
THE 1940 ELECTIONS AND THE NEXT TASKS

BY EARL BROWDER

(Report to the meeting of the National Committee of the Communist Party of the U.S.A., held in conjunction with the Special Convention in New York on November 16-17, 1940.)

ON NOVEMBER 6, the cry went up from leading circles of both the Republican and Democratic parties that now, since the elections are over, all campaign documents and speeches should be immediately and publicly burned, with appropriate ceremonials, and should be forgotten as quickly as possible. Norman Thomas even rushed the gun, and sent this message over the air before midnight of November 5, immediately following Boss Flynn's announcement of victory for the third term.

This common thought of all the "great minds" arises from their common recognition that, despite all the best laid plans, the election campaign did get out of hand, it took a course in its last days quite displeasing to them all, and they all found themselves saying things they want forgotten immediately and completely. Elemental forces had broken through the most complete blockade, finding powerful, if distorted, expression. And the gen-

tleman at the top are uneasy about it, they are disturbed, they want it wiped from the popular mind.

What a revealing commentary this is upon the true character of our boasted democracy! Almost before the election is over, its leading participants and their servants hasten to tell the masses that the decisive period of the political debate, the ten days before the voting, consisted of lies, slanders, appeals to prejudice, unsound arguments, of which we must all be ashamed and forget as quickly as possible!

The Communist Party has no need to wash itself after the election in this manner. We have nothing in our campaign of which we are ashamed, nothing we wish forgotten, no speeches or documents which we are not ready to defend after the election with equal or greater conviction. Instead of burning our campaign speeches, we sent to press the day after election a permanent pamphlet of the Presidential campaign addresses, copies

of which are in your hands, which we believe you will unanimously endorse.

One outstanding feature of the election campaign in its last phase was described by Karl Marx over ninety years ago, in words which for concise and appropriate description of America in 1940 cannot be improved upon. In the introduction to *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx said:

“Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power? Where the Opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?”

Wendell Willkie was doubtless unconscious of the fact that he was following the Marxian law to the letter when he accused Roosevelt of communistic tendencies. Roosevelt was equally unconscious of how he was proving the genius of Marx when he accused Willkie of seeking an alliance with the Communists. Their ignorance of fundamental political laws, however, only emphasizes the profound correctness of Marx's conclusion from similar phenomena almost a century ago, namely, that *“Communism is already acknowledged by all . . . to be itself a power.”* True in 1848, and a thousand times true in 1940!

How the Masses Intervened in This Election

Even before the major party conventions, it was already clear and registered by us that, whatever the

election outcome, the chief executive office would be occupied by the War Party coalition, by a representative of Wall Street. After the nominations this fact was publicly confirmed when Willkie at Elwood quoted the exact words of Roosevelt as their common war platform, and repeated his promises on domestic policy. In the first phase of the campaign, up to October 2, this agreement was rigidly adhered to. Under its cover was put over the two great decisive steps toward militarization and war, the conscription law and the alliance with the British Empire. But already the pact between the war coalition was strained, because the election campaign was on, and the masses were pressing upon both parties and their leaders their profound abhorrence of the war.

The first decisive break in the war coalition of the bourgeoisie—they call it “national unity”—came on the conscription issue, when in Congress two-thirds of Republican representatives and one-third of the whole House, including Democrats, voted against the draft bill, defying their official leaders and the enormous pressure from above, in concession to the rising pressure of the masses from below. The trade of fifty destroyers for naval bases with Britain and the Joint Defense Council with belligerent Canada were not even submitted to Congress as accomplished facts, but were carried through as edicts of a military dictatorship. This was unquestionably due to fear of crystallization of a strong opposition in the country, and not to the inherent dicta-

torial tendencies of Roosevelt, for it weakened rather than strengthened his immediate position, whatever its significance as a precedent for the future, since it registered a fear of the people and even of Congress. The masses had begun to register their profound opposition to the war, despite and over the head of the rigged-up election combination.

From this moment the course of the election campaign changed its character. What had been planned by the coalition as a great drive to whip up war hysteria among the masses, leading to a war mandate on November 5, broke down and took another course. Willkie awoke to the fact that his candidacy was fading into nothingness. In his Cleveland speech he suddenly switched tactics (without in any way modifying his programmatic commitments) and made a definite appeal for the anti-war vote, accusing Roosevelt of planning to take the country into the war, which he pledged his election would prevent. The rise in his political prospects was sudden and dramatic, although that speech cost him the support of some of his original backers, and Dorothy Thompson—an army in her own right—deserted him for the President. So menacing became the peace issue to the third-term prospect that Roosevelt was finally forced to revise his plans and enter the campaign speaking lists. Instead of being able to whip up the war spirit further, Roosevelt was forced to engage in competition with Willkie in promises of peace.

Thus, instead of the election re-

sult being, as planned, a mandate for the war policy, it was turned into its opposite, a registration of the fact that no candidate could win the country on a war platform so long as there was even the most shallow and demagogic appeal to the masses for peace by the other chief candidate. That the promises of both candidates were sheer demagoguery, there is hardly need for me to emphasize here. The peace promises were concessions to mass sentiment, wrung from two unwilling candidates. They were maneuvers to deceive and cheat the masses—but they have a value, if the masses, especially the workers, strengthen their independent organizations with the determination to enforce these promises in a serious struggle against the war-makers. The turn of the campaign, in which the masses compelled the recognition of their desire for peace, as shown in the change from demagoguery for war to demagoguery about peace, was a great victory for the workers, for the people. It was the outstanding feature, the surprise, of a campaign which in its beginning appeared on the surface to be cut-and-dried.

The Disintegration of Old Party Ties

Superficial and tendentious commentators are already busy interpreting the distribution of votes on November 5 as an unprecedented strengthening of the hold of the Democratic and Republican parties upon the masses. The true significance of this election is quite to the contrary.

The superficial argument runs, that with the biggest poll in American history, close to fifty millions, the vote cast for all the minor parties taken as a whole was the smallest in modern times. A larger percentage of votes went for the two major parties than has occurred at any time in the twentieth century—this in the face of the closest programmatic agreement between the major parties that has ever appeared during this time.

It would be the greatest mistake to accept this surface appearance at its face value. Allegiance to the two old parties among the masses has never been so weak as it is now. It is notorious that the Democratic Party has long been held together only by the mass prestige of the New Deal Roosevelt who was opposed by the majority of his own party leaders. Roosevelt's abandonment of the New Deal for an armaments, militarization and war policy has so profoundly alienated the masses who followed him with enthusiasm in 1936 that in 1940 they voted for him with obvious reluctance, with suspicion, and only because Willkie was committed to identical policies and was obviously dishonest in his last-minute peace demagoguery. There is not the slightest doubt that a Republican candidate who would have opposed conscription, the hysterical military appropriations and the deal with Britain—even such an old-fashioned conservative as Taft—would have won handily in most states outside the Solid South. The hold of the Democratic Party, and of Roosevelt, upon the masses has been seriously

shaken and undermined, far beyond the measure of the drop from 62 per cent of the vote in 1936 to 55 per cent in 1940.

As for the Republican Party, its morale, which reflects its ties with the masses, was so low that its convention in Philadelphia could be stampeded into abandoning all its known and traditional leaders in favor of an unknown, a Democrat in all his previous political activity, and who was chosen precisely because he was politically a blank sheet of paper upon which each voter could be invited to write his own prescription and vote for it. Surely, that is no evidence of a hold upon the masses. Even Willkie's increase of votes over Landon was won only in the last weeks, after he departed from his coalition program to engage in desperate demagoguery.

A further evidence of the weakening of the ties of both parties with the masses is the unprecedented shifting from one side to the other. The appearance of this phenomenon among well-known public figures only reflected a much more significant shifting among the masses of the voters. More than in any modern campaign, the theory of the "lesser evil" came forward as a major manifestation. The votes were more "against" than "for."

The Socialist Party vote for Norman Thomas is not yet known fully or exactly. But from fragmentary returns, it is already clear that it shows a rather complete collapse and bankruptcy. In New York City it ran below the exceedingly difficult "write-in" vote for the

Communist Party. The ambiguous banal, weasel-worded toadying campaign of Norman Thomas met its natural and inevitable response among the voters, even those who for years had followed him and his party banner faithfully. It had finally become more than they could stomach.

The Communist Party, denied a place on the ballot in more than half the states, including centers of our greatest strength such as New York, Ohio, and Illinois, had not even the physical possibility of measuring its mass influence by the vote cast for its candidates. Considering the unprecedented campaign, official and unofficial, of intimidation and suppression carried on against our Party, it can only be judged as a many-times multiplied mass influence as compared with 1936, to have reached or even surpassed that vote in 1940.

It has always been difficult to get Communist votes cast, and even more difficult to get them counted. In order to get some measure of how much mass influence our Party must have in order to register a hundred thousand votes in the Presidential election, let us resort to a bit of imaginative comparison. Let us suppose, for example, that Mr. Willkie and his party, even with all their financial and property-backed backing, had nevertheless been forced to enter this campaign with a law on Federal statute books denying public employment or relief to any Republican; with the courts revoking naturalization papers of any citizen shown to have been a Republican when natural-

ized; with a Congressional Committee holding public inquisitions to ferret out hidden Republicans to drive them out of public or private employment, and to instigate any and every possible legal proceedings against them; with their party forced to gather signatures to petitions to get on the ballot, with public blacklisting in the newspapers of such signers; with their election workers imprisoned by the hundreds and assaulted by the thousands; with a Republican candidate for governor in one state sentenced to prison for fifteen years for the obvious fraud of obtaining signatures to its petitions on the ground that the Republican Party is "the Party of Lincoln"; with the party finally thrown off the ballot in most of the states; with no prospects of gain for anyone but only of sacrifice; with a thousand and one other large and petty persecutions. With all this, one can only speculate how many votes Mr. Wendell Willkie or Mr. Roosevelt will be able to register, if and when they are brought by fate to face similar conditions. For such conditions are a real test of how deep a party's roots have penetrated among the masses.

The Re-emergence of the Labor Party Movement

A major and most important feature of the election campaign was registered during its last ten days in the sudden and emphatic re-emergence of the Labor Party movement. This occurred in the very heat of the final campaign drive, when the Labor Party could not even dream of finding organiza-

tional expression, when the masses were already making up their minds which of the two evils should be chosen as the lesser one. Following the historic radio broadcast of John L. Lewis on October 25, which placed this dilemma in its sharpest form, a large part of the most representative progressive trade unions and people's organizations, with their leaders, responded with an unequivocal declaration of lack of confidence in both major candidates, with the demand for labor's political independence in the form of a Labor Party, together with unswerving adherence to the firmly established progressive policies of the C.I.O., as led by John L. Lewis.

There is no need here to repeat the timely and correct evaluation of this event which our Party made at the time. What we need to record and emphasize now is the tremendous historical significance of this upsurge of the demand for labor's complete political independence, at the very climax of a hotly-contested election, from which labor had been excluded except as voting-cattle. The great significance of this event is in nowise diminished by the fact that, as individuals, the members and leaders of these organizations in most cases chose a "lesser evil" on November 5, and divided their ballots between Roosevelt and Willkie; neither is it diminished by any momentary confusions that may have appeared in progressive ranks during those days. On the whole, it must be said that the progressive circles, rank and file and leaders, displayed a brilliant capacity to seize the moment for a smashing

blow against the camp of the warmongers, together with their agents in the labor movement, and for upholding the arms of all fighters for peace and progress.

A tremendous latent "third party" or Labor Party movement was present in the 1940 campaign, hidden by the surface of events, but revealing itself, beyond any doubt, to close observation and analysis. It could not come forward for lack of timely and bold leadership. But this is a lack which can be remedied, as was shown so forcibly by the re-emergence of the demand for a Labor Party in the last days of the campaign.

This great Labor Party manifestation was another sign of the disintegration of the old bourgeois parties, of their loosening hold upon the masses, of the imminent emergence of a new party on the American political scene, through which labor will achieve its independence and rally to its side the farmers and all toiling masses, in a great mass struggle for political power.

How the Communist Party Worked in the Campaign

We have already given a general and rough estimate of the Communist vote and its significance, as showing multiplied influence and deepening roots among the masses. It is now necessary to examine how our Party worked in this campaign to bring about such a result.

First of all, we multiplied our strength because under the most extreme difficulties we never allowed ourselves to be cut off from that source of all strength, the

masses of workers, of the people. We never allowed ourselves to drift or be driven into sectarianism. We went to the masses, we had faith in the masses, we drew strength from the masses, we gave leadership to the masses. This campaign was for us, from first to last, a mass campaign.

We have already described that great victory of the masses, their intervention in the election campaign, how they frustrated the original plans of the two-party coalition to make it a war campaign, how they forced the change from a demagogy for war to a demagogy about peace. That mass intervention was a spontaneous, unorganized movement on the whole. But its success was determined by the presence within it of elements of organization and leadership. Without some elements of clarity, organization and leadership no success is possible, and the degree of success of a mass movement is always commensurate with the degree to which these factors are present.

These important and vital factors of clarity, organization and leadership were furnished, in the first place, by the Communist Party. Alone among all nationally-organized political forces, the Communist Party foresaw the possibility of this intervention of the masses, and worked consciously, systematically and energetically to bring it into motion and direct it to success. *Not* the Communist Party *alone*, of course, but the Party attracting and guiding and working through the broadest circles of militant progressives, did this work. But the Com-

munist Party *alone* was a nationally-organized directing center conscious of its goal. Thereby we won thousands of devoted adherents and new friends.

So, also, in the loosening of the ties between the old parties and the masses, the process comes spontaneously out of the relations of class forces and their struggles, but it is given consciousness, direction and effectiveness by the work of our Party, in the first instance. When the party in power decries its opposition as "communistic," when the opposition hurls back that reproach, not only against the more advanced opposition parties but also against its chief adversary, as we witnessed so sharply in this campaign in the United States, we have learned from Marx to recognize this as the consequence of the emergence of Communism as a power, acknowledged as such by all. Our Communist Party by its work forced the two major parties, which held 99 per cent of the vote, nevertheless to recognize and combat Communism as their most significant and dangerous opposition, and to recriminate each other as to supposed Communistic tendencies within themselves.

So, also, in the upsurge of the Labor Party movement, the bourgeoisie and its ideologists can see nothing but the manifestation of Communism. Of course the Communist Party supported this movement, and furnished its most conscious element. But it is a broad mass movement, going far beyond our Party ranks. When the capitalist press brands this movement and

its leaders as "Communist," it is only repeating the same formula under which Willkie and Roosevelt hurled this epithet at one another.

The Communist Party gave support to every clearly progressive and peace candidate even if he ran on the Democratic or Republican ticket. All the more so did we support that wing of the American Labor Party in New York which revolted against the old warmongering, reactionary, and Social-Democratic state leadership. Here again, of course, the war camp instantly and unanimously brands any and every opposition to its course as "Communist" beyond the slightest shadow of doubt! The grain of truth behind this lie is that the Communists support everything seriously progressive, and that without the existence of the Communist Party all progressives would find this world a darker and more difficult place.

The Rose - Antonini - Dubinsky-Hillman warmongering leadership within the American Labor Party are boasting of their great election victories. "They" carried the state for Roosevelt. Let them take responsibility, therefore, for what Roosevelt gives to labor, beginning with the \$122,000,000 war contract to Henry Ford in the days immediately following election. But it was the progressive wing of the American Labor Party, against the most bitter and energetic opposition of the pro-war leaders, which gave the A.L.P. its only independent electoral victories, outstandingly the sweeping victory of Vito Marcantonio, the fighting Congressman

from Harlem. Marcantonio was plastered on every billboard and in every newspaper as a "Communist," because of his brilliant fight against militarization and his generally progressive record, but his constituents, by no means Communists, and largely Catholics, returned him to Congress over his Tammany opponent by a majority of almost two to one. That was a great tribute to Marcantonio; it was also a demonstration that the masses do not agree that it is so terrible to come under the accusation of being a Communist.

Out of the whole campaign, and out of the work of the Communist Party in it, it is clear that we have emerged far stronger than we have been before. And I repeat, this is above all because we took our correct understanding and policy to the masses, and always to the masses.

The High Importance of the Fight For the Ballot

The Communist Party's election campaign was, from beginning to end, a prolonged and bitter fight to establish our place on the ballot in the various states. Our Party's members and supporters conducted the struggle with heroism and devotion, enlisting several hundred thousand persons directly in one or another form in this fundamental battle to resist the deterioration and destruction of the democratic achievements of the American people. Our casualties ranged all the way from thousands blacklisted from their jobs, hundreds beaten

up, mutilated and jailed, scores sentenced to prison terms on frame-up charges, and one, Oscar Wheeler, candidate for governor in West Virginia, sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment for soliciting signatures on the ground that his arguments for support to the Communist candidates were "fraudulent." But throughout the fight, our Party did not weaken or capitulate for a single moment; it carried the battle through right up to the end.

It is not my purpose to review all the rich detail of this struggle at this time, valuable as such an examination would be, nor to search out the many shortcomings and weaknesses which inevitably accompanied this so generally admirable and well-conducted campaign. Others will contribute to this task of review and analysis. At this point what is most necessary is to fix the main historical significance and political lessons of the battle for the ballot.

Two points stand out in any such political estimate: First, the Communist Party's fight for its ballot rights was the front line of struggle for all the immediate demands of the working class and the majority of the people. Every nation that has lost its liberties and been thrown into catastrophe in these last years started on the downward path by the suppression of the Communist Party. By fighting for the legality and full election rights of the Communist Party, we were fighting for no narrow party interest, but for peace, for democratic rights and civil liberties, for protection of the standards of life for

the whole working class and the nation.

Second, this fight for the ballot was a fundamental step in the political education of the American masses, necessary for their understanding of the class nature of bourgeois democracy, of the dictatorship of monopoly capital that is exercised through democratic forms, of the inevitable course taken by monopoly capital toward the destruction of these democratic forms whenever they begin to limit and hamper the supremacy of Wall Street's rule. It was necessary to demonstrate to the masses, through their own experience, that it is a lie that the Communists are the enemies of democracy, that in truth it is always the most vicious anti-Communists who first and most destructively tear down and destroy even the limited democratic rights previously enjoyed by the masses. The fight for the ballot was a primer of political education, a concrete American version, in terms of experience, of Lenin's immortal book, *State and Revolution*.

Perspectives and Tasks

This report is not intended as a complete and rounded-out review of the elections, their issues, the experiences, and all the detailed lessons. Much of what is to be said has already been dealt with in editorials and articles in the *Daily Worker*, with more to follow, and these things are repeated and developed in this report only in so far as necessary to fix the main, the outstanding, the decisive characteristics.

A few words are required as to the perspectives. While no one can predict the exact form in which the imperialist war will develop, and in which America will be fully involved, yet one thing is clear: The ruling classes of the United States are riding ruthlessly into the middle of the bloody imperialist war for the redivision of the world; fear of revolutionary upheaval in Europe, and the determination to hold it down by all means, remains the most powerful general motive driving American ruling circles toward entrance into the war as a belligerent. This is already tied up most closely with the Far East which, through the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), may well be the door for United States entrance into the second World War. Capitalism must be preserved at all costs abroad if Wall Street is to feel safe in America; that is the meaning behind all the hypocritical battle cries under which American youth is being mobilized as cannon-fodder.

For the working class and toiling masses, therefore, the future is one of intensifying struggle to keep out of the war, and to bring the war to an end; of ever broader and more serious battles to defeat and throw back the attacks of monopoly capital against wages and living standards, against social legislation, against civil liberties and democratic rights for the masses. This struggle will inevitably force a general recognition among the working class and the toiling masses that the two old parties represent their enemy, Wall Street, monopoly capital, the economic royalists; that

it is necessary to break completely with these parties, and achieve political independence, through a Labor Party or Farmer-Labor Party.

The trade unions are again coming forth as the most important and decisive factor in this struggle, in all its phases. Now more than ever before the trade unions must be extended and consolidated; must perfect their own inner democracy, so that the will of the broad rank and file will be truly reflected in a progressive, clear-headed and militant leadership; must rally around themselves the farmers, the Negroes, the youth, all the democratic organizations and masses of the country.

In the welter of imperialist war plans, formed and being carried out by the most reactionary and undemocratic forces of American life, it has become a matter of life and death for the democratic forces of America—indispensably led by labor—to intervene in the whole sphere of the foreign policy of this country. As, at the dawn of our nationhood, a rejection of the fatal foreign policy engendered within the sordid reactionary forces of American political life, and the acceptance of Jefferson's proposed foreign policy of peace based upon the strength of cooperation with the revolutionary Republican forces of Europe, brought this the young American Republic to safety—just so, today, the American working class heirs of the revolutionary republican Jefferson must work for the safety of their democratic heritage by compelling a foreign

policy of cooperation with the only remaining powerful progressive forces of Europe, with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Those who in America strive to alienate the United States from, and to continue the present foreign policy of tricky hypocrisy and sabotage of relations with, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, are playing the same treacherous role toward America as was played by the Petains and Weygands, the Livals, Daladiers and Blums in breaking up the keystone of France's security—her mutual aid pact with the strongest power of Europe, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The imperative duty of the American workers and all their democratic allies is to fight for the strength and peace of America through the most cordial relations and cooperation with the Soviet Union and with the struggling democracy of China.

American workers must be brought ever closer in information, understanding and common action with the workers and democratic mass movements of the Latin American countries. They must be rallied to the most immediate concrete aid to the rescue of the Spanish republican refugees in France, and their transportation and resettlement in Latin America, supporting the campaign already launched by the United Spanish Aid Committee; and

learn how to help the Spanish people prepare to overthrow the Franco fascist dictatorship. They must be rallied to more energetic aid to the heroic Chinese people, fighting for their national independence against United States munitions furnished to the Japanese imperialists. They must learn to understand and help the workers of the European lands who, on both sides of the battle-lines, are preparing their forces for the overthrow of their capitalist, imperialist, fascist oppressors and destroyers.

These are the perspectives and tasks of labor and the toiling masses. The perspectives and tasks of the Communist Party can only be the same, with the Communist Party in the forefront as the most far-sighted, the most advanced, the most organized, the most persistent, the most courageous, the most reliable detachment of the working class.

To play such a role, the Communist Party must give the most serious attention to building its own forces, to recruiting new members, to educating itself and its supporters ever more thoroughly, to mastering the theory and practice of scientific socialism, which is communism. These are our perspectives and tasks. Let us move forward with deeper confidence and determination, knowing that we represent the masses and the future.