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# Which Party for the American Worker?

## Letter to a Worker-Correspondent

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Fellow Worker:

You have asked me some interesting questions. Why should I join the Workers Party? What is the program of the WP? Why was “another” party necessary? Can we not remove the evils from which workers now suffer without revolution?

Workers have every right to ask these questions of us. No worker, indeed, should join the WP without carefully considering and understanding our answer to these questions.

I am going to give our answers to them in as straightforward and simple a manner as possible. I hope you will discuss these letters with the other workers in the shop in your neighborhood about whom you wrote me. We ask nothing except a careful consideration of our program by honest, class-conscious workers. We believe the result will be that they join the Workers Party ranks.

### **How Workers Party Began.**

First of all I am going to tell you briefly how the WP came into existence; for that in itself tells something very important about what kind of a party the WP is. The WP was launched on December 1, 1934. Thus by the calendar the WP is, so to speak, a baby. But this is the case only if you judge by the calendar. In organization, in tradition, in personnel, in program, the WP begins its life as a mature party.

For the WP did not suddenly descent from the clouds or spring up out of the sea. It is not the result of a “bright idea” in the brain of some individual. The WP came into existence as the result of the

merger of two previously existing organizations, each of which had an honorable history of some years in the labor movement, both nationally and internationally. One of these organizations was the American Workers Party, the other the Communist League of America, popularly known as Trotskyists.

The CLA was composed of revolutionists who were expelled from the Communist Party and the Communist International. They differed with the line taken by the CP and CI in certain matters of principle and tactics. They asked for the right to state their views in the party discussions, being willing to carry out party discipline in action, if this elementary right of the members of a revolutionary party were granted them. They were refused the right and expelled.

Nevertheless, they continued for some years as a faction of the CP and CI, attempting to correct their line, hoping to reform them and get back in. When the comrades of the former CLA saw that the evils to which they had pointed were not corrected, but aggravated, and when they saw the result of these evils in the complete collapse e.g. of the Communist Party of Germany before Hitler Fascism, they decided that they would be untrue to the working class if they continued trying to reform the CP. They decided that a new revolutionary party and a new international must be formed.

The American Workers Party, on its part, was the outgrowth of the Conference for Progressive Labor Action. The CPLA was formed in 1928-29. It was composed mainly of trade unionists, most of them in the AF of L, some in independent unions. They fought against gangsterism, racketeering, and autocracy in the unions. They agitated for a militant policy as against the class-collaboration, "cooperation with the bosses," policy of the AF of L officialdom. They sought to organize the workers in the basic industries which were utterly neglected by the AF of L at that time. When the depression continued, they took a leading part in organizing the unemployed in many states and in building the National Unemployment League.

### **Found Need of New Party.**

While the leading members of the former CPLA carried on their activities mainly in the economic field, they had a revolutionary outlook. They realized that actions relating to the immediate needs and grievances of the workers could be carried out effectively and help in the eventual emancipation of the workers, only if the vanguard ele-

ments among the workers had a correct outlook and philosophy, and this meant being organized in a revolutionary working class party. When they looked about for such a party to which they could belong and bring the workers, they did not find it in the CP or SP or any other existing party or group,. Thus in the fall of 1933 they also came to the conclusion that there must be a new party and a new international, and set up the Provisional Organizing Committee of the American Workers Party.

Thus there were two groups, which had come from very different directions to the same conclusion. Soon the CLA and the AWP entered into discussions. We said, "If we really mean the same thing, when we talk about a new party, we should be building it together." We were deliberate about the thing, however. We decided that we must not fuse politically unless we were really in agreement on the fundamentals of a program. Lacking such agreement, we could still work together on concrete issues but political merger must be on the basis of principle. Thus for 11 months discussion went on. At the end of that time a joint committee of the two organizations wrote a Declaration of Principles and a constitution which were adopted at their conventions and which constituted the basis of the merger and for the formal launching of the Workers Party of the United States.

### **Not a Hasty Decision.**

It is clear, then, that here was no hasty, irresponsible decision to go and launch "another party." The workers in the CLA and AWP acted in the most careful and responsible manner in dealing with the problem before them, as revolutionists should.

The WP does not, however, trace its history back merely to the former AWP and CLA. The members of these organizations had been active in labor and revolutionary work, here and abroad, long before the organizations themselves came into being. So it came about that in the founding convention of the WP there were present not a few of the founders of the CP and CI, workers who had been active in the Socialist Party in the days when that was a progressive force, workers who had participated in the Russian revolution, workers who had stood firm in the trying days of the Great War, who had taken a leading part in the labor struggles in the US for the past 30 years or more. The Workers Party is rich in tradition and experience.

## **Our Credentials.**

A party needs more than traditions, however, You and your fellow-workers have a right to ask whether we have credentials from the working class today, what role we are playing in the surging movement and the vast struggles of the present. Our answer is that we do have such credentials. We point to the fact that in the founding convention of the WP the leaders of the National Unemployed League, the strongest and most stable of the unemployed organizations which have come out of the depression, the leaders of the great Toledo strike, the leaders of the great series of strikes in Minneapolis, active workers in steel, automobiles, textiles, rubber, transportation, the public utilities took part. We are an integral part in all sections of the country of the working class movement and the struggles of the masses.

Let me go back for a moment and emphasize again that the WP is the result of a merger. For 10 years and more we have seen splits and disintegration in the revolutionary movement. Sometimes it seemed as if every week produced a new party, group, or grouplet. No wonder that you and many other workers felt discouraged and even sometimes disgusted. Here at last we have a case not of “another party,” not of two groups where there was one before, but of one organization where before there were two. Here is an example of revolutionary unity. This, we submit, means more than just adding one and one to make two. The establishment of a unifying center marks an historic turning point in the revolutionary movement. This example of unity will be as contagious, we believe, as was the example of splits in an earlier period. The fact that the former CLA and AWP were able to begin this process of unification is proof that they represented healthy, vigorous, and responsible elements. That they may work with these elements to further the crucial job of unifying the revolutionary forces is one big argument for workers joining the WP.

## **Unity — On What Basis?**

When we speak of unity today we have to understand clearly what we mean. Unity — on what basis? Merely repeating the word “unity” or “united front” will not accomplish anything.

Political unity, for one thing, is not the same as united front. United front means united action for specific purposes, against wage

cuts or evictions, for the defense of labor prisoners, etc., by organizations which have grave political differences.

Membership in a political party of the working class is not on the same basis as membership in a union. A union is a mass organization to which all workers in a given trade or industry belong — Republicans, Democrats, Single Taxers, Workers Party, CP, SP, Baptists, Presbyterians, Prohibitionists, etc. It does not follow that you can put the same Republicans, Democrats, Single Taxers, Prohibitionists, Baptists, etc. in a political party, and have a labor party, much less a revolutionary party.

The revolutionary party does not deal merely or primarily with immediate issues of wages, hours, and conditions of work. It deals with the problem of the economic-political system as a whole, how it must and can be changed or abolished, etc. A revolutionary party must, therefore, have a philosophy, a theory, a program. If it has a wrong one, then at the critical moment it will fail and betray the masses.

Take the example of Austria. There we had a great working class party, the Social Democratic Party. It had no rivals. It had in it practically all the best elements in the Austrian working class. There was likewise a powerful trade union movement, closely linked with the political party, great cooperative, cultural, sports organization. Yet this mighty and united movement collapsed before Fascism. Why? Because it was based upon a false, Social Democratic, philosophy and program. To the consideration of that philosophy and program I shall turn in another letter. Suffice it now to point the obvious moral: the working class does not want the kind of “unity” that leads to Fascist concentration camps, any more than it wants the divisions that lead to defeat at the hands of Fascism. An army moving unitedly in the wrong direction cannot get to the right place!

What, then, is the philosophy of the WP? It is not something brand new, which we patented yesterday. Our Declaration of Principles says: “The WP of the US is founded on the great principles of revolutionary theory and practice stated by Marx and Lenin and tested by the experience of the class struggle on an international scale, above all in the Russian Revolution of 1917 (the “October Revolution”).” The WP carries on, in other words, the great revolutionary tradition of the modern working class. To it belong Marx, and Lenin, and Trotsky, for we are not of those who have read him out of the revolutionary movement. To it belongs the Russian Revolution,

through which the one workers' state, beacon light of inspiration to the workers of the entire world, was brought into being.

As the revolutionary party of the American working class our primary task, as the Declaration of Principles states, "is the defeat of the enemy at home — the overthrow of the capitalist government of the United States." Thus, proceeding from the basic principles of Marx and Lenin, we "will use the revolutionary potentialities of American tradition and history," adapt our tactics to the concrete situation and the lineup of the class forces in the US in order to inspire and lead the American working class and its allies in other exploited sections of the population, to the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a society in which natural resources and the machinery of production will be used for the benefit of the workers and not for the profit of a few.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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