

How To Build A Labor Party

Our Approach To Labor Party Advocates

At the beginning of 1991, a nationwide advocacy campaign for the building of a U.S. labor party was initiated by Tony Mazzocchi, a "progressive" union leader in the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) Union (where he holds the post of Secretary-Treasurer). In his invitation to join this "new" campaign, Labor Party Advocates, Mazzocchi states:

"Labor Party Advocates has a single purpose: To educate the public about the need for a labor party in the United States. To belong is to affirm one's belief in an idea: that the labor movement in the United States needs its own political party."

Labor Party Advocates (LPA) held a national public meeting in New York, in May 1991. It attracted over a hundred and fifty activists, mostly trade unionists, from around the United States. The meeting was met with enthusiasm from the activists who attended, especially over the need to take action *now* to build a labor party. As the New York meeting progressed, some important disagreements emerged from the floor. They were centered on: the refusal of LPA to run or endorse candidates in the elections; Mazzocchi's opposition to a program for the LPA until it can sign up at least 100,000 members (!); and, most importantly, Mazzocchi's insistence that LPA members not break their ties with the Democratic Party.

The opposition to Mazzocchi in New York was not baseless. It illustrates the contradictions of Mazzocchi and his campaign. Mazzocchi has made a name for himself as a left-wing union leader and radical activist, and has been involved in (quietly) promoting the idea of a labor party for at least 10 years. However, his reputation should not distract from the fact that he is a part of the union bureaucracy, albeit with some left wing coloration. As in the case of the other union bureaucrats, Mazzocchi clearly understands that his interests are tied not to the empowerment of the working class — but to the profit system, because this is the source of his privileges. Despite the fact that he has some harsh criticisms to make of U.S. capitalism — mostly because it is *eroding* his dues-paying union base — he has little more to offer than mildly *reformist* solutions.

Mazzocchi's bureaucratic method of operation is clearly shown by the fact that he is against a fighting rank and file movement in the unions, that he does not mention anything approaching a *class struggle* program (workers' wages indexed to the cost of living, for instance), and by the fact that he has little if any criticism for the thoroughly reactionary, pro-boss and pro-imperialist labor bureaucrats in the AFL-CIO leadership. In reality, there is nothing in Mazzocchi's

proposals that is explicitly (or implicitly) anti-capitalist. In his pamphlet, "Labor Party Advocates, Questions and Answers", Mazzocchi elaborates on his program:

"We need another New Deal. We need fair taxes. We need to make it easier to join unions. We need to offer all workers the same health, pension and education benefits currently enjoyed by the few. We need to provide meaningful job security, and we need a guarantee of alternative employment at a comparable wage when we lose our jobs."

In his pamphlet Mazzocchi proposes that "we need another New Deal", to achieve this program; that is, another "nice" liberal Democrat like Roosevelt to lull the workers. Thus, Labor Party Advocates will *not* campaign to build an *alternative* to the Democratic Party:

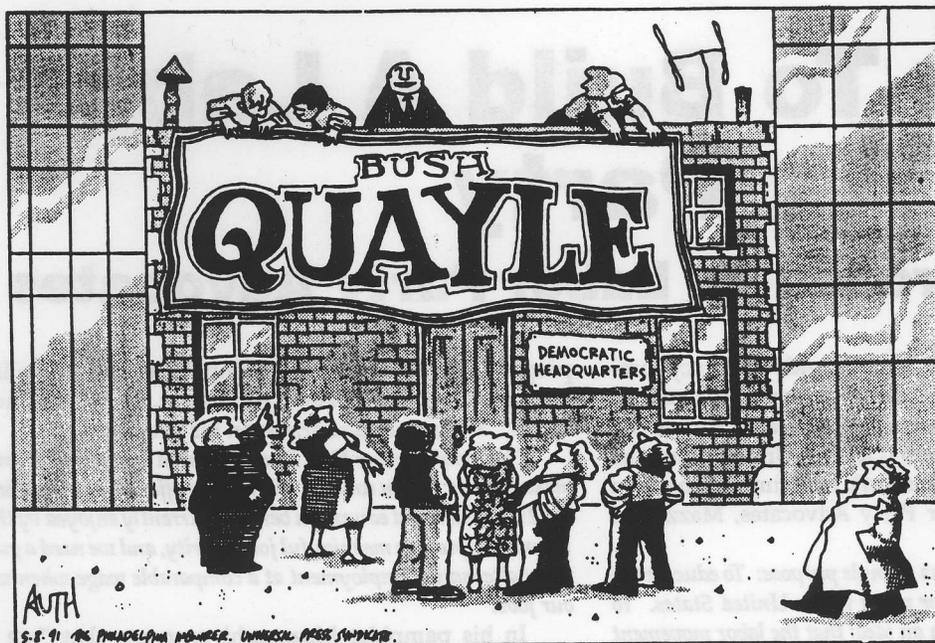
"Does someone have to break their ties with the established parties to become a labor party Advocate? No. Labor Party Advocates as an organization will not run its own candidates, and individual Labor Party Advocates will therefore be free to work for the candidates of any of the major parties."

Thus, Mazzocchi's method and program are clear. He wants the labor party to remain an idea talked about during the free time of the "progressive" bureaucrats and their radical friends, while in the real life of the class struggle these same bureaucrats can continue to keep the working class subordinated to the bosses' parties.

The Democrats, Mazzocchi and the Left

Today in the U.S. it is an urgent task for the working class to break with the bosses' parties and build its own political party. The workers need a party that can fight for their interests at every level. The building of a workers' party will be a basic and important step toward collective organization and political independence for the U.S. working class, in the same way that the building of the trade unions was an essential step. Polls carried out by Mazzocchi himself (in unions around the midwest) show that most workers no longer have illusions in the Democrats and in fact favor a labor party now. (Though this doesn't apply to the union bureaucracy, which as a majority *opposes* breaking its connection to the Democratic Party and the bosses.)

In the wake of the Gulf War and "the war at home" (i.e., the ongoing attacks on the trade unions, social services and rights of the working class), more and more workers are realizing that, in order to beat the system, it is necessary to respond *politically*, i.e., through building their own party. The budget crises in the Bay Area and the California public



school system are only the tip of the capitalist iceberg. Almost every city and state in the U.S. is now heading for budgetary *disaster*, if not bankruptcy, and the working class is expected to pick up the tab. At the same time, membership of the trade unions has dropped to its lowest point in 50 years (less than 15% of the workforce). All of this has begun to put the question of *independent* political mobilization against the bosses and their political cronies on the agenda. It is becoming clear that unless the working class begins the process of building a workers' party soon, it will lose all its hard-won gains, including the trade unions.

On the other hand, *no sector* of the Democratic Party today has anything to offer workers except sugar-coated versions of capitalist austerity, union-trouncing, oppression — and *war*. During the Gulf crisis, the entire Democratic Party leadership lined up *squarely* behind Bush's barbaric war drive against Iraq, albeit with a few murmurs of disapproval for its devastating results. (Which included the mass murder of over 100,000 *Iraqis*, and major environmental destruction.) The same Democrats were also more than happy to join the sickly chorus of cheerleading for arch capitalist restorationist Boris Yeltsin, following the coup in the Soviet Union.

On the "home" front, too, the situation is no different. Democratic politicians of all stripes, including Michael Dukakis in Massachusetts and Tom Bradley in Los Angeles, have proven to be quite useful allies to the bosses, with their budget-cutting, union-busting, and policy of police brutality against minorities and the poor.

Even Tony Mazzocchi is aware of all this. But, where we part company with Mazzocchi, and a large chunk of the left, is over their belief that liberal politicians in the Democratic Party, like Jesse Jackson, can be "friends of labor." Even "orthodox" trotskysts such as the United Secretariat, the

Labor Militant tendency and even the Revolutionary Workers League have called on Jesse Jackson to "break with the Democratic Party."

J a c k s o n , Dellums, and company have proven, despite their racial and class backgrounds, that their loyalties lie not with the workers and oppressed, but with the bosses. This came out clearly during the 1988 Jesse Jackson election campaign. What did Jackson promise to the voters if he were elected? To increase government aid to black capitalists, to intensify "the war on

drugs" (i.e., the war on the black ghettos), to "keep jobs in the U.S" (i.e. to poison workers with chauvinism), and to distance himself from "terrorists" such as the Palestinians. In other words, Jackson, like many left Democrats before him, used populist rhetoric to win votes from the workers, while proving his bourgeois credentials to the bosses. What this campaign proved, more clearly than anything else, is that neither Jackson nor any of his liberal chums in the Democratic Party are in reality "friends of labor."

This is a petty-bourgeois myth which needs to be exposed once and for all. To call on a bourgeois politician — under the guise of being a "friend of labor" — to break from the bourgeoisie, and to propose that such a politician can be a candidate of labor is like calling on the bosses to denounce their system. Trotskyists do not call on the "left/liberal" Democrats to break with their party and build a labor party, or run as labor candidates. Such a demand only promotes illusions that the Democratic Party can be reformed and serve the interests of the working class. Moreover, today the Democrats are in a deep crisis. Because they have nothing different to offer from the Republicans, the Demo's cannot even come up with a candidate for the next presidential election. We should just let the Democratic Party die — and not try to prolong its life, by promoting illusions in its "liberal" wing. It is time to build a labor party *now* !

Trotsky's Attitude to the Labor Party

"Are we in favour of the creation of a reformist labor party? No. Are we in favour of a policy which can give the trade unions the possibility to put its weight upon the balance of forces? Yes. It can become a reformist party — it depends upon the development. Here comes in the question of the [transitional] program." (Leon Trotsky on the Labor Party in the U.S. (Merit), pg.14.)

Throughout the 1930s, Trotsky participated in a debate over the labor party question with the U.S. Trotskyists in the Socialist Workers Party and its predecessor, the Communist League of America. A particularly important series of discussions on this question took place in Mexico City between April and July, 1938. Prior to the SWP's first national conference in March 1938, the SWP and its leadership under James Cannon had followed Trotsky's position of *opposing* the slogan of the labor party.

The change in Trotsky's position (in 1938) resulted from the fact that Trotsky quite correctly viewed the question of the labor party as a *tactic*, dependent on the changing features of the class struggle, and not as a strategy. Support for the building, entry, and electoral activity of the labor party was not, for Lenin and Trotsky, something that was carved into stone (as it is for Militant in Britain and the U.S. today).

Thus, Trotsky opposed the tactic in 1932 and re-evaluated it in 1938. In the early 1930's, he did not foresee the sudden upsurge of the CIO and the building of mass industrial unions which took place in 1936. He believed that American workers would by-pass the stage of a mass workers' party and that the development of the revolutionary party would take place at a faster rate than the decline of capitalism.

The emergence of the CIO movement laid the basis for Trotsky's re-evaluation of the labor party tactic. He saw the CIO upsurge as an important factor which would renew the determination of the working class to take action; and for this they would need their own political party. In other words, the class struggle itself dictated the need of the workers for a labor party, and a number of workers' parties were formed across the USA. These included the Farmer-Labor Party which was formed in Minnesota (where it dominated the state government) and the American Labor party in New York. In this situation, it was important for revolutionaries to *support* the struggle of the workers for political independence and to prevent the union bureaucracy from channeling the struggle in a reformist direction. In a discussion with the SWP leaders, Trotsky was explicit that revolutionaries must fight for a revolutionary program within a labor party:

"Cannon: How can you explain a revolutionary labor party . . . ?

"Trotsky: *I will not say that the Labor Party is a revolutionary party, but we will do everything to make it possible. At every meeting I will say: I am a representative of the SWP. I consider it the only revolutionary party. But I am not a sectarian. You are trying now to create a big workers' party. I will help you but I propose that you consider a program for this party. I make such and such propositions.*" (Ibid., pg. 20.)

There are those on the left who would argue that these debates took place in the 1930's and that they do not apply to the class struggle in the 1990's. On this we would have to differ. Although the features *specific* to the labor movement in the 1930's are different from the specific features of the class struggle in the 1990's, we live in a period which is of the same *basic* characterization. That is, it is a period marked by the death agony of capitalism in general, and specifically, by a

burning need of the workers to fight back in every way — particularly, *politically*. Today the tasks placed before us are similar to those posed to the Trotskyists in the 1930's. In this regard, the questions and debates of the SWP leaders with Trotsky in 1938 are particularly pertinent to the kinds of tasks we have to carry out in building a U.S. labor party today. Then and now, as Trotsky pointed out, *objective reality* demands political action by the working class. Today, there is as much of a real need for a labor party in the U.S. As in the 1930's we must start from the objective decay of capitalism and *not* from the workers' illusions in it. That means that we should prevent a labor party in the U.S. from following the British reformist road:

"... *the need for a labor party is absolutely proven by all events. It is proved that economic action is not enough. We need political action.*" (Ibid., pg. 26.)

"*I say here what I said about the whole program of transitional demands. The problem is not the mood of the masses but the objective situation, and our job is to confront the backward material of the masses with the tasks that are determined by objective facts and not by psychology. The same is absolutely correct for this specific question of the Labor Party.*" (Ibid., pg. 24.)

For Trotsky the labor party question was part of the program of transitional demands; and most of those demands, including the demand for a labor party, would not be fully realized under capitalism. (It would be easier to get rid of capitalism than to fully implement the demands!) In other words, an *anti-capitalist labor party* (that will last) will not be realized without the socialist revolution. Therefore, today we must raise the slogan of the labor party and other demands not because we believe that the capitalists can grant them as *reforms* (reforms are by-products of the revolutionary struggle!); but because the struggle to implement them will mobilize the working class against the capitalist system. In the course of this struggle, the consciousness of the workers for the socialist revolution will develop.

Trotsky summarized the relationship between the labor party slogan, the transitional program and the socialist revolution as follows:

"*It [the labor party] can become a reformist party — it depends upon the development. Here the question of program comes in. I mentioned yesterday and I will underline it today — we must have a program of transitional demands, the most complete of them being a workers' and farmers' government. We are for a party, for an independent party of the toiling masses who will take power in the state. We must concretize it — we are for the creation of factory committees, for workers' control of industry through the factory committees. . . .*

"*We say, the factory committees should see the books. This program we must develop parallel with the idea of a labor party in the unions and workers' militia. Otherwise it is an abstraction and an abstraction is a weapon in the hands of the opposing class.*" (Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* (Pathfinder Press), pg. 83 (emphasis added).)

For us today, as it was for Trotsky, the labor party cannot be raised without the fight for other transitional demands. The labor party was not built after the 1930's, because there was no mass revolutionary party which could link the demand for the labor party to the class struggle and other transitional demands, such as: a sliding scale of wages (i.e., wages indexed to the cost of living), workers control, workers militia etc. This vacuum has allowed the "progressive" union bureaucracy to raise the labor party slogan as an abstraction, that is, in order to pacify the workers.

How to Fight for a Labor Party

At the end of 1990, a meeting of Labor Party Advocates (LPA) was held in the Bay Area, as part of a U.S. tour by Tony Mazzocchi to introduce his campaign. Although the majority of left activists present in this meeting were reluctant to voice key criticisms of substance against Mazzocchi's perspectives (especially in the presence of major dude hotshots from the union bureaucracy like Walter Johnson), the RTT took a different view.

We pointed out that Mazzocchi's campaign was not just half-hearted in not running or endorsing independent labor candidates, but would lead to a dead end in light of the present climate of ruthless, systematic attacks on the working class. We pointed out that the reason for Mazzocchi's refusal to support running independent labor candidates is his belief that union militants should not stop campaigning for the

Democratic and Republican parties!

But the majority of union workers want to build a labor party! A poll carried out by Mazzocchi himself among union workers in the midwest, showed that about 60% favor the building of a working class party *now*. In addition, when a union-sponsored candidate from the United Mine Workers union ran in an election for the state legislature of Virginia in 1989 (during the Pittston Strike), *he won the election* against the incumbent Democratic candidate. There is no reason at all why this cannot be repeated today.

In the Bay Area LPA meeting, we proposed that an important step in building the labor party should be for the unions (with the help of LPA) to run independent labor candidates — against both the Republicans and the Democrats — on a class struggle program. At the same time, we also raised the *dangers* involved in organizing a purely *reformist* workers' party, as the example of Kinnock's Labor Party in Britain clearly shows.

As a revolutionary tendency, we support any real campaign to build a workers' party which will mobilize the workers. We therefore think that the Labor Party Advocates campaign should not be ignored. If it attracts growing numbers of workers and activists, revolutionaries should participate in it and counterpose class struggle methods for building a labor party to Mazzocchi's reformism. However, the labor party will never be built by the "lip-service" campaigns of even the most left-wing bureaucrats. Only a massive struggle, as part of an offensive of the working class as a



Workers at the Daily News defending their strike. Massive struggles are necessary to build a labor party.

whole, can lead to the building of a workers' party in the U.S. (and only militant rank and file workers and revolutionaries can be expected to begin the process seriously).

When the class struggle erupts on a national scale, a labor party can be built in the U.S. relatively quickly — even within a few years. But, the working class will *not* need to go through a "reformist" stage before it can organize to overthrow its exploiters and oppressors and take power. On the contrary, the workers should pass through the school of the labor party in order to *break* with reformism. This will require winning over the best fighters from the mass base of the labor party to the revolutionary tasks of the working class.

The RTT will fight for a workers' party which is explicitly anti-capitalist, i.e., one that stands for workers' power, on a revolutionary, *transitional* platform. We are against the methodology of Labor Militant, who try to hide this goal in the closet by calling for a labor party which will run on a series of so-called "democratic socialist policies" (in reality watered-down demands). We are no more in favor of building such a "semi-reformist" labor party, as we are of building one that is reformist, pure and simple.¹

However, the RTT will work within *any* workers' party that comes into being in the U.S., even if it evolves in a reformist direction. Within such a party, our top priority will be to prevent it from becoming crystallized into a reformist party, and we will fight within it at every opportunity for a revolutionary program of transitional demands.

How to Fight the Labor Bureaucracy

While we demand that the labor bureaucracy take concrete steps towards building the workers' party, our priority is first and foremost to campaign amongst the union rank and file for such a party. Today, the first step towards building this party is to organize caucuses of sympathetic militants in locals around the country. Conferences at both local and national levels should be organized to establish the labor party and to debate its program. Members of organizations of the oppressed, such as the National Black Independent Party (NBIPP) and the National Organization of Women (NOW) could be invited to participate in these conferences. At the same time, workers should demand that the trade union leaders support the campaigns of independent labor candidates, and that these same leaders break once and for all from the bosses' parties and become active in the campaign to build the labor party. However, we must emphasize that *we do not leave it up to* the labor leaders to begin the process of building the labor party — the workers themselves must take the lead.

We demand that the union bureaucracy (especially the "left wing" which likes to talk about the labor party) support campaigns for independent labor candidates. But if they refuse support, we will continue to campaign — just as vigorously — for union-backed labor candidates. In fact we will use the campaigns to organize *against* the bureaucrats. We will campaign for a class struggle rank and file movement, which will fight for the unions to break from the Democrats once and for all as the key step in building a labor party. The workers should build a labor party with the union

leaders if possible, against them if necessary. Trotsky's comments on how we should deal with the trade union bureaucracy, are pertinent today more than ever:

"What we can say is that the objective situation is absolutely decisive. The trade unions as trade unions can have only a defensive activity, losing members and becoming more and more weak as the crisis deepens. . . . If the trade union leaders are not ready for political action, we must ask them to develop a new political orientation. If they refuse, we denounce them. That is the objective situation." (Leon Trotsky on the Labor Party in the U.S., op. cit., pg. 24.)

It is more likely that a rank and file movement in the unions will be constructed without the cooperation of the union bureaucracy. This movement must be based on a class struggle program of transitional demands, such as a sliding scale of wages, free abortion on demand, and nationalization of essential industries under workers' control.

The Centrists and LPA

In spite of the lessons of many decades of struggle, including the struggles for labor parties in the 1920's and 1930's, and the debates between the SWP and Trotsky himself around this question, the left (including the "Trotskyist" left) seems to have learned very little. Probably more than any other single political question in the U.S., the question of the workers' party in the U.S. sharply marks the line between sectarianism, opportunism and revolutionary Trotskyism.

The Mazzocchi campaign proves this all clearly. Organizations with a claim to "orthodox Trotskyism" (e.g. Labor Militant, Socialist Action, Socialist Organizer), have jumped on the Mazzocchi band wagon. These right-wing opportunist groups are tailing Mazzocchi, and have no problem in leaving *open* the question of what kind of labor party they want. On the other hand, there are those on the centrist left who have ignored Mazzocchi's campaign altogether (we include here such sectarian oddities as the Spartacist League and its minor split — the Bolshevik Tendency).

Labor Militant's Opportunistic Support for Mazzocchi

Labor Militant, the U.S. section of the British Militant Tendency (which has over 5000 members in the Labour Party), has played a major role in organizing Mazzocchi's LPA campaign. Labor Militant in its theory and practice explicitly substitutes the creation of a radical, semi-reformist labor party for the building of an independent, revolutionary Trotskyist party in the U.S. In Militant's eyes, such a labor party should be built by the existing union *bureaucracy*. Once built, such a party can *peacefully* bring about the end of capitalism, by implementing a series of "democratic socialist policies" such as the nationalization of the "Fortune 500" companies. Thus, for Militant, the "democratic socialist policies" can be implemented without the revolutionary mobilization of the working class against capitalism. In reality, Labor Militant calls for a labor party in the U.S. which is

not explicitly anti-capitalist, and runs on a program of watered-down transitional demands (that are exclusively American-centered).

For instance:

- ** A minimum wage of \$10.00 per hour
- * A guaranteed job for all
- * A 32-hour work week with no loss in pay
- * A National Health Service
- * A national pension plan
- * An end to the domination of the U.S. economy by the . . . corporations."

And how can these nice objectives be achieved?

"The CLP [Labor Militant's "Campaign for a Labor Party" - ed.] believes that to achieve these objectives, capitalism must be replaced by a democratic socialist system, based on the nationalization of the 500 major corporations under workers' control and management." (Labor Militant #20, May-July 1991.)

But it is up to the union bureaucracy to "achieve these objectives":

"It is up to the labor leaders to channel the rage that is developing among workers and youth into a movement to bring down the Bush government and end the big business monopoly over U.S. politics... The labor leaders should build a trade union based Labor Party and put in power a labor government pledged to implement democratic socialist policies." (Labor Militant #18, October 1990-January 1991, emphasis added.)

Labor Militant simply follows its sister party, the British Militant Tendency (and Social Democracy in general!) in suggesting a peaceful road to socialism, led by the union bureaucracy:

"We have proclaimed hundreds, if not thousands of times that, armed with a clear program and perspective, the labour movement in Britain could effect a peaceful socialist transformation." (Peter Taafe, quoted in the program of the Militant Tendency.)

What, we wonder has become of the revolutionary perspectives put forward by the the Bolsheviks, the Third International, the Left Opposition, and the Fourth International? Since when have revolutionaries politely requested that it is up to the union bureaucracy, "the labor traitors" (in Trotsky's words), to build the workers' party? Secondly, was it not Lenin himself who asserted that the precondition for every workers' revolution is the *smashing* of the capitalist state machinery? And, at what point in history exactly did Trotsky's Transitional Program for *Socialist Revolution* mutate into the "democratic socialist policies" of a future labor government? Labor Militant *clearly* has no answers to these questions.

The Opportunism of Socialist Organizer and Socialist Action

Socialist Organizer (S.O.) originated as a split from Socialist Action (S.A.), the "official" section of the United Secretariat for the Fourth International, at the beginning of 1991. But, on many levels, Socialist Action and Socialist Organizer maintain almost identical politics.

Both Socialist Organizer and Socialist Action are on the mark in some of their criticisms of Labor Party Advocates. They quite correctly point out that Mazzocchi's call for a "new" New Deal in the 1990's is a bad move. In particular,

S.O. goes to some lengths to expose the great myths of Roosevelt's New Deal, quoting extensively from Art Preis' landmark book on the CIO, "Labor's Giant Step". S.O. also rightly calls for independent labor candidates to run in the 1992 elections (while Socialist Action is against such a step right now!).

However, the common criticism that S.O. and S.A. have toward the LPA campaign pales in comparison with their common opportunistic approach toward it. In particular, neither group has a problem with Mazzocchi's call for an explicitly reformist labor party. In this endeavor they both are more than willing to give their full, uncritical support. (The two groups also view Mazzocchi and figures like him as quite "separate" from the rest of the union bureaucracy.)

S.O.'s paper, *The Organizer*, gives us a lesson in centrist politics the moment we turn from one page to the next. Directly opposite S.O.'s article on LPA we find word-for-word reprints of Mazzocchi's speeches and writings, without a word of explanation, differentiation or criticism to preface them. An entire page of the June issue of *The Organizer* is devoted to Mazzocchi's program, as if he were simply a Trotskyist fellow traveller and editorial contributor — and not a reformist union bureaucrat! Moreover, most of the reformist positions that Mazzocchi brings up in "his" page are not dealt within S.O.'s lead article, including those of his positions which Trotskyists would clearly oppose. Such an eclectic "mixing" of politics is a hallmark of centrism, and we often see the same kind of methodology in *Socialist Action* as well.

Socialist Organizer calls for the formation of a third (reformist) Black party in the U.S. and a third (reformist) women's party — emerging possibly from N.O.W. Revolutionaries do not support *separate sectors* of the oppressed such as women, Blacks and Latinos building their own parties, especially reformist parties, as Socialist Organizer suggests. They should, however, support the right of the oppressed to build their own militant movements linked *directly* to the building of the labor party.² Thus, the sectoralist methodology of S.O. is in no way compatible with the revolutionary Trotskyist perspective of building a workers' party. Socialist Organizer states:

"Blacks need an independent party to organize the militant action that will wrest control away from what Malcolm called the 'white power structure. . . . Just as revolutionary socialists must support and actively participate in the fight to build an independent labor party based on the unions and open to all the oppressed, we have an obligation to put forth this perspective for independent Black political action. . . . An independent Black party, moreover, can be an essential stepping stone toward the formation of a labor party." (The Organizer, May 1991, p.13, emphasis added.)

But S.O.'s support for "an independent Black Party" is linked not to the struggle to build a labor party, but to the illusions of black nationalism and reformism. In the same issue of *The Organizer*, S.O. rush to heap praises on the Rev. Graylan Ellis-Hagler, who is running for Mayor in Boston, Massachusetts. S.O.'s logic for supporting Hagler is the "progressive" nature of his program. But Hagler is a black nationalist and a reformist. Despite repeated questions from S.O. regarding his position on the need to break with the

Democratic Party, his answers remained ambiguous. He clearly wants to reform the repressive bourgeois state apparatus. In an interview with Socialist Organizer he said :

"The proposal we wrote calls for cadets, once they graduated from the police academy, to be assigned for an 18-month period without weapons, without firearms, in schools, in rec centers, in public housing projects, and as street workers to work with young people and to engage with them as counselors, mentors, coaches and guides." (Ibid., pg. 3.)

Hagler is promoting the worst kind of illusions in the black ghettos. He gives black workers the illusion that the cops can be transformed into social workers who will stop repressing blacks (it is practically a joke!) But S.O. makes no comment about this. It does not, of course, counterpose the revolutionary demand for Black defense guards linked the unions and the workers, to the nationalist illusions promoted by Hagler. Thus, S.O.'s uncritical support for separate reformist and nationalist parties of the oppressed is part and parcel of its support for the labor party initiative of the union bureaucracy. Such is the hallmark of right-wing centrism.

Despite their split, Socialist Organizer and Socialist Action have retained the same opportunist attitude toward the union bureaucracy and the labor party. This attitude is perfectly summarized in Socialist Action's attitude to Mazzocchi:

"In his explanation of its purpose, Mazzocchi correctly emphasizes the primarily educational function of LPA at the present time. His letter of invitation and pamphlet advance good arguments for a break with capitalist politics and for the formation of a labor party based on the unions. . . . [H]e also correctly declares that the LPA 'will neither run nor endorse candidates for political office.' . . . Tony Mazzocchi is not in the same category [as the labor bureaucrats -ed]. He is a long time progressive and even radical militant in the American labor movement who has not broken with some of the best of his early positions[!]" (Socialist Action, May 1991, p. 16, emphasis added.)

Socialist Action emphasizes Mazzocchi's position of "the primarily educational function of LPA"; that is, SA concurs that the labor party project should be restricted to a talking-shop between the "progressive" bureaucracy and the union activists — not a tool to mobilize the workers! With such an attitude, one does not need to wage a revolutionary opposition against the bureaucracy, but to join it! The history of Socialist Action proves this. During the Gulf War, for example, S.A. collaborated with the union bureaucracy to maneuver the mass anti-war movement into the safety net of pacifism.³

Revolutionary Trotskyism: The Only Way Forward

In the case of Mazzocchi's campaign, it is clear that honest rank and file militants from the unions have become attracted to LPA because they believe it is a vehicle to build a real, fighting alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. Mazzocchi has gained some credibility for organizing this campaign, and it is likely, as the attacks on the working class and oppressed intensify, that it will attract more workers and

activists. In this kind of situation, Trotskyists are *obliged* to participate and counterpose class struggle transitional demands, such as "30 hours' work for 40 hours' pay", to the feeble reformist perspectives of the union bureaucracy. We are obliged to confront and expose Mazzocchi and his hacks to the workers, and to show why his reformist perspectives can lead to *defeat*. At the same time, we will struggle alongside these workers for the common goal of initiating a labor party in the U.S., on a class struggle basis.

Today, the working class is in the midst of a period of unprecedented attack by the bosses and their allies. Disillusionment with the Democratic Party is extensive (the majority of workers do not even vote in the elections). The need for workers to respond to the capitalist crisis in a political way is more pressing today than ever. The struggle to build a workers' party is definitely on the agenda. In fact, Mazzocchi is calling for a labor party precisely because of rank and file pressure.

A labor party can be initiated in the U.S. through a democratic discussion in the unions, combined with solidarity labor actions. To get the ball rolling, caucuses of militants should be organized in the various locals, and national and local conferences should be convened to establish the labor party.

Ultimately, the labor party in the U.S. will be only built through massive struggles by the working class and oppressed. But, by linking the present small scale labor party campaigns to the class struggle perspective of the transitional program, we can *begin* the process of building the labor party and win workers to a revolutionary program. Only the revolutionary workers' party, a Trotskyist party, will ever be capable of leading a revolution that will get rid of the oppressive capitalist system once and for all.

- Break with the Republicans, break with the Democrats! Build a Labor Party!
- For independent labor candidates in the elections!
- Make the bosses pay! No budget cuts, layoffs, or plant closures!
- Open the books! Nationalize under workers' control all factories which threaten bankruptcy or plant closure!
- For full employment! For wages indexed to inflation and a 30-hour workweek for 40 hours' pay!
- Free contraception, health care and abortion on demand!
- Nationalize under workers' control all essential industries, including the drug and health care industry!
- Solidarity with Soviet workers against capitalist restoration!
- U.S. hands off Iraq! Solidarity with the masses in Middle East against Bush's "New World Order"!
- For a workers' government to defend the workers and implement these demands!

NOTES

¹ See section on "The Centrists and LPA".

² See our program in International Trotskyist #1.

³ See International Trotskyist # 2 and # 3.