and democratic control. Only by these means will it be possible to organize our industrial life on a basis of planned and steady operation without periodic breakdowns and disastrous crises.

It proposes the following measures:

#### Unemployment and Labor Legislation

1. A federal appropriation of \$5,000,000,000 for immediate relief for those in need to supplement state and local appropriations.
2. A federal appropriation of \$5,000,000,000 for public works and roads, reforestation, slum clearance and decent homes for the workers, by federal government, states and cities.
3. Legislation providing for the acquisition of land, buildings and equipment necessary to put the unemployed to work producing food, fuel and clothing and for the erection of houses for their own use.
4. The six-hour day and the five-day week without a reduction of wages.
5. A comprehensive and efficient system of free public employment agencies.
6. A compulsory system of unemployment compensation with adequate benefits, based on contributions by the government and by employers.

7. Old age pensions for men and women sixty years of age and over.
8. Health and maternity insurance.
9. Improved systems of workmen's compensation and accident insurance.
10. The abolition of child labor.
11. Government aid to farmers and small home-owners to protect them against foreclosures and a moratorium on sales for non-payment of taxes by destitute farmers and unemployed workers.
12. Adequate minimum wage laws.

#### Social Ownership

1. Social ownership of mines, forests, oil and power resources; public utilities dealing with light and power, transportation and communication and of all other basic industries.
3. The operation of these socialized industries by boards of administration on which the wage-earner, the consumer and the technician are adequately represented; the recognition in each industry of the principle of collective bargaining.

#### Banking

1. Socialization of our credit and currency system and the establishment of a unified banking system, beginning with the complete governmental acquisition of the Federal Reserve Banks and the extension of the services of the Postal Savings Banks to cover all departments of the banking business and the transference of this department of the post office to a government-owned banking corporation.

#### Taxation

1. Steeply increased inheritance taxes and income taxes on the higher incomes and estates of both corporations and individuals.

2. A constitutional amendment authorizing the taxation of all government securities.

### Agriculture

Many of the foregoing measures for socializing the power, banking and other industries, for raising living standards among the city workers, etc., would greatly benefit the farmer.

As special measures of agricultural upbuilding, we propose:

1. The reduction of tax burdens, by a shift from taxes on farm property to taxes in incomes, inheritances, excess profits and other similar forms of taxation.

2. Increased federal and state subsidies to road building and educational and social services for rural communities.

3. The creation of a federal marketing agency for the purchase and marketing of agricultural products.

4. The acquisition by bona fide cooperative societies and by governmental agencies of grain elevators, stockyards, packing houses and warehouses and the conduct of these services on a non-profit basis. The encouragement of farmers' cooperative societies and of consumers' cooperatives in the cities, with a view of eliminating the middle-man.

5. The socialization of federal land banks and the extension by these banks of long-term credit to farmers at low rates of interest.

6. Social insurance against losses due to adverse weather conditions.

7. The creation of national, regional, and state land utilization boards for the purpose of discovering the best uses of the farming land of the country, in view of the joint needs of agriculture, industry, recreation, water supply, reforestation, etc., and to prepare the way for agricultural planning on a national and, ultimately, on a world scale.

### Constitutional Changes

1. Proportional representation.

2. Direct election of the president and vice-president.
3. The initiative and referendum.
4. An amendment to the constitution to make constitutional amendments less cumbersome.
5. Abolition of the power of the Supreme Court to pass upon the constitutionality of legislation enacted by Congress.
6. The passage of the Socialist party's proposed Workers' Rights amendment to the Constitution empowering Congress to establish national systems of unemployment, health and accident insurance and old age pensions, to abolish child labor, establish and take over enterprises in manufacture, commerce, transportation, banking, public utilities and other business and industries to be owned and operated by the government, and generally for the social and economic welfare of the workers of the United States.

#### Civil Liberties

1. Federal legislation to enforce the First Amendment to the Constitution so as to guarantee freedom of speech, press and assembly, and to penalize officers who interfere with the civil rights of citizens.
2. The abolition of injunctions in labor disputes the outlawing of yellow dog contracts and the passing of laws enforcing the rights of workers to organize into unions.
3. The immediate repeal of the Espionage law and other repressive legislation, and the restoration of civil and political rights to those unjustly convicted under wartime laws.
4. Legislation protecting aliens from being excluded from this country or from citizenship or from being deported on account of their political, social or economic beliefs, or on account of activities engaged in by them which are not illegal for citizens.
5. Modification of the immigration laws to permit the reuniting of families and to offer a refuge to those fleeing from political or religious persecution.



### Negro

1. The enforcement of Constitutional guarantees of economic, political and legal equality for the Negro.
2. The enactment and enforcement of drastic anti-lynching laws.

### International Relations

While the Socialist party is opposed to all war, it believes that there can be no permanent peace until socialism is established internationally. In the meanwhile, we will support all measures that promise to promote good will and friendship among the nations of the world, including:

1. The reduction of armaments, leading to the goal of total disarmament by international agreement, if possible, but, if that is not possible, by setting an example ourselves. Soldiers, sailors, and workers unemployed by reason of disarmament to be absorbed, where desired, in a program of public works, to be financed in part by the savings due to disarmament. The abolition of conscription, of military training camps and the R. O. T. C.
2. The recognition of the Soviet Union and the encouragement of trade and industrial relations with that country.
3. The cancellation of war debts due from the allied governments as part of a program of wiping out war debts and reparations, provided that such cancellation does not release money for armaments, but promotes disarmament.
4. The entrance of the United States into the World Court.
5. The entrance of the United States into the League of Nations under conditions which will make it an effective instrument for world peace and renewed cooperation with the working class parties abroad to the end that the League may be transformed from a league of imperialist powers to a democratic assemblage representative of the aspirations of the common people of the world.
6. The creation of international economic organizations on which labor is adequately represented, to deal with problems of raw material, investments, money, credit, tariffs and living standards from the viewpoint of the welfare of the masses throughout the world.
7. The abandonment of every degree of military intervention

by the United States in the affairs of other countries. The immediate withdrawal of military forces from Haiti and Nicaragua.

8. The withdrawal of United States military and naval forces from China and relinquishment of American extra-territorial privileges.

9. The complete independence of the Philippines and the negotiation of treaties with other nations safeguarding the sovereignty of these islands.

10. Prohibition of the sales of munitions to foreign powers.

Committed to this constructive program, the Socialist party calls upon the nation's workers and upon all fair-minded and progressive citizens to unite with it in a mighty movement against the present drift into social disaster and in behalf of sanity, justice, peace and freedom.

## APPENDIX E

## DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

(Adopted at the Detroit Convention, June 3, 1934)\*

The Socialist Party is the party of the workers, regardless of race, color, creed. In mill and mine, shop and farm, office and school, the workers can assert their united power, and through the Socialist Party establish a cooperative commonwealth forever free from human exploitation and class rule.

If the workers delay and drift, they will prolong the period of their enslavement to a decadent capitalism. This uncreative, wasteful and brutally oppressive social system takes jobs away and turns millions of would-be producers into the streets with no assurance that ever again they may become employed--financiers, for their own selfish gain, control markets and prices and autocratically regulate the extension or withdrawal of credit. Those who utilize the profit motive for arbitrary advantage, restrict the workers' standard of living save where labor has aggressively organized and struggled energetically for its rights--and even then deny to the working class the abundance which the modern productive process is technically capable of bestowing upon those willing to labor for the common good. Capitalism invades the peace of farming areas with the all-pervasive danger of insecurity and in many regions with bitter destitution. Throughout the land it attacks the American home and brands countless children with the pinch of want.

The privileged minority who benefit from exploitation of the multitude are not content with owning the mechanism of production and distribution, which perpetuates their property power; they control the press, radio, and motion picture; they starve and poison the educational system; they dominate our courts, our municipalities, our state legislative assemblies and our national government; for the extension of their economic domain they expose to the appalling menace of new imperialist wars the innocent youth in our own and other countries, on whom they will lay the ruthless clutch of conscription and send to fight those wars. To confuse the voting masses and retain their authority, they maintain great political parties whose appeal fluctuates between frank reaction and fictitious liberalism, neither of which offers

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\*American Socialist Quarterly, III (July, 1934), 3-6.

to the workers any substantial or enduring program for the acquisition of their birthright.

Only those who labor with hand and brain in their concerted might, can overthrow this monstrous system and replace it with a Socialist order. Whenever they will, they can transfer to the people the ownership of industry, land, finance, and natural resources including water power, and operate these possessions of the Socialist commonwealth for the material and cultural enrichment of all--beginning with the large scale industries of a public character such as banking, insurance, mining, transportation, communication, and the trustified industries, and extending the process rapidly to the point where rent, interest, and profit are abolished.

The socialization of industry as Socialists conceive it, however, means more than simple government ownership--it involves the opposite of irresponsible bureaucracy, and includes democratic administration through the elected and responsible representatives of the workers in the respective industries and of the workers as a whole.

The Socialist Party advocates the establishment of a system of co-operative and publicly owned and managed warehouses, markets and credits, to promote direct dealing between farmers and city consumers at the cost of the service in their mutual interests, thus reducing the cost of living, assuring farmers a just compensation for their labor, and enabling them to escape from the twin curses of tenantry and mortgaged serfdom.

Workers of town and country must be strongly organized on economic as well as on political lines. The ceaseless struggle of the labor unions and farm organizations, and the constructive work of bona fide cooperative societies, are necessary, not only for the immediate defense and betterment of the condition of the producing class, but also to equip producers with the understanding and self-discipline required for the efficient administration of the industries of which they are to win control.

It is the duty of every Socialist wage worker to be a loyal and active member of the union in his industry or trade, and to strive for the strengthening and solidifying of the trade union movement. It is the duty and privilege of the Socialist press to aid the unions in their struggles for better wages, increased leisure, and better conditions of employment.

The Socialist Party, while standing for the interests of the American people, recognizes that the well-being of any

one nation is inextricably interwoven with that of every other. To divisive capitalist nationalism it opposes international workers' solidarity; to the Socialist party of other countries it extends full support in their struggles, uniting with them in the common effort to build a world-wide federation of Socialist republics.

The Socialist Party is opposed to militarism, imperialism, and war. It purposes to eradicate the perpetual economic warfare of capitalism the fruit of which is international conflict. War cannot be tolerated by Socialists, or preparedness for war. They will unitedly seek to develop trustworthy working class instruments for the peaceable settlement of international disputes and conflicts. They will seek to eliminate military training from schools, colleges and camps. They will oppose military reviews, displays and expenditures, whether for direct war preparedness or for militaristic propaganda, both in wartime and in peacetime. They will loyally support, in the tragic event of war, any of their comrades who for anti-war activities or refusal to perform war service, come into conflict with public opinion or the law. Moreover, recognizing the suicidal nature of modern combat and the incalculable train of wars' consequences which rest most heavily upon the working class, they will refuse collectively to sanction or support any international war; they will, on the contrary, by agitation and opposition do their best not to be broken up by the war, but to break up the war. They will meet war and the detailed plans for war already mapped out by the war-making arms of the government, by massed war resistance, organized so far as practicable in a general strike of labor unions and professional groups in a united effort to make the waging of war a practical impossibility and to convert the capitalist war crisis into a victory for Socialism.

In its struggle for a new society, the Socialist Party seeks to attain its objectives by peaceful and orderly means. Recognizing the increasing resort by a crumbling capitalist order to Fascism to preserve its integrity and dominance, the Socialist Party intends not to be deceived by Fascist propaganda nor overwhelmed by Fascist force. It will do all in its power to fight Fascism of every kind all the time and everywhere in the world, until Fascism is dead. It will rely, nevertheless, on the organization of a disciplined labor movement. Its methods may include a recourse to a general strike which will not merely serve as a defense against Fascist counter-revolution but will carry the revolutionary struggle into the camp of the enemy.

The Socialist Party proclaims anew its faith in economic and political democracy, but it unhesitatingly applies itself

to the task of replacing the bogus democracy of capitalist parliamentarianism by a genuine workers' democracy. Capitalism is doomed. If it can be superseded by majority vote, the Socialist Party will rejoice. If the crisis comes through the denial of majority rights after the electorate has given us a mandate we shall not hesitate to crush by our labor solidarity the reckless forces of reaction and to consolidate the Socialist state. If the capitalist system should collapse in a general chaos and confusion, which cannot permit of orderly procedure, the Socialist Party, whether or not in such a case it is a majority, will not shrink from the responsibility of organizing and maintaining a government under the workers' rule. True democracy is a worthy means to progress; but true democracy must be created by the workers of the world.

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