

Towards the Party Convention*

By Eugene Dennis

It is appropriate that our outlook for the convention be discussed in relation to the two urgent questions which have occupied us at this nation conference—the national elections and the Marxist press.

Our objectives in the elections have been well stated: to make a maximum contribution towards clarifying the major issues, to promote labor-Negro-farmer cooperation and alliances, and to help defeat the most reactionary enemies of the labor movement and the Negro people—the most rabid opponents of the national welfare and peace.

It is true that only five weeks remain until the November elections. As our deliberations have indicated, although the time is short our efforts, mass activity and initiative can have a modest, yet a positive bearing on the final phase of the election campaign.

Moreover, irrespective of the outcome of the elections itself, we can facilitate, now and after the elections, improved relations between the Left and other sectors of the labor movement. We can help advance the common action of labor and its allies for the big struggles that will

unfold after November, thereby promoting the trend towards an anti-monopoly coalition.

Our discussion on the Marxist press grows out of the pressing situation that has arisen and that threatens the very existence of the Marxist daily newspapers in our country. Our great concern to preserve these publications does not stem solely from our deep attachment to them.

For these papers have been, and most become even more, a most powerful instrument for voicing the needs and interests of the working class, the Negro people, and their democratic allies—a mightier and a more popular tribune for peace, democracy and Socialism.

As we make the fight of our lives for putting these papers on a solid financial foundation, increasing their circulation, and broadening their base and appeal, we must be increasingly conscious of the fact that these papers are key weapons in the battle of ideas, a battle in which their sharpest edge must be directed against the policies and the ideas of monopoly.

While the Marxist press cannot even begin to compete in size, news coverage, and special features with the giant corporate press combines

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that cover our country, they can more than hold their own in this battle of ideas. Our success in furthering the goals set by this conference will in no small degree depend on our ability, and the ability of the papers themselves, to imbue their readers with the utmost confidence in our cause and in our basic Communist ideology.

What we do on these two questions before and after the elections will leave its imprint on our national convention and the course of coming events.

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As we all know, at the end of the election campaign we will officially open our pre-convention discussion. This discussion period will take place at a time of new advances in the world-wide struggle for peace, national liberation, and social progress.

Within the country, the prospects are for a considerable sharpening of economic and political struggles. Masses of people are in a mood to offer more effective resistance to the attacks of monopoly. The struggle for desegregation and civil rights is bound soon to enter a new phase. And regardless of the complexion of the new Administration and Congress, tens of millions of working people are determined to press forward to realize *now* some of the election promises for peace and prosperity, for a "new era" and a "new America."

This—in a nutshell—will be the

atmosphere in which our pre-convention discussion opens. It is bound to be vigorous and, at times, extremely sharp, with many clashing ideas and estimates. For we are in the process of collectively assessing the perilous period of cold war and witchhunts from which we are beginning to emerge, and during which reaction took such a heavy toll.

Our task is doubly complex because we are not merely examining the past, rectifying our previous errors, and beginning to overcome our relative isolation. We are doing all this at the same time as we enter a period of great change; a period which is prompting us, as well as the Marxists of all countries, to review our work and policies, and to develop further the theory of Marxism-Leninism to meet changing conditions and the challenge of new developments.

How well is our Party prepared to face this most challenging period in its history? Is our Party capable of coming through this crucial test in a way that will enable it to more effectively discharge its responsibilities to the working class and people of our country?

My own answer to these questions is an unequivocal: YES. Starting with the approach to the April plenum of our National Committee, we have begun a critical review of the past, and a searching consideration of the problems ahead. With the active participation of our member-

ship we are engaging in an extensive debate and democratic exchange of opinions, which are already beginning to effect positive changes in our policies, thinking, and methods of work. We have also weighed the lessons of the 20th Congress of the CPSU. Some of the main conclusions drawn from this past period of collective probing, and from the initial steps forward that have been taken, are embodied in the Draft Resolution adopted by the overwhelming majority of the National Committee as a basis for the pre-convention discussion.

In my judgment this Draft Resolution is basically correct. It provides a sound political direction for our Party.

What are the central propositions upon which this judgment is based? Stated in capsule form these include:

1) The Resolution makes a sound estimate of the new and important changes that have taken place, and are taking place, in the world—particularly the historic significance of the emergence of Socialism as a world system, the consequent disintegration of the old colonial empires and the new trends towards working-class unity—changes which open new perspectives of peaceful co-existence, national freedom and social progress.

Yet, as the Resolution points out, the dominant world trend towards peaceful co-existence does not advance spontaneously. As the events around the Suez affair graphically

demonstrate, while imperialism continues to try to impose its will by armed force, the threat of force and violence and other pressure, the new relationships of forces in the world are such that war is no longer inevitable. At the same time, these events also underscore that the road to peace continues to be the road of struggle and requires the constant vigilance, intervention, and solidarity of the peoples, not the least, of the American people.

2) The Resolution correctly estimates some of the new and favorable developments in our country: the growth of popular sentiment for peaceful negotiations between the East and West; the broadening movement for civil rights and for the restoration of the Bill of Rights: the forward steps of organized labor to achieve effective unity, security and greater participation in the political life of the country.

The Resolution takes special note of the enormous significance for the welfare and future of our country of the rising Negro liberation movement in the South and the growing nationwide struggle for civil rights. It recognizes that the struggle to win full equality for the Negro people in the South and to achieve the organization of the South on the firm foundation of Negro and white unity constitute the Number One democratic task for our country. This is a central struggle to uphold the Constitution and to expand democracy in America.

3) While noting certain favorable developments in our country, the Resolution does not minimize the difficulties ahead. It points out that the monopolists have grown bigger and their grip on the government has increased since the advent of the Cadillac Cabinet. It emphasizes that the main enemy of the American people, as well as the main danger to world peace, are the vested corporate interests, the predatory monopolies.

There can be no doubt that in the immediate period ahead American monopoly capital will make every effort to intensify its exploitation of the home market, to step up its offensive against the living standards, rights, and organizations of the working people—including the NAACP, the trade unions, and our Party.

But the Resolution also stresses that wider sections of the labor movement and its allies are moving in the direction of greater cooperation and concerted action to resist the offensive of the trusts. It emphasizes that the path to a "New America" lies through curbing and eventually breaking the power of the monopolies.

This is why the Resolution places in a *new way* the necessity and the *new possibilities* for the development of a people's anti-monopoly coalition and a corresponding political realignment. It places this objective, culminating in the election of a government based on such a

labor-farmer-Negro alliance, as the strategic task before the American working class and its allies in the period ahead.

4) The Resolution strongly reaffirms, and in a number of respects develops further, the position of our Party in advocating and striving for the transition to Socialism by democratic and constitutional means. We first raised this perspective for the future in the late '40s—even as the dangers of the cold war and reaction were growing sharper. Now, however, with the new elements in the world situation, the possibilities of a peaceful, constitutional transition become clearer.

As the Resolution points out, the establishment of an anti-monopoly alliance and government led by the working class would make possible the realization of the immediate program of labor and the popular forces. But, more than this, it could also open the door to further democratic and social advance. It could pave the way to fundamental social changes, including the transition to Socialism, under conditions where the people could move forward by constitutional means.

5) Of exceptional and far-reaching importance are the conclusions drawn in Section IV of the Resolution dealing with the Party. Taking into account not only the lessons of our past errors and weaknesses, but, above all, the profound changes in the new world period in which we are now living, the Resolution pro-

poses changes in our structure and methods of work, in strengthening inner-Party democracy, and in how we apply our science. It goes further than we were able to last April, going deeper into the sources of our recent errors and of our long-standing Left-sectarianism.

In the light of this re-examination and the important changes proposed, we stress the basic concept of our Party as an American working-class organization—democratic, unified, militant—based on the principles of Scientific Socialism, on our scientific application of Marxism-Leninism to the conditions of our country.

While pointing towards the future and our endeavor to help create the conditions for the emergence of a broad, mass party of Socialism in our country, based on Marxist principles, the Resolution stresses the historic role of our Party, pride in its past achievements, and confidence in its ability to overcome its weaknesses and past errors. It expresses the determination that our Party can effect the necessary changes and can be built and strengthened so that it will be in a position to measure up to its great responsibilities.

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In stressing the most significant features of the Draft Resolution, I do not wish to imply that the Resolution is a model of perfection or is devoid of serious shortcomings—some of which we noted in the covering letter to our membership. This

is particularly true in respect to the inadequate analysis of some of the new developments and problems confronting the labor movement, the specific role of the Party in this connection and how we exercise our vanguard role. There are also a number of ambiguous or faulty formulations in the Draft which certainly need improvement and which on a future occasion I intend to discuss.

Moreover, the Resolution does not attempt to answer all questions, some of which will have to be probed and discussed over a much longer period than what remains until the convention.

Nonetheless, it is my belief that the main political line of the Resolution is sound. Its shortcomings will be corrected and it will be strengthened in the course of the discussion and in the final action of the convention.

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Of course, some do not share this point of view. Within the limits of the short time at my disposal, let me touch briefly on some of these viewpoints.

Some say the Resolution is a "compromise." By that they do not refer to this or that particular formulation. They mean that the document conciliates contradictory trends and major differences—and resolves nothing. But this is not so. The Resolution points in a definite and basically correct direction. In the course of the debates, many ques-

ons were studied, many differences
olved. Obviously, certain view-
oints and proposals were rejected,
d various shadings of opinion and
mphasis are still held by individual
omrades. Various differences which
rose in the deliberations—especially
nce none of you have had an oppor-
nity to read the forthcoming article
y Comrade Foster in which he ex-
ains his “no” vote—are being re-
orted by the National Committee
o the state organizations and will
e dealt with extensively in forth-
oming articles. But the fact remains
at on all central questions the
esolution represents the political
osition and collective thinking of
e majority of the National Com-
mittee.

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The charge has also been made
at the Resolution departs from the
cience of Marxism-Leninism. But
n objective examination of the
esolution shows that this charge is
without foundation. Like the Marx-
t-Leninists of other lands, we have
ken into account the profound
hanges in the world situation which
equire a further development of
ur theory and the modification of
ertain theoretical propositions.

Secondly, we re-affirm that it is
ve American Communists who
ust interpret and apply the theory
f Marxism in accord with the con-
itions of our country and the ex-
periences of the American working
lass.

Thirdly, we recognize that some

of our past errors arose from a doc-
trinaire interpretation of certain
Marxist-Leninist propositions, from
attempts to apply mechanically some
of the experiences of Marxists of
other lands and from an unscien-
tific approach to some of their views.

We are convinced that this Reso-
lution will help the Party to fight
effectively against both dogmatism
and the distortion or abandonment
of Marxist-Leninist theory. It will
aid our Party to unite the universal
truth of Marxism with the experi-
ences and practices of the struggles
of the American working class and
people.

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Some contend that although the
Party's past errors were largely Left-
sectarian, the Right danger is the
main danger now. It is necessary to
note that the Resolution calls upon
the Party to vigilantly combat Right-
opportunist tendencies which un-
doubtedly will grow as we make the
necessary turn. Further, the Reso-
lution condemns and rejects liquida-
tionism. But the Resolution does
this within the context of recognizing
that to overcome our relative
isolation and establish broader ties
with the labor and people's move-
ments, our main struggle nationally
must be against Left-sectarianism.

Who can deny that we are only
beginning to overcome our long-
standing deeprooted sectarianism?
Who can deny that we are only be-
ginning to develop a flexible and
united front policy, taking into ac-

count the new developments and trends within the merged labor movement and the great Negro liberation struggles? The fact is that to thoroughly overcome Left-sectarianism in our thinking, our habits, and our policies, will require a protracted struggle going far beyond our coming convention.

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On the perspective for a new united party of Socialism—some reject it entirely as negating the role of our own Party today. Others distort this perspective and present it as something that can be brought about “in a hurry” as a substitute for our Party and as an escape from our present difficulties. Still others, such as Starobin, invite us to “disband,” “fade away,” and thus allegedly “facilitate the emergence of a new party of Socialism.”

To reject the perspective for a new united party of Socialism would weaken the possibilities of unity of action of all socialist-minded forces in the coming period, as well as our ability to influence in a Marxist-Leninist direction existing currents of socialist thinking and those which we believe will develop in the period ahead, especially in the labor movement.

On the other hand, to attempt to realize this perspective immediately would be to abort it, to create a sectarian caricature of what it should be, and to disperse our ranks and negate our vital role.

We view the perspective of a new

united party of Socialism as a worthwhile objective, which in any case will require time and struggle to realize. We consider that this orientation will help strengthen the socialist component of the developing anti-monopoly people's coalition, and that it will also prove fruitful for promoting the unity of socialist forces in this country on a working class, Marxist basis.

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Some say that the Resolution exaggerates the errors of the Party and deprecates its signal achievements. But the fact is that the Resolution speaks with legitimate pride of the achievements of the Party and the noteworthy contributions which it has made in the past difficult and trying years, especially in the struggle against the dangers of war and fascism. Moreover, we express the utmost confidence in the future of our Party and the historic role it will yet play.

Our confidence has increased because at long last we are drawing the profound lessons of our errors over the past decade, and of some of the weaknesses that have plagued us since the earliest years of our organization. We realize that our recent mistakes, as well as our losses, were influenced by objective factors. But we realize, too, that subjective factors played an important role. If we deal extensively with these, especially with the nature, roots, and consequences, of our mistakes—it is because we understand these are the

factors that *we can change*.

As we all know, one of the tests of a genuine Marxist party is whether it can self-critically learn from its own mistakes and make the necessary changes and corrections. In this respect, the Resolution makes a signal contribution.

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Some comrades think that the Resolution does not go far enough in the recommendations made for changes in the form and structure of the Party. As you know, the Resolution rejects as a matter of principle any proposal to liquidate our Party or to convert it into a non-Marxist, non-working-class organization.

On a different basis, it disagrees with certain other proposals, which do not necessarily involve matters of principle, as for example to transform the Party into a Marxist political action association engaging in fundamental Marxist ideological, political and economic activity—proposals which in our judgment are not warranted under present political alignments and conditions.

As for the suggestion that the Party change its name, the National Committee makes no recommendation at this time. Whatever the pros and cons of the argument on such recommendations, it should be borne in mind that such proposals, in and of themselves, offer no magic formula for coping with legal difficulties, or for resolving the cardinal problems of developing mass ties and

mass movements. While this is the collective judgment of the National Committee, obviously on this, as on all other questions, it will be up to the membership and the convention to make the final decisions.

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As we enter the final pre-convention period, all of us are cognizant of the democratic and stimulating discussions that have developed in our ranks since our April plenum. We have all benefitted by the constructive criticism and the many fruitful contributions that have been made by our membership. At the same time, we are not unmindful of certain negative aspects of the discussion; some of which were aggravated by the inadequate participation of the National Committee members in the discussion. Nor can we close our eyes to certain anti-Marxist views and factional overtones which have been expressed and need to be resolutely combatted.

We are heartened by the fact that even in these past turbulent and searching months some headway has been made in a number of areas in breaking down old barriers, in renewing or cementing new ties with non-Communist workers, progressives, and liberals, and in developing greater political and organizing initiative in some field of mass work.

And here let me add that we must find special ways and means to guarantee that all in our ranks most directly responsible for effecting

such changes—particularly our comrades in the unions and other mass organizations who are now prevented from fully participating in many of our deliberations—shall be enabled to effectively register their views and vote in all the forthcoming conventions, county, state and national.

At the same time, we should also note that a number of comrades seem to feel that the pre-convention discussion requires them to call a "moratorium" on mass work. They claim that nothing can be done until all internal questions of the Party are settled. But it is impossible to resolve Party questions in the vacuum that results from the absence of mass activity. Certainly one of the biggest contributions that we can make to our discussion and convention is to revitalize and develop our mass work now.

Other comrades have adopted a "watchful waiting" attitude. They are somewhat skeptical of whether our Party will be able to effect the necessary changes. They have decided to "wait and see" what the convention will do. Meanwhile they stand on the sidelines. We urge these comrades to assume their individual and collective responsibilities and help the Party to make the turn, and we should do everything to facilitate their participation.

As the pre-convention period opens, all of us should be more conscious of the vital need of making our criticism and proposals con-

structive, of strengthening our ties of comradeship, and of reinforcing the unity of the Party. Let us not forget that Party unity is a fundamental pre-requisite for enabling our Party to surmount objective, as well as internal difficulties.

We cannot forget that our pre-convention discussion takes place in the midst of an unprecedented political and ideological offensive by monopoly capital. Especially since the State Department's publication of the Khrushchev special report, a colossal effort has been underway to discredit Marxism, to undermine the confidence of progressive humanity in the lands of Socialism, to weaken proletarian internationalism, and to disorient and divide our party.

While the corporate interests will not succeed in their main objective, nevertheless it is a fact that on the home-front their anti-Communist and anti-socialist campaigns have had a certain effect, including here and there in our own ranks. It must be admitted that certain tendencies have proved harmful: to underrate the historical liberating role of socialist society, to deprecate our Party's role and contributions, as well as to carry on inner-party criticism completely oblivious to the external situation. Such tendencies have been used by our adversaries in their ideological attack on Marxism, on Socialism, and as means of impairing the unity of our Party. To ignore these facts is to do a great disservice

to our Party and to the American working class.

The unity of our Party and its singleness of purpose is dictated by reasons far beyond the vital advantage this brings to the Party itself. For Party unity is essential in order to help unite wider sections of labor and its allies in concerted action against the common enemy—monopoly capital.

By Party unity we mean, of course, that unity which is based on our common ideology—the principles of Scientific Socialism; on our understanding of the historic role of the American working class and its Marxist vanguard; on our uncompromising devotion to the struggle for equal rights and freedom for the Negro people; on our appreciation of the epochal achievements and liberating role of the lands of Socialism; on our fraternal solidarity with the working peoples of all countries.

This does not mean that we should blur over important differences that arise within our ranks, nor limit debate or the right of dissent. But this, in turn, does not mean that these differences need to harden into crystallized trends and fixed positions. The truth is that Party unity is more precious today than ever before.

The progress which the National Committee has made in the past three months in probing into a number of major controversial questions and in arriving at a collective position which we believe to be

basically sound, indicates that the give-and-take of collective discussion and inquiry can bring about a common outlook which reinforces the unity of the Party on a basis of principle.

The initial steps forward which the Party is making now, prior to the convention, in strengthening collective leadership, expanding inner-party democracy, digging deeper into all questions, in learning from one another, in beginning to move forward and outwards—these should be our guide in consolidating Party unity, in establishing in our Party an atmosphere of creative thinking and constructive criticism, of persuasion and mutual help, and in developing mass activity—including now in the midst of our pre-convention discussion.

The National Committee harbors no illusions. We do not minimize the severity of the political struggles and the many obstacles ahead. Nor do we underestimate the gravity of the internal situation in our Party and the stubborn efforts and time required to fully effect the many changes that the situation requires.

But we believe we are on the correct track. We know that we are on the threshold of big events and face new opportunities as well as new difficulties. And we are confident that at this juncture—which coincides with the 37th anniversary of the CPUSA—our Party will make the turn and enhance its indispensable contributions to the American working class and people.