

A-3

SOCIALIST ELECTION POLICY IN 1958

by James P. Cannon



PIONEER PUBLISHERS

10¢

United Action In the 1958 Campaign

{We print below the speech delivered by James P. Cannon, National Chairman of the Socialist Workers Party, at a March 1 SWP Dinner-Meeting where he and Vincent Hallinan, 1952 Progressive Party Presidential candidate, spoke. The topic of the evening was "United Socialist Political Action in 1958 and the Outlook for American Socialism."}

The subject assigned to us tonight, as it appears in the advertisements, reads: "United Socialist Political Action in 1958 — and the prospects for American socialists." This two-sided subject proposes action today and suggests, at the same time, that we look ahead and try to see where we are going.

In my opinion, the two sides of the subject are equally important, and they are properly joined together. Unless we consider our outlook it's not easy to take any kind of meaningful action. On the other hand, if we content ourselves with looking at the future as we would like to see it, and do nothing about it today, take no action in the direction of our goal, we debase our vision into a daydream of mopers and idlers.

Direction without motion is just about as useless as motion without direction. If we want to do anything meaningful and purposeful in the present day, we have to look ahead and see the general direction of our goal. **And if we want to reach the desired goal without too much delay we have to get started. We have to get going. That, I think, is the double meaning of the subject assigned to us for our discussion tonight.**

Our vision and our goal, to which our lives are committed and which make our lives worthwhile, is the socialist society of the free and equal. And as a next prac-

tical, experimental step on the road to that glorious objective, we ought to take a census of the socialist population of this country. We should try to find out how many people will make out their ballots for socialism if the issue is presented to them squarely. To that end we are proposing an electoral coalition of socialist forces for united socialist political action in 1958.

I believe that a survey of the present situation in the American socialist movement will show the feasibility and the timeliness of this proposed next step. There are important historical precedents for this procedure, as I will relate a little later on.

We have to start from where we are. In the discussion and exchange of views that have been taking place, particularly in the past two years, many writers in different publications have turned their attention to this question of just where we stand right now. The trend of opinion seems to range from sober to gloomy.

Some say we're "at rock bottom." Others say "we have no place to go but up." And then some real calamity howlers have expressed the opinion that we can't even go up or down or sideways; that all we can do is just sit there and "think," and twiddle our thumbs, and perhaps wait for a new Moses to be discovered in the bullrushes who will lead us out of this capitalistic Egypt.

Well, I don't believe in unfounded optimism at all, but, as I see it, the reality is a little better than some socialists picture it. **There is no doubt, no doubt whatever, that the present position of American socialism is far from good, and far from strong. That's obvious. But what about the other side of the present reality — what about the position of American capitalism? Well, she ain't what she used to be, that's for sure.**

This small capitalist segment of the world that aspired only yesterday to rule the whole world, has fallen on evil days and everybody knows it. Even the professional boasters are singing the blues. As I read the comments, ranging all the way from the colonial world to the very centers of American power in these days, the general opinion of American capitalism is that it's in a hell of a fix. I am only telling you what I read, but I must admit that I think so too. Nobody has any confidence except Eisenhower. And he's out on the golf course and doesn't know what's going on. They say he doesn't even read the newspapers.

Now, we socialists don't need to conceal our own troubles — we have plenty of them. We who have survived the storms of these last terrible years, know very well that we have been hurt. The socialist movement in the United States has suffered heavy blows, one on top of another, for at least 17 consecutive years.

First, there were the terrible reactionary effects on the labor movement, and on all American radicalism and even liberal thought, of the Second World War. And the cold war that followed it. And the Korean war. The effects were reactionary in all directions.

A Turn of the Tide

Then we had to contend with the conservatizing influence of the long, artificially propped-up prosperity, which sapped the strength of American radicalism in all its departments.

And then we had to put up with the devastation and terror of the long witch-hunt, which decimated the ranks of American radicalism and liberalism and all sections of the socialist movement.

And then, last, but not least, the socialist movement has been sapped by a moral sickness — the calculated lies and slanders, the suppression of free and independent thought, the violations of class solidarity, the disruption of fraternal relations and free discussion among socialists of different tendencies. All this dirty business has worked to demoralize the movement and to discredit the name of socialism.

We have been hit hard from all sides. But in spite of that — and this is our great capital for the future — a considerable nucleus of undaunted and incorruptible socialists have survived all this adversity. More than that, the adverse factors have been changing in recent times. For several years now, if we have looked closely enough, we have seen a turn of the tide.

Anti-war sentiment is stronger in this country today than it has been at any time in the last quarter of a century. The most striking proof of that is the fact that, for the first time since the early thirties, Hollywood dares to make anti-war movies again. And they are turning out to be the most popular movies on the screen today. There is a world of significance in this simple fact which the

movie manufacturers never dreamed of when they were making something to sell.

Not only is the anti-war sentiment strong and growing, but economic troubles are beginning to engender a new radicalism. The unprecedented boom, propped up by military spending, was dragged out so long that many people began to think that capitalism finally had found a way to escape from its own laws. This artificial boom, according to what I read in the most conservative financial journals of the country, has entered into a decline. They call it a "recession," but they admit there are five million unemployed in this country; and that means that there are probably six to seven million actually unemployed.

And nowhere have I been able to read in the financial and economic columns of the various journals—nowhere except in Eisenhower's speeches—any promise that it will get better "next month." Or, more correctly, this month—this is the first of March already, and Eisenhower is already one day down on his fatuous prophecy.

Anti-war sentiment is growing, the capitalist economy is in decline and with it the conservatizing influence of prosperity is spending its force. And also in recent years we've seen the witch-hunt slow down. It isn't stopped by any means, but the witch-hunt terror that all sections of American radicalism had to contend with in the past ten years, has been decidedly moderated. **People are raising their courage again in wider and wider numbers. All that is in our favor.**

A New Atmosphere

And no less important than these favorable turns in the situation, is a new atmosphere in the circles of American radicalism—in all circles. Socialists of different tendencies have begun to think of each other as comrades. Free discussion and fraternization, and sentiment for united action and regroupment of all the scattered forces are the order of the day now everywhere. I say that's a good day for us and for our cause—the cause of American socialism.

It doesn't bother me at all that, in a meeting such as ours, we have some criticism of each other; and some things are said by one speaker that another can't fully endorse—that's not the significant thing about this great meeting tonight. **The significant thing is that socialists of**

different tendencies stand together here on the same platform and urge united action against the capitalist class.

All these changes I have mentioned are in our favor, and we should take advantage of them. We should see in them the opportunity for American socialism to enter a new stage of revival which will carry it to new heights, on the road to victory over American capitalism.

In spite of all that has happened to discourage, to terrorize, to weaken and demoralize the movement there are still a lot of socialists in this country. The sentiment for socialism in the United States, even today, after all that has happened, is much bigger than any of the organized parties and groups; bigger than all of them put together. And the potential sentiment for socialism, which the bankruptcy of American capitalism will generate in the next period, is a hundred or a thousand times greater than the conscious socialist sentiment at this present moment. That's the real situation as I see it, and the real prospect before us. We ought to take it as the starting point in a new struggle to put socialism on the map and wipe capitalism off the map.

The Starting Point

The basic aim in rebuilding for the future, as I think all present will agree—the basic aim to which we are all striving—is to regroup the scattered socialist forces, and eventually to get all honest socialists together in one common party organization. But that can't be done in a day. The experience, of the last two years shows that it will take time. We'll **have to take** the process of collaboration and unification in stages, one step at a time.

The starting point of the process is for all genuine socialists of all tendencies, whether presently affiliated to one organization or another, or independent at present, to recognize that we are all part of one movement, and that we ought to work together fraternally in one field of action after another. Work together against the injustices and oppressions of capitalism. That sounds almost like a revolutionary assertion after the terrible experience of the disruption of solidarity. But it used to be the unvarying practice and tradition of the old socialist and radical movement in America.

In the time of Debs and Haywood and Vincent St. John, there were many differences of opinion and differ-

ent organizations, and many quarrels and squabbles and debates. But it was taken for granted, as a matter of course, that when there was an issue of common interest against the class enemy—whether it was a strike, or a labor leader arrested, or some act of injustice committed against any section of the movement—that all should work together in solidarity against the injustice.

On this point I am a reactionary—I want to turn the clock back to the good old days of solidarity and cooperation in practical action against the common enemy. Fraternal cooperation and solidarity in practical action does not exclude differences of opinion, does not exclude discussion and debate as we go along. There is no socialist life without free discussion of differences. But while we discuss our differences, we should also remember what we have in common as socialists and act together in support of it.

Many different opinions are being expressed in the course of debate on the American road to socialism. I think all suggestions and ideas should get an attentive hearing. But however one may think socialism is going to come to the United States, one thing is sure—it's not going to be smuggled in. It's a shame to have to say that. isn't it?

The cause of socialism can be advanced only by counterposing it to capitalism—simply, honestly, openly and directly. Clever tricks designed to fool people into socialism are self-defeating as well as dishonest and contemptible. I think we have had more than enough of that indecent horseplay already. The revival of the American socialist movement will really begin to get under way when we get back to fundamentals and come out in the open as socialists every day in the week and twice on Sunday.

When we say that socialists should find a way to work together, especially in electoral campaigns, we mean of course real socialists, socialists who, to use the words of the Communist Manifesto, "disdain to conceal their aims." Socialists without false faces.

What is a socialist? Well, I can tell you very quickly what he is not. He is not a Republican. And he is not a Demo-Dixiecrat. And he is certainly not a shame-faced supporter of the war program of the U.S. State Department. He is not a member of or supporter of any capitalist party whatever. I'm not submitting this as an argu-

ment. I'm stating this as the summary conclusion from established facts.

Marx, Engels and Debs

Capitalism rules and exploits the working people through its control of the government. That's fact number one. And capitalism controls the government through the medium of its class political parties. That's fact number two. The unconditional break away from capitalist politics and capitalist parties is the first act of socialist consciousness, and the first test of socialist seriousness and sincerity. That's fact number three.

Where did I learn that? Marx and Engels explained it over a hundred years ago, so it's not hot off the wire. I personally heard Debs explain it fifty years ago. That's what they said—Marx and Engels and Debs.

They were very simple fellows who couldn't understand that the way to get what you want is to vote for what you don't want. They couldn't understand that the really slick and clever way to get socialism is to vote for capitalism. And to tell you the truth we don't understand it either. And we don't intend to play that game.

About 20 years or so ago there was an aviator who flew out of the New York airport on a trip to Los Angeles and landed in Ireland. They called him "Wrong Way" Corrigan, and he became a popular symbol of the man who doesn't know where he's going. That's the trouble with the Wrong Way Corrigans of politics—they don't seem to know where they're going, and it would be imprudent to follow them.

This is not a general public meeting, but a sort of invitational meeting of socialists of different tendencies. All of us present here, I take it, are socialists of one tendency or another. Now let us ask ourselves, honestly and directly: How did we become socialists? How did we acquire our certain confidence in the bright socialist future of humanity — the great vision which has transformed and inspired our lives and sustained us through the darkest days of struggle against this insane social system? Did we acquire our socialist consciousness because of our superior wisdom? I don't think so. We became socialists, each and every one of us, in the same way — because others who went before us explained it to us in earlier years. They wrote pamphlets and books, and distributed

journals, and made speeches, and explained things—and from them we learned.

And the fact that we had to learn from others—does not that suggest the idea that others may learn from us? Does not that impose upon us the obligation to explain socialism to others yet to come? And if we socialists don't speak up for socialism, who will? Who will spread the inspiring word of a socialist outcome of this mad world of capitalism, if we don't? And if we have to do it, when do we begin? I believe, the sooner the better.

And here comes the importance of the subject we have under discussion tonight. The best time of all—the most fruitful time to explain socialism—is during election campaigns, when public interest is highest, and we stand the best chance to get a hearing. The capitalist class rules this country in a complicated way, through the machinery of bourgeois democracy. They can't shut off all avenues of public communication, even to minority parties—although they try their best.

Socialist Propaganda

The Socialist Workers Party, even with its limited forces, has demonstrated in these recent years, how we can get through cracks in the wall and compel them to give us access to TV and radio audiences and to carry notices in the newspapers. We get a greater hearing for the ideas of socialism in the few months of the election campaign than in all the rest of the time put together. That makes every election campaign a socialist success.

The main purpose of participating in elections, as a socialist organization or as a coalition of socialist organizations, is to take full advantage of the expanded opportunity to make socialist propaganda. And in the economic and social storm that is now beginning to blow up in this country, with fear and insecurity about war, and making a living, or even existing on this planet—there will be more interest in social and political questions, and more people will be listening than at any time in recent decades.

What can we do to make the most of this exceedingly favorable opportunity to advance our cause? The National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party has expressed the opinion and made the proposal in an announcement in the National Guardian and in the Militant—the proposal that all socialists get together for united political

action—for socialism and against capitalism—in the state and congressional elections of 1958. **And that this action in 1958 be regarded as the springboard for a united Presidential campaign in 1960.**

That's an outlook worth looking at, isn't it? It opens up the prospect, if accepted by other groups and tendencies, of pushing the whole socialist movement a bit forward. It is really a first-class idea, but there is nothing new or original about it. We learned that, where we learned so many things, by looking at the books and studying the history of what others have done before us. Electoral coalitions were a common practice of socialists of different tendencies in the past.

A Historical Precedent

In the year 1900, Debs was a candidate for President, not of a single party, but of a coalition—exactly what we are proposing today. A split-off section of the Socialist Labor Party, headed by Hillquit and Harriman, and the Social Democratic Party of Debs and Berger agreed upon a common election slate with Debs for President, from the Social Democratic Party, and Harriman for Vice-President, from the split-off Socialist Labor Party. The coalition ticket was supported by the Appeal to Reason and other independent socialist papers. The united presidential campaign in 1900 aroused so much enthusiasm and so much sentiment for unity, that nine months later they were able to bring the forces together in a new party. That's the way the Socialist Party of America was founded in August 1901.

There are other examples. In Russia the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks were split and at loggerheads over many issues. But when it came to the elections to the Duma they conducted a poll among themselves to determine the proportion of candidates for each side, and ran a joint electoral slate in the general election. At the outbreak of the First World War, there were Bolshevik and Menshevik deputies in the Duma, the Russian parliament, all elected on a joint slate.

Besides the historical examples, some actions taken by individuals and by groups in recent times have led up to our proposal and made it realistic and timely. You recall that in 1956, the SWP, at the cost of tremendous effort and sacrifice, and the immeasurable labor of comrades bucking the reactionary election laws to get on the ballot, ran a Presidential slate of Dobbs and Weiss. **In**

that election campaign a new note of socialist solidarity was sounded. Whereas, for many years in the recent past no socialist or radical party ever cooperated with or supported or helped another party, in that election campaign in 1956, Vincent Hallinan in San Francisco and Clifford McAvoy in New York came out in support of the SWP candidates.

That was the first break in the log jam. Then again last year, in the municipal elections in San Francisco, where Frank Barbaria and Joan Jordan, ran as candidates of the SWP, Hallinan and Billings and Hitchcock and Olshausen and others, all not members of the SWP, differing with us on many points, nevertheless recognized the importance of a socialist vote and endorsed our candidates and helped the campaign. The National Guardian supported the SWP candidates in Detroit, New York and San Francisco on the same grounds. **The National Guardian played a role in this progressive development similar to that of the independent Appeal to Reason in the early days.**

It seems to us that these new developments, taken all together, have set the stage for another step forward. The SWP National Committee has taken the initiative and made the proposal for a more formal electoral coalition after full deliberation. We mean every word we say, and we are ready to go through with it. The matter is now under discussion throughout all sections of the movement, and we hope for a favorable outcome.

The American socialist movement has been badly battered in the storms of recent years. But the new events, which I have briefly summarized, show that the movement is still alive and kicking and is even looking up a bit. The prospects are brighter than they have been for a long time. We should take heart and hope, as Debs used to say, and work diligently in the coming days to turn the bright prospects into new achievements and new advances.

The forces for an imposing demonstration of socialist sentiment in the 1958 elections are already present. They are waiting for the go-ahead signal. They need only to be aroused and encouraged and organized. **And for this, as is almost always the case, there is no eloquence equal to the eloquence of action. United socialist political action in the 1958 elections will be the right action at the right time.**

**Subscribe
To The Militant
6 Months for \$1**

(Introductory Offer)

Name

Street

City

Send to

116 University Place
New York 3, N. Y.

**Subscribe Now
International
Socialist Review**
the Marxist Quarterly

35 cents a copy —

Year's subscription: \$1.25



116 University Place
New York 3, N.Y.

**BOOKS
AND PAMPHLETS**

*On Socialism
And the Labor
Movement*

Order Free Catalog from:

PIONEER PUBLISHERS
116 University Place, New York 3, N. Y.



March 1958

Published for the

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

by

PIONEER PUBLISHERS

GBIC