

The logo for the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is rendered in a stylized, white, sans-serif font against a dark blue background. The letters 'S', 'W', and 'P' are interconnected, with the 'S' and 'W' sharing a vertical stroke and the 'P' being positioned to the right.

# discussion bulletin

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## OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD HUMANISM

By William F. Warde

Comrade Bernz, whose wit often outruns his wisdom, tries to erect an unscaleable wall between Humanism and Marxism in order to illustrate the unprincipled character of the Independent-Socialist ticket in New York in which the SWP collaborated with the Humanist Corliss Lamont, among others. His theoretical approach is as wrong as his practical political purpose.

He begins by rejecting out of hand the cardinal principle of Humanism that "mankind's primary preoccupation is mankind." He does not give his own opinion on what the primary preoccupation of mankind is -- or should be. If "the proper study of mankind" is not the history, welfare, and future of the human race, then what in the world is it? It's certainly not God or an after-life. Nor is it nature in and of itself even though humanity is inescapably preoccupied with nature for the sake of satisfying its own needs and extracting the means of further development from that source.

To be sure, this Humanist proposition is not complete as it stands. It has to be supplemented and supported by a scientific socialist understanding of man's relations with nature and with his fellow men. But there is nothing incorrect with its assertion. Marx didn't "demolish" that principle, as Bernz says; he criticized and developed it, gave it a new theoretical form and a thoroughly materialist foundation.

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Bernz then proceeds to give this generalization the most extremely individualistic and egotistic interpretation. It means, he claims, that a person is above all concerned with his petty self and "the hell with everybody else." The Humanists, he implies, who begin with concern with mankind in the abstract end up in particular "by denying the class struggle and suppressing the working class."

This is less an objective characterization than a caricature of the real history of Humanist thought and the evolution of the Humanists. As an ideological, political and social tendency, Humanism is not so much self-centered as socially oriented. It has led its proponents not only into the liberal and reformist camp but even under certain circumstances further into revolutionary democratic and socialist directions.

This was the path taken by Marx and Engels over a hundred years ago. Some among us followed the same course much later. But the terribly intransigent Bernz will not allow any one else to make that transition, even in the politically backward United States.

According to him, the last progressive Humanist was Feuerbach. Since then all Humanists who denied the revolutionary class struggle have landed in the lap of the counter-revolution. This is especially true, he says, "right now, here, in these United States where the working class is not on the march. . . , etc."

Bernz is here mixing up the general progress of Humanist ideology from historical idealism to historical materialism with the evolution of particular Humanists under specific conditions in a particular country. He asserts that all Humanists without exception must march uniformly to the right in this country today. But suppose the facts of life show certain exceptions to this rule; suppose the reactionary policies of U.S. imperialism -- and the crimes of Stalinism -- drive some Humanists to take steps in the opposite direction. What attitude should we take toward such Humanists?

Bernz has a simple sectarian prescription. Deny the facts, ignore the individuals -- and maintain the generalization intact.

"Humanism," he categorically declares, "cannot point toward Marxism." What, never? Well, hardly ever. Let us agree with Bernz that ninety-nine out of a hundred Humanists must today head away from Marxism, as this is represented by the SWP. How about the one case in a hundred which points to some degree toward Marxism? Should we deal with a Humanist-Socialist like Lamont, who veers from the Stalinist orbit toward limited collaboration with Marxists, in the same way as we would with conservative, do-nothing Humanists or those who are liberal Democrats?

Isn't it worth-while to seek ground for practical collaboration with these forward-moving individuals where there are points of agreement, without denying our differences or discarding our own program and principles? If we engage in blocs with them on specific projects such as socialist electoral or civil rights campaigns and conduct discussions with them, can't we hope to draw them closer to an understanding, if not an acceptance, of our own position that a consistent and correct contemporary Humanism has to be based upon a dialectical materialist outlook and implemented with a revolutionary socialist program?

All this is foreign to our critic. He forgets that our task is not to reassure ourselves about our ideas but to inform and convince others of their correctness. To paraphrase his own words, he should have less "preoccupation with his own sweet self" and more with the living problem of how to build bridges between ourselves and elements or individuals taking a step or two toward the left.

\* \* \*

Bernz tells us that Marx made it clear that "mankind could not change mankind." What agency, then, will change mankind, if not itself?

To be sure, Marx did point out that man could not change himself by thought alone, by moral exhortations or pious wishes. He could change himself, in the future as in the past, only by acting upon nature through technology in production and by acting upon social relations through the methods of the class struggle.

But Marx taught that in both of these domains human action would initiate, regulate and consummate the transformations in human beings.

Bernz declares that mankind can change itself only through "material forces." He neglects the fact that human labor is the most important of all the material forces in the process of production and thereby in the formation and transformation of mankind. Mankind alters its human nature by acting upon external nature. But all the physical things and processes which enter production are intermediate and instrumental in the making and remaking of mankind, not first or final.

Active, productive, thinking, consciously creative mankind is the decisive factor in the dialectic of the interaction of the material forces in the process of production. A complete and comprehensive understanding of the crucial role of human action upon nature through technology, i.e., labor, is what gives a sound scientific basis to Humanism -- and differentiates materialist Humanism from all other varieties of the same school.

History becomes dehumanized if purely physical forces are elevated above laboring humanity. Genuine dialectical materialism, on the other hand, brings out the human essence of history by explaining how the development of the forces of production, with increasingly higher forms of labor at their head, generates the progress of society and remolds human nature.

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When Bernz concludes that "the points of agreement between Marxism and Humanism, however numerous, are inconsequential; the differences are all important," he intends to exclude any possibility of joint action between Marxists and Humanists. What he has to say about the relations between Marxism and Humanism could be applied equally to all other tendencies in the broad labor and socialist movement. "The points of agreement. . . are inconsequential; the differences are all important."

Therefore? Erect the differences into such an impassable barrier that there cannot be the least communication or collaboration with such divergent tendencies.

The trouble with the generalization is that it is too sweeping, categorical and abstract for the given situation and purpose. It suffices for the constitution of a party, where the differences are all important. But it is not adequate for the functioning of that party in relation to tendencies and individuals who are breaking with their old positions and coming closer to some points of ours. There the points of agreement are not "inconsequential" but meaningful -- provided the party knows how to extract the advantages from them.

March 12, 1959.

## A REEXAMINATION OF THE WALLACE CANDIDACY

By Leo Adler

When Henry Agard Wallace threw his hat in the ring, for the 1948 Presidential elections, announcing his candidacy for President on a new third party ticket, a series of repercussions and reactions that were tantamount to an explosion shook the American political scene.

To the Democrats it looked like it might be a death blow. No matter how much they tried at first to dismiss the importance of the third party, they were plainly scared. To the Republicans it was a great joke, political capital. A slap on the back for Wallace, said Hamilton Fish, a prominent Republican isolationist when he applauded Wallace's characterization of the Democratic Party as a party of "war and depression" and his (Wallace's) running on a peace party and aiding the Republicans. From Moscow "Wallace's candidacy gives millions of Americans the chance to vote against the policies of Truman." (N.Y. Times, Jan. 2, 1948.) Norman Thomas of the SP, "Mr. Wallace's attack on the Marshall plan for the economic recovery of Western Europe put him in the company of Communists and their supporters, the Daily Worker, and Colonel Robert McCormick of the Chicago Tribune." (ibid., Jan. 2) J.P. Cannon, SWP, "Organized labor should enter the political field and set up its own party" and "not clutter up the field with another splinter capitalist party like the Wallace movement." (ibid.) But for many militant workers, Negroes, immigrants and small shopkeepers, for the broadest sections of the masses, Wallace seemed to offer the long awaited-for means of expression.

To James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman (Workers Party) the Wallace movement was counterfeit for a genuine labor party. Through a large section of the American working class, at this time, there ran a wave of discontent and resentment for the two Big Business parties. It was on this wave that Wallace hoped to ride to victory. But if there was no chance of Wallace winning the election, what kind of victory could this be? Why was Wallace running? It is mainly to answer this question and to present a brief analysis that this document is written.

### The Populist Myth

One of Wallace's most preposterous claims was that his movement had inherited the populist tradition of the "Locofocos, the green back party, the populist peoples party, and the LaFollette progressives." In a PM editorial (Feb. 1, 1948) Max Lerner provides a family tree for Wallace, "Wallace comes, as Bryan and La Follette came, out of the populist tradition of the middle west. It is the tradition which glorifies rebellion and dissent, and is not fearful of being in a minority. There is an obstinate hard cast to his jaw . . . he is, in his basic thinking, as far from the Communists as Bryan was, or La Follette. His thinking is populist-agin' the trusts agin' imperialism, agin' Wall Street." If Wallace was a bit unsteady about his present standing he picked about the deadest and most untenable family tree to lean on.

Populism arose at a particular juncture in American history. The farmer was able to play a somewhat independent role, due to the unorganized working class which was not yet aware of its strength. Also at that time Eastern capitalism had not yet established its hegemony over the Western farmer. Populism at this historical moment came as a protest against some of the evils of capitalism, and not at the system itself, and it came right from the farmer's needs and experiences. As V.I. Parrington notes, "Huge meetings gathered of the farmers of a county and day long they listened to the speeches that were an echo of the daily experience of the farmer and the farmers wife."

This was a movement that arose from the social needs and plights of the small farmers, it was based on their conjunctural position which enabled them to organize independently of both the capitalist and working class. What had this populism of Bryan in common with the Wallace movement? One was in the words of all historians an indigenous, spontaneous mass movement from below. The Wallace movement can in no way be called a spontaneous or a mass movement based on either the farmer or labor. Its program and candidate were decided upon and imposed from above. What is more, it took place at a time when populism was historically untenable. Populism was never to recur, or could ever recur again in America.

### A Third Capitalist Party?

For those who maintain that the Wallace party was a third capitalist party, they will have to show how its program on foreign policy was in the interest of the American ruling class. On domestic policy it has a purely petty-bourgeois program, but this was in no way the distinguishing feature of the Wallace party. It was in fact inconsequential to the primary interests and motives of the Wallace candidacy. The foreign policy, i.e., the opposition to the Marshall plan, and aid to foreign dictators (hostile to the Soviet Union) and the compulsory military training, that distinguished and marked the Wallace party as a Stalinist creature.

At this time the capitalist class was practically united on its decision to wage a cold war on the Soviet Union. The only exception being the isolationist wing of the Republican Party headed by Taft. For their own reasons their foreign policy was the closest to Wallace. They, like Wallace, branded the Democratic Party as a war party. Taft was opposed to the Marshall plan, he was also opposed to peacetime conscription.

Might it not then be for Wallace and the CP a choice between a "Troglodyte or Truman?" "If the only choice were between a Truman advocating compulsory military training and military aid to reactionary regimes and a Taft strong against compulsory military training and shipments of arms abroad, I would vote for Taft. I have made this statement because I want to emphasize the supreme importance of peace in the strongest possible way." (Wallace, in the New Republic of Dec. 29, 1947.) Here is America's number one Liberal supporting the number one American arch-reactionary Taft. Why is Taft a better bet for peace? Peace in the Wallacian sense, the kind of peace that now goes under the label of peaceful co-existence. Why is Taft the "lesser evil?"

(1) . . . he is not as violently anti-Russian as are most of the other potential Republican candidates. . .

(2) . . . he is the Republican least likely, among all those seeking the presidential nomination, to pursue a foreign policy backed with armed force, and thus to sharpen the chance for war. . .

(3) . . . there are two types of Republican candidates today. One conforms to the Henry Luce, American-century type, and the other is Taft. The American-century type of candidate believes first, last and all the time, in the "menace of communism." . . . This group, and their candidates, I look on as the most dangerous in America.

(4) . . . Taft. . . believes that the encroachment (of government on business) can be delayed if our government has no active role to play overseas.

(5) . . . today we have Taft standing for a "Little America" and the whole Luce stable of presidential hopefuls for a "Big America." President Truman belongs to the "Big America" group just as certainly as Dewey or Vandenburg. . . They are suited by temperament and ambition to build a strong and expensive mechanism to run the world.

(6) . . . Compared with the "American century" adventurers, Taft is a Troglodyte of prehistoric vintage. (ibid.)

It is not obvious that the interests of the Kremlin can best be served by the election in the U.S. of an isolationist, anti-spending, prehistoric troglodyte. A Taft is not as aware of the real needs of American capitalism as a Truman a "modern Twentieth Century adventurer," is.

#### What Does the CP Gain?

What is Wallace? Wallace is the most popular and respectable name that the Stalinists could get to head their "Peace" ticket. What can Wallace do? He can help the Republicans gain a victory. This victory to the Kremlin is a "lesser evil," than the election of a war monger. While Wallace on one hand says he is for capitalism, he on the other hand heads a party whose foreign policy by no stretch of the imagination could be said to be in the interests of capitalism.

In one of Wallace's first speeches he stated that he had no possible chance of winning. The best he could do in this author's opinion was to split the Democratic vote (they expected 5 million votes) and thereby aid the isolationists. As it turned out however Taft was defeated by Dewey, who had the backing of Eastern capital. But at that time the CP did not foresee this; in fact, they believed that their running Wallace would convince Big Business that they could afford to run a Taft, because of the large deficit Wallace would cause the Democrats. In New York State it was almost certain that Wallace's running would swing the election for a Republican victory. Here are the figures for 1944.

| <u>Party</u> | <u>Roosevelt</u> | <u>Dewey</u>     |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|
| Dem.         | 2,478,596        |                  |
| Rep.         |                  | 2,937,697        |
| ALP          | 496,405          |                  |
| Liberal      | 329,235          |                  |
|              | <u>3,304,238</u> | <u>2,937,697</u> |

From these figures it can be seen that the ALP and Liberal party votes are a necessity for the Democrats. Also the Wallace candidacy seems to lessen the chance of Dewey's nomination. This observation was made by the N.Y. Times, which also pointed out that Dewey was strong in New York but not in the country. The Wallace candidacy has only one possible purpose, to stop the Marshall plan. This was the decisive reason for the Wallace candidacy and it is precisely what the Communist Party hoped to gain.

### What They Lost

In 1948 there was a widespread feeling of discontent within the ranks of the labor and Negro movement. Thousands of militants were looking for a political opposition to the reactionary rule of Big Business. Herein lay the tragedy. While the time was right for a labor party, the only third party was Wallace's. It was this "wave of the future" on which Wallace hoped to ride to victory. The policy of the labor bureaucracy was to continue to support the lib-lab coalition, thus tying the hands of labor. The militants were left with a reactionary, neo-Stalinist, Wallace, who while "waving the proletarian arms-bag in front of a banner could never lead the working class to anything but Stalinism.

Since 1936 and the popular front, the CP had followed the same policy as the labor bureaucracy. Then it was in the interest of the Soviet Union to support Roosevelt and the imperialist war. Now that the war turned against the Soviet Union, so much for the labor-democratic coalition, they were now going to try and break it.

I would like to pause here to say that the role of the "labor leaders" in opposing Wallace from their grounds was completely reactionary. To them Wallace's crime was not opposition to the Marshall plan, as James P. Cannon wrote in the Militant, but his endangering the "progressive" front. The labor movement should have opposed Wallace as a counterfeit for a real union-backed labor party. But this would not be enough. The Wallace party should also have been attacked by the Socialist Workers Party as a Stalinist counterfeit, as it was by the Shachtmanite Workers Party.

The CP by their supporting Wallace also put many prominent and important people in the position of having to break with Democratic Party and Truman or abandoning their past organizations and political connections. Thus the Communist Party at one blow lost most of the influence it had for many years built up in the liberal and labor movement. They lost primarily in these three major areas:

(1) In the ALP. The leaders of the right wing in the CIO union in the ALP were given their long awaited-for opportunity to quit, when the Stalinists supported Wallace. Hyman Blumberg, state chairman of the ALP and vice-president of the ACWU and Jacob S. Polofsky

its president immediately decided either abandon the ALP or fight for control. They left. Louis Hollander of the clothing workers and of the state congress of the CIO also left, after announcing that "the isolationists and the Communists were joining hands to block the passage of the foreign aid program." Soon the Stalinists were left holding hands in the ALP.

(2) From the liberals. Robert Kenney, Bartley Crum, Frank Kingdon, and Albert Butsch, all from the PCA resigned. By backing Wallace and driving the Wallace movement out of the Democratic Party the Stalinist organizers gave the liberals their chance to slip out from under. The newspaper PM, and the magazine the Nation, also used their chance to get out. The Stalinists were left with little influence in the liberal movement.

(3) In the CIO they did themselves the greatest damage. There was a sort of unequal balance between the right wing and the Stalinist-controlled union. When Murray was forced into opposing them it upset the balance and cleared the way for Reuther and other CIO leaders who were looking to smash the Stalinists.

It seems to me inconceivable that the Stalinists strategists did not see in advance the loss of influence they would suffer. Even if their "tactic" had succeeded, they must have been prepared to face the possibility of a Taft administration driving the CP underground. But be this as it may, the Wallace movement stood as the number one springboard for the CP propaganda against the Marshall plan.

### Neither Socialist nor Capitalist

It is not enough simply to pin the label splinter capitalist party on Wallace. You must do more than vaguely speak of divisions or internal cleavages in the ruling class. Which divisions? Which specific sections of the ruling class, maybe Wallace represented Taft's section? Which section of the capitalist class saw appeasement as being in its interest? None did. In no way could the Wallace movement represent American capitalism. His domestic economic program was plainly petty bourgeois, it was on this count a capitalist reform party, aimed at the country farmer and labor. But its decisive and sole reason for having been on the American political scene is something quite different. If Wallace had repudiated CP support, and had come out in favor of the Marshall plan, he and his New Republic staff would not have been able to get enough petitions to run for city dog catcher.

If a Cyrus Eaton today was to run on a new third party ticket backed by the CP, Guardian, and other Stalinist-oriented groups, on a program whose foreign policy included U.S. surrender to the Soviet Union in the interest of world peace, would this be a capitalist ticket? And now there is no Marshall plan, in fact one can almost smell peaceful coexistence emanating from such sources as the N.Y. Post.

I have heard from some comrades that even if the Wallace movement did represent the interest of the Kremlin foreign policy, it would

still be a capitalist party because the bureaucracy is a menshevik, petty bourgeois, tendency in the working class. This kind of approach I believe comes from an inherent danger in the Trotskyist position on the USSR. The bureaucracy is in a contradictory position. It is historically a reactionary caste, arising from the degeneration of a workers state. It continually strives to stabilize its rule, and assure a base for its continued existence by evolving into a new class. But history is not inclined to listen to the heart-murmurings of the Soviet bureaucrats. It has placed an obstacle in their way, the world working class, and the nationalized economy in their country. The continued existence of the bureaucracy will inevitably lead to a restoration in the Soviet Union, and now in the age of H-bombs to barbarism. "In the USSR the overthrow of the bureaucracy is indispensable for the preservation of state property." (Trotsky, In Defense of Marxism.) But excuse me for getting off the track. What I am trying to establish is that the Wallace movement in the concrete situation of 1948 represented the interests of neither the capitalist class nor the working class. It represented the interest of the Stalinist bureaucracy, notwithstanding its historical origin or tendencies.

### Conclusion

The party in 1948 correctly rejected the Wallace candidacy as a counterfeit to a genuine labor party, undeserving of support by revolutionary socialists. But on the other hand it incorrectly labeled it as a third capitalist party.

The SWP was then and has to this day remained staunchly in favor of the American working people taking the next step towards their emancipation, by forming a political party of their own. With this perspective firmly in mind we will march triumphantly into the future.

New York, N.Y.  
March 9, 1959.