

X. LABOR MUST FIND ITS POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

JOHN L. LEWIS, in his historic speech of October 25, broke away from the active and official leader of the war party, Roosevelt, only to fall into the arms of the candidate for leadership of that same war party, Willkie. Thus did he give dramatic expression to the most fundamental issue facing labor and the people—the necessity of full political independence from the moribund Democratic and Republican parties which are but two expressions of the war party coalition—without, however, indicating the only radical solution, which is an independent national Labor Party. Labor is still the prisoner of the capitalist two-party system, and Mr. Lewis' most staunch supporters throughout the country will feel a pang of deep disappointment that he passed up his magnificent opportunity to make the first smash through these prison walls, for the sake of the future, but chose rather the short-sighted course, of once again bargaining for crumbs from the table of the rich, of "rewarding friends and punishing enemies," of playing one group of the ruling class against another in competition for labor's support.

When is labor to emerge into its rightful independence, power and dignity, if this poor game is to be forever continued on the plea of the difficulties of independence, and the pauper's profits of the old opportunist game? That is the main question which the progressive labor movement puts before itself and before John L. Lewis. And that is the question to which he contributed no beginnings of an answer.

With Lewis' scorching excoriation of the betrayal of Roosevelt, of

his adventurous playing with the welfare, lives, and peace of the people, a profound assent arises from the masses, a deep-voiced "Amen." That is a truth most necessary for the spokesmen of progressive labor and the people to utter loudly and clearly. The myth of the New Deal, now abandoned and betrayed, had to be dispelled. Someone had to stand up and cry out the obvious truth: "The King is naked!" Lewis did it, and thus far performed an historic service.

But the unconditional endorsement of Willkie, as the opposite of Roosevelt, flies in the face of truth and commonsense. It transcends even the moss-grown plausibilities of the "lesser evil" theory. It is incredible. It strikes no answering chord among the masses. It does not correspond to their experience or their understanding. For the masses know that Willkie has pledged himself to follow the self-same course as Roosevelt in every essential, to do the very things for which Roosevelt is so justly and roundly repudiated. The act does not ring true. It is the expedient of the moment, the grasping of a straw. It is an expression of weakness, not of strength, a weakness which, if not remedied, can become fatal in the unfolding of events as history whirls forward.

There can be nothing but contempt for the howls and caviling against Lewis, which come from the camp of Roosevelt's "labor" lieutenants. Among these Lilliputians, Lewis has stood forth as a giant. They have groveled at the feet of the war machine and would deliver labor in chains for the reward of Roosevelt's smile. Lewis has at least tried to bargain for some definite gain as the price of labor's vote, even though such bargain is dubious and unsound, and dangerous for the future.

The Communists have no part or parcel with endorsement of Willkie, unconditional or otherwise. Once entrenched in power, he will ruthlessly drive forward the program of imperialist reaction and war which Roosevelt ruthlessly drives forward today. That is why the Communist Party and its growing mass of supporters fight so fiercely for the people's ballot rights in New York today. For the Communist Party in 1940 occupies the unique position of being the only channel through which labor and the masses can register un-

equivocally their will to peace, their struggle for a better life, their path to the future when labor will hold all power in its own hands.

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