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PARANOIA BORDERING ON RESIGNATION: NORMAN THOMAS AND
THE AMERICAN SOCIALIST PARTY, 1939-48

The University of Oklahoma

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THE AMERICAN SOCIALIST PARTY, 1939-48

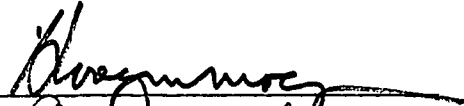
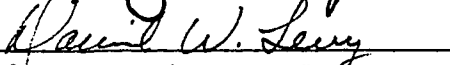
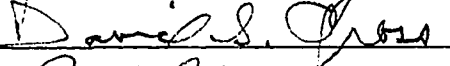
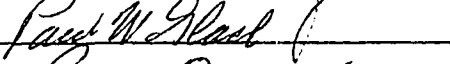
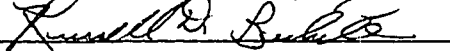
A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
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BY
STEPHEN MARK GENS
Norman, Oklahoma

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PARANOIA BORDERING ON RESIGNATION: NORMAN THOMAS AND
THE AMERICAN SOCIALIST PARTY, 1939-48

APPROVED BY

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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INTRODUCTION

Eugene V. Debs, Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit united their supporters in 1901 to form the Socialist Party of America (SP). Each man had different views of the organization and its purpose, but not of its goal, a socialist America. Debsians were mid-western and western radical industrial unionists from the recently broken American Railway Union, mixed with ex-populists and utopian communarians. Berger led a strong electoral machine centered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His forces favored evolutionary socialism. They were rhetorically marxist. So was Hillquit's "Rochester" faction of Daniel DeLeon's Socialist Labor Party. Hillquit led a marxist group against DeLeon's dictatorial rule and his all-or-nothing philosophy of politics, union work and revolution. Hillquit's forces were doctrinaire European socialists, Berger's were European social democrats, and Debs's were a mixture of budding syndicalists and grass roots populists.¹

The SP was an interesting and volatile organization which allowed it wide theoretical and practical boundaries before the First World War. The American political tradition imposed a certain structure on the new Socialist Party, but except for that, the early SP was free to pursue its goal by any means. The SP flourished in an atmosphere which matched its elastic personality. The intense reform optimism of the progressive era nurtured idealism. The intellectual climate of the period also permitted a disparity of groups to function fairly

effectively within a single organization. Idealism was the party's glue; much seemed possible. An SP marxist probably considered Debsian communarians unbalanced, but could point to no one recent incident as proof. All options were open, none tried, all perhaps true. Time and experience was to close some doors, and appear to open others.

The prewar optimism allowed the SP's goal to obscure the problem of the means by which the socialists expected to prevail. Not that the question of means was absent. It caused many fights between evolutionary and revolutionary socialists. The battles culminated in 1912 with the passage of an anti-violence, pro-political action amendment to the SP constitution, and the National Executive Committee (NEC) decision to expel William "Big Bill" Haywood for his advocacy of direct action.² The oft-acclaimed inclusive nature of the prewar SP would not have been possible if the question of means were as significant as it was later to become. It was much less important before the war because all roads to socialism appeared open. The party's final goal seemed merely a matter of patience. Socialism was just around the corner.³

But the world would not stand still. As it changed, so did the SP. Socialists were the consummate adherents of the doctrine of progress. Change was inevitable and necessarily good. It could only mean progress for socialism, either evolutionary, through increased working class political consciousness, or revolutionary, through increased working class reaction to capitalist oppression. One thing few socialists expected was that change, instead of liberating, would ensnare radicals in positions which, while seemingly dictated by objec-

tive analysis, were to close many theoretical passageways to socialist liberation. And rarely would it open any new doors.

The era of the Great War for Democracy did just that. Government and popular repression during World War I broke the back of the SP in the west. The populists' traditional nativism and patriotism surfaced rapidly and the government fertilized it abundantly. The party's anti-war St. Louis Declaration (1917) made it prey for government repression, along with the semi-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). During and after the war, American society and government set limits on the means the party could use to invite socialism into American society and culture. Political agitation and education were acceptable only if neither seriously challenged the popular will, whether it was truly popular, or government fomented.

The party grew during the war, and by 1917 it had over eighty thousand members.⁴ New eastern and foreign-born members enthusiastically replaced lost western adherents. The party attracted new members because of its anti-war stand, and later, its support for the Russian Revolution. But many, impatient with Debs, Berger and Hillquit, and fired by the visions of the Russian Revolution, split from the party to form the first communist parties. The split translated into a sixty thousand member loss in SP membership between 1917 and 1921.⁵ The war severely affected radicals who remained within the SP. Repression circumscribed the party's actions and dictated restraint. The postwar conservative popular mood necessitated retrenchment and a fuller examination of means. Could the SP alone gain power, or should it seek alliance with residual elements of other prewar reform groups?

Before the war this question had little importance. When anything was possible, no alliance was necessary. But some kind of post-war alliance appeared necessary for a badly tattered and tired American left, including the SP. In opting for alignment with mainstream reform groups, the SP prevented the new communist party from taking the same tack, thus consigning it to sectarian impotence. And the SP-farmer-labor-LaFollette campaign of 1924 netted a full five million votes. But five million were not enough and a strong electoral showing did not bring power immediately on its heels. Labor quit the coalition, thus slamming shut another door in the SP's face.

In the areas of politics and organization, the SP experienced between wars the same pressures that a maturing social order exerted on all industrialized societies, European, Asian and American. The industrial revolution of the nineteenth century created new economic structures which presented societies with many possible routes to the social goals of peace, prosperity and stability. As the new order matured, various societies tried many of these new routes, usually to find only contradictions, pitfalls and booby traps. The American SP, an easily identifiable political group, faced in the period 1920-48, a world of rapidly diminishing viable alternatives. They were forced into their positions by the actions of others. It was little wonder they never gained a significant foot-hold in American society or politics.

The twenty years between the two great world wars were difficult for the American SP. One after another, apparent alternative routes to peace and plenty closed, slowly narrowing the boundaries within which the SP sought to exist and gain power for socialism. By

the mid-1920s, the original leaders of the SP were old and none-too-effectual. Debs, perhaps the most influential leader the American left ever produced, died in 1926. Berger was killed in an accident in 1929. Hillquit put more work into his law firm than into the party. The SP, immediately after the 1924 election, was leaderless. Party membership fell to eighty-five hundred in 1926.⁶

In the election of 1928, the nation first heard of a new SP leader, Norman Thomas, who was to overshadow all other American leftists until his death in 1968. Son of a Presbyterian minister, and himself a minister in the first decades of the century, Thomas joined the SP in 1918, largely because of the party's anti-war stand. The SP's new leader always worked for peaceful change and accepted the marxist principles of class struggle and the importance of the working class to socialist liberation. His new-found radical principles forced a repudiation of his religious beliefs, but Thomas retained a love for Christ's social teachings, and often sounded more like a Social Gospel preacher than a socialist. Thomas was a Princeton educated patrician, whose speech and morals reflected his protestant background. But in the 1920s and 1940s, his dynamic presence and idealism completely dominated the American socialist movement.⁷

By the middle of the depression decade, the SP leader was in his prime, a tall, gaunt figure, usually dressed in a gray or brown three-piece suit. He was quick to smile, quicker to speak. Indeed, he talked incessantly. His white crowned over-sized head would bob and weave as it projected his booming baritone voice. Thomas spoke to many audiences, hostile and friendly. He dodged rotten eggs in Frank

Hague's Jersey City and furtively dashed from town to town in Arkansas, trying to organize a sharecroppers' union. Never did he lose his optimism nor did he renounce his faith in democratic socialism.⁸

Thomas was a unique type of revolutionary. He was haunted by the underdog's pitiful wail but perfectly at home cheering his beloved Princeton to victory at the annual Princeton/Yale football game. He agitated for a cooperative commonwealth of socialized industry, the abolition of the profit system and economic equality for the masses, while living off his wife's inheritance. His flamboyant oratory and dry wit no doubt engendered more support than his ideology; he was at home with both radicals and Wall Street brokers. Yet neither ever felt entirely comfortable in his company. Within the SP, his leadership was rarely challenged, but often attacked. His life and work were mixed metaphor and paradox, and the SP reflected its leader's ambiguities.⁹

Under any leadership the SP would have weakened in the inter-war period. A blend of morality and political class consciousness characterized the American SP from its inception. Socialists demanded that politics and ethics be one, inseparable and united. Thomas's protestant social gospel orientation conformed to and strengthened this belief.

The economic and social circumstances of the Great Depression seemed an excellent opportunity for Thomas's SP to flourish, perhaps even to replace one of the two major parties. But it did not. True, the economic dislocation of the depression led many to seek alternative solutions to laissez-faire capitalism, but events and trends in the world emasculated alternatives before they could take root. Popular

fascism in Italy and Germany undercut radicals' faith in the inevitability of socialism. Stalin's dictatorship in the supposedly socialist Soviet Union discredited violent vanguardist revolution. The SP's changing attitude toward Bolshevik Russia demonstrated that alone, domestic politics did not completely determine a political organization's methods or success, especially if the organization had an internationalist outlook. The story of the American socialist response to Soviet Russia was a tale of lost dreams and fading hopes. And hopes were the building block of all reform.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 had been a beacon of light in a dark world for the great majority of leftists and liberals. For most non-communist radicals, history between the wars was a tale of dreams, disappointments and finally disenchantment with the "Russian Experiment." Disenchantment often brought reaction so fierce that individuals or groups shaped their policies around a desire to separate themselves from any taint of a Soviet connection. Stalinist Russia, more than any one factor, destroyed the American left of the 1930s and 1940s; Stalin drove his more independent admirers into the arms of American capitalism. The Russian dictator's fetid neuroses and purges graphically illustrated the dangers of violent social revolution, the cadre theory of revolutionary action, the one-party state and dogmatic social control. By 1945, most radicals believed they had little choice but to deny the whole Russian experience.

No group illustrated this evolution better than the Socialist Party. Socialists enthusiastically endorsed the Bolshevik seizure of power in October of 1917. Even right-wing leader Victor Berger pro-

claimed "all socialists are pro-Bolshevik today."¹⁰ Socialists protested Woodrow Wilson's attempts to isolate the Soviet republic.¹¹ But support had two meanings: many socialists supported the revolution in Russia, others supported the revolution which just happened to be in Russia. It was the latter groups who split from the SP and formed the first communist parties in 1919. Those who became communists trusted that the Bolshevik/cadre revolutionary mode was the Truth for all nations. Thomas stayed with the SP. He denied that the Russian experience would or should be echoed everywhere, especially in the United States. Radicals such as Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas were American exceptionalists.¹²

The split between the Russophiles and American exceptionalists was acrimonious. Continued factionalism within the American communist party in the 1920s made it more so. The arguments between communist and communist, socialist and communist were childish. Who loved the Soviet Union and its revolutionary standard the best? What mean would serve the interests of the god revolution better? Here were planted the seeds of Stalin's control over the American communist movement. The Soviet dictator was able to embody in his person the formless dream of social revolution, at least in the minds of American communists. Russia seemed to be making progress toward a real workers' state. Stalin's five year plans were exciting. A society purposefully charting its own future. This ideal was the Soviet leader's weapon, his hold over the otherwise intelligent radicals throughout the world. It was a mighty weapon, as the impotent, fumbling western capitalists seemed unable, or unwilling, to match the virile, rational Soviet eco-

conomic and social progress.¹³

Anarchists were the first radical group to question the morality of the Soviet revolution, the first to see the unsanctified blood on the Bolshevik hands. Emma Goldman, the passionate Russo-American anarchist, hounded out of her adopted homeland in 1919, likewise fled the "revolutionary homeland" in 1922. In March 1921, she witnessed Trotsky's Red Army slaughter the Kronstadt sailors. Those were "agonizing days, because of my utter helplessness in the face of terrible things enacted before my eyes." Kronstadt "broke the last thread" that bound Goldman to the Bolsheviks. "Whatever their pretenses in the past, the Bolsheviks now proved themselves the most pernicious enemies of the Revolution."¹⁴ This painful scene recurred time and again in the three decades following Kronstadt. Almost every American radical of note agonized through a personal Kronstadt (Golgotha?) and only extreme love of the ideals of radical action allowed so many to remain leftist for so long.

For the mainstream socialist party, once the head of the Third International (Comintern), Grigori Zinoviev, made the decision that the American SP was unwelcome in the Comintern, the question of Russia was fairly simple, at least throughout the 1920s.¹⁵ Socialists applauded the revolution, applauded Lenin and Stalin in their moves toward a planned socialist economy, applauded the apparent lack of racism and sexism in Soviet society. Certainly socialists denounced Bolshevik methods. But radical denunciations were muted because right-wing anti-communists exaggerated the Soviet faults so unreasonably "that no individual with any common sense could accept what they said." Liberals

and non-communists "were conditioned like Pavlov's dogs to reject attacks on the Soviet Union as being probably false and certainly exaggerated."¹⁶

Early criticism of Soviet excesses was closer to the truth than most wanted to believe. Already in the 1920s the American communist movement, re-christened in Moscow as the Communist Party U.S.A. (CP or CPUSA), was showing its ugly repressive face under a mask of "democratic centralism." Liberals and radicals alike should have heeded its lessons. First Leon Trotsky's supporters, James Cannon inside the CP and Max Eastman without, fell to the Stalinists' increasingly keen sectarian axe. The Comintern then expelled the influential American communist Jay Lovestone and his followers; Lovestone dared to suggest that America's capitalism was more solidly entrenched than Western Europe's.¹⁷

The Great Depression changed the objective social, political and economic circumstances for all radical groups. All believed the depression's social dislocation could only work for the benefit of their group, all sought to gain members and power from it. SP membership rose to twenty-six thousand by 1934. If it had not been for Stalin's view of non-communist leftists as his worst enemy (social fascists), a united left might have resulted in enormous gains in Europe and America.¹⁸ Many socialists treated the communist third period hysteria with self-satisfied humor. If the communists persisted in such behavior, they would further subdivide their party into oblivion. Most socialists reacted this way until February 1934. At an SP-sponsored meeting at Madison Square Garden to applaud the Austrian Social Demo-

crats' brave, if futile, stand against fascism, CP members invaded and used violence to break up the meeting. SP-CP relations were never the same.¹⁹

But even before the Madison Square Garden meeting, many of the older SP members, men such as Morris Hillquit and James Oneal, were drifting rapidly away from non-communism toward anti-communism. By 1935, Oneal wrote that Bolshevism made "a caricature of socialist philosophy"; it had "debased every noble ideal of the labor movement."²⁰ Norman Thomas and his youthful allies did not take this hard line in the early 1930s. It took more than one incident to turn the Thomasite socialists into anti-communists. The militant faction of the SP was only non-communist, often for reasons of pacifism, and this disagreement with the old guard was a major surface reason for the 1936 split in the SP.²¹

In 1934, Stalin reversed his position and called for a Popular Front of all leftists and liberals against the growing threat of international fascism. The Popular Front strategy allowed the younger generation of American socialists to remain enamored with the Soviet Union. In June 1934, CP leader Earl Browder wrote Thomas requesting that the SP join the CP in a united effort to stop fascism.²² Thomas and his party refused the request because of the communists' incomprehensible, unchartable twists of doctrine and because the socialists refused to accept the underlying logic of the popular front, that alliance with democratic capitalists, the forerunners of fascism, could stifle fascism's growth while promoting socialism's, and that war preparation would advance the cause of peace.²³ By 1948, the SP essen-

tially accepted the first part of this formula, substituting communism for fascism, but still rejected the second.

Thomas was not willing to liquidate the SP in favor of the popular front alliance, but he was willing to exploit the American CP's new-found spirit of compromise. He accepted communist cooperation on specific issues and was even willing to debate with Browder on the relative virtues of communism versus socialism.²⁴

The Thomas-Browder debate took place in 1935. Browder's statements were unusually placatory, at least to the ears of SP members, still used to the appellation "social fascist." Thomas' remarks were as conciliatory. He explained that he was a socialist because the SP did not practice the centralized control the CP did, and the SP did not follow "orders handed down from Moscow." Thomas indicated that even in this heyday of peace between the two groups, he was very fearful of the "overcentralization of bureacracy, even in a noble cause." "What troubles us" about Russia, he told Browder, "is the fact that we do not observe the withering away of the dictatorship as fast as some of us had hoped when the original revolutionary emergency had passed."²⁵

Those remarks were Thomas' most biting. The bulk of his "debate" was praise for the Russian experiment. Thomas said he regarded Russia as "the one outstanding achievement, the one bright pillar of hope, in the turbulent, confused world of the last few years." He praised the "great and priceless things [the Soviets] have . . . done," especially in the areas of public education, medical care, housing, women's rights and the all-important fight against racism.²⁶ Certainly Thomas and his supporters realized that the Soviet system was a party

dictatorship, that Stalin was a despot, that the party "was perverting the revolution to its own burocratic [sic], nationalistic ends."

Despite this knowledge, most socialists, between 1919 and 1939, distinguished between the Russian state apparatus, which was evil, and its professed goals, which were good. So socialists believed they should defend the Soviet Union against capitalist attack and cooperate where possible with the communist cadres.²⁷

Socialist theorists understood that the precept that the end justified the means was implicit in Marxist-Leninist theory. SP left-wing leaders Lillian Symes and Travers Clement wrote in 1934 that the unique conditions under which the Russian Revolution occurred dictated the form in which the Soviet apparatus grew. Even "democratic centralism" was "a logical corollary of a belief in inevitable and more or less imminent catastrophic revolution," an illusion under which most radicals operated in the depression decade. Symes and Clement judged the Soviets not so harshly, for who could censure those who created new institutions using the theory of scientific materialism, that actions and theory must be united through the actual lived lives of the masses?²⁸

In 1934, Symes and Clement found little to criticize about the Comintern in so far as the conditions under which it grew dictated its final form. Yet by 1940, Symes wrote that the Comintern demanded "unqualified acceptance of the Bolshevik Revolution . . . as the model of Socialist revolution everywhere," and that the nature of "unqualified acceptance" of any principle would "mean the [eventual] dictatorship of a single individual," in this case, Stalin.²⁹ The major dif-

ference between the 1934 SP view of the Soviet Union and its national allies and the 1940 view was that by 1940, socialists had digested the paradox of revolutionary thought, that the means determined the final form of the end. This revelation was neither providential nor a product of the dialectic. It was an exercise in materialism. It was a direct heart-breaking lesson socialists learned watching the Soviet Union convulse horribly under Stalin's paranoid, bloody tactics. By the beginning of the Second World War, socialist leaders were hard pressed to believe that anyone could still view the Soviet Union as a revolutionary state, let alone socialist.³⁰ The lessons of the great purges and the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact were all too clear.

Stalin's purges of the mid 1930s affected non-communist radicals dramatically. Modern Monthly's editor, V. F. Calverton, charged in late 1936 that Stalin's "justice" showed his victims to be innocent and himself guilty.³¹ To Norman Thomas, the purges at first merely substantiated his earlier opinion that Stalin's excesses were "dimming the glow of the socialist ideal." The trials, Thomas considered a sham and "a betrayal of socialism and a blot upon the great record of achievement in Soviet Russia."³² Thomas was as much worried about the image-tarnishing factor of the trials as he was the horror of a bureaucracy out of control. The socialist leader commented that Stalin certainly was not running a popular front in Russia, and worse, his actions made it difficult to praise the Russian experience. Thomas mourned "a situation" which allowed reactionaries gleefully to compare Hitler and Stalin, a position the SP leader would soon take himself.³³

As the trials continued and after Thomas' visit to the "Social-

ist homeland" his attitude hardened. Writing in the Socialist Call in May 1937, Thomas took a first significant step in a direction that led him and others toward tacit support for democratic capitalism. He commented that a "lack of democracy" in Russian political and economic life endangered the socialization of the Soviet economy. He found in Russia not a classless society, but one of strong class differentiation.³⁴ Whatever achievements Stalin's crew had made were drowning in a sea of blood. By 1938, Thomas reported to Modern Monthly readers that "Russia is not a socialist state." The purge trials were the "most dreadful single chapter in the story of the degradation of a self-proclaimed socialist movement." The trials should teach all leftists a lesson and invite "bitter tears and deep humiliation" at the carnage Stalin produced in the name of socialism.³⁵ Lillian Symes, writing in 1940, said it very succinctly. The purge trials, she charged, were "dramatic evidence" of a "long process of counter-revolution and betrayal" by the Soviet State.³⁶

Added to the purge trials, which few socialists believed were as bloody as has since been demonstrated, the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was the "culmination" of "the developments which . . . made it necessary to revise" the SP's position on the Soviet Union. Not that the Pact surprised socialists and non-communists much. Calverton predicted in 1936 that "within a year or so . . . you will have fascism and communism meeting" for the same purpose, more power. Similar predictions came from within the SP in early 1939. Thomas predicted the Pact in April for reasons of Realpolitik. Henry Haskell and Herbert Zam both agreed, citing Russian military weakness from the

purges as the major reason for the Pact.³⁷

Prediction was no balm for the pain of betrayal. Within days of the pact's signing, the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the SP attacked it bitterly, calling it "a piece of hypocrisy . . . an example of double standards unmatched in history." Travers Clement remarked that while "the outline of the hidden knife was visible for a long time in the sleeve of Stalin," the pain of the pact was nevertheless one of "great betrayal." Emma Goldman, from her exile home in southern France, summed up the feelings of non-communists the world over. She called Stalin "the present Ivan the Terrible," and termed the pact "the blackest treachery yet. . . . I tell you," she wrote to labor organizer Rose Pesotta, "the world is reeking with putrid poison."³⁸

The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact consummated a very significant shift in the attitude toward Soviet Russia among most non-communist American radicals. The propensity to compare the Soviet system with Nazism, Stalin with Hitler, Bolshevism with fascism, first appeared in leftist publications soon after the two dictators signed the pact. Although scholars do not agree exactly when the terms "communazi" and "red fascism" appeared, all indications point either to late 1939 or early 1940.³⁹

Socialist disappointment with the Soviet Union was but one roadblock to the organization which prevented it from taking more advantage of the social and economic conditions in the 1930s. Intra-party factionalism sapped its actual strength as much as fascism and Stalinism undercut its moral purpose. Much of the fratricidal struggle within the party was an all-too-human struggle for power, age against

youth, right against left, and as usual, reformer against revolutionary.

The old guard of the party in the early 1930s was the core group of Hillquit's followers who had helped form the party in 1901, Algernon Lee, Louis Waldman and James Oneal the most prominent leaders besides Hillquit. The old guard's strength was in the New York City and state areas and among the predominantly jewish needle-trade unions. After Hillquit's death in 1933, Lee and the others saw their party control wither under the pressures of youthful leftist zeal and Thomas's growing national status. The older SP leaders fought back, using the issues of anti-communism and absolute adherence to democracy as their rallying points. Thomas allied with the young leftists. Not that he was as radical or shrill in his demands for rapid change as they. Their support was to solidify his party leadership. And more than that, he realized that the old guard, should it retain power, was more interested in upholding the political, economic and organized labor status quo than in substantive change.

In this Thomas was correct. Within a few years of the 1936 split, the old guard gleefully committed political hara-kiri and joined the New York State American Labor Party (ALP). Thomas was not deaf to the call of fusion with other leftists, but he and younger SP members recognized that the ALP's blind worship of Franklin Roosevelt was counterproductive. It would sooner or later pull the ALP and the old guard into the ranks of the democratic party, still controlled by the conservative southern and western oligarchs who would not allow any important reforms. Thomas was correct, but his correctness cost the SP approxi-

mately fourteen thousand members. SP membership stood at six thousand in 1937.⁴⁰

The 1937 SP membership was a polyglot group. There were small pockets of socialist strength in some unions, particularly the United Auto Workers and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. There was a smattering of farmers in the west, in Kansas, Indiana and Iowa. The party's major strength in the 1930s continued to be centered around the nation's great industrial complexes, New York City, Chicago, Detroit, and the electoral machines in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Reading, Pennsylvania and Bridgeport, Connecticut. Most of the eastern members were intellectuals, lawyers, teachers, doctors and not a few preachers. Too many chiefs and not enough indians.

Throughout the late 1930s, Thomas and the SP tried to recoup from their "victory" over the old guard. They recruited non-aligned leftists into the party, especially James Cannon's Trotskyists. This ploy backfired. Cannon's forces were too successful in converting younger SP members to Trotsky's apocalyptic revolutionism, and soon the NEC felt it necessary to expel Cannon and his followers. The Trotskyist leader entered the SP with about five hundred followers and left it with at least fifteen hundred.⁴¹

By 1939, Norman Thomas's American Socialist Party was a mess. Weak, disillusioned, impotent, divided into left-center-right warring factions. If it had not been for its leader's charisma and reputation, the SP probably would have died of malnutrition before Pearl Harbor. Thomas kept it alive, his moral purpose and strength unflagging. If factionalism and the twin threats of communism and fascism were not

enough, the advent of the Second World War and the socialist leader's indefatigable opposition to American war participation should have finished off organized American socialism. But it did not.

By 1944, party membership had shrunk to 2,400. The question of American participation in the war and the party's reaction to that participation lost it a good number of members.⁴² Of the 2,400, the vast majority were centered in California, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.⁴³ Of the ninety-five delegates who attended the 1944 national convention in Reading, Pennsylvania, forty-six were working class, defined as union members, office workers and salesmen, twenty-two were professional, including journalists and teachers. There were three artists, two military personnel, six conscientious objectors, eight housewives, seven students and one farmer. Fifty-two were male, forty-five female. Most of the delegates were in the twenty to forty year old age group, surprising in light of the military draft during the war. The 1944 SP was still a fairly diverse group, one of the few in which women were accepted on a fairly equal basis with men. But it was a dying organization, slowly suffocating from a lack of new alternatives.⁴⁴

Critics have charged since 1939 that the SP's anti-war stance was a mistake, theoretically and politically.⁴⁵ Yet none probed beneath the party's rhetoric to see why socialists took their stand, to understand the party's view of its limited alternatives, and its fears for the future of American society. It was a complex question for American socialists and their final answers, whether foolish and chimerical or wise and prescient, speak as much for the complexity of the

age and American socialists' unique perception of the American system as they do to any perceived weakness of American socialism.

NOTES

Introduction

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43. Membership figures taken from "Report of the 1944 national convention, membership," SP Duke, Roll 49.

44. Figures gleaned from the registration cards of the delegates to the 1944 national convention, in SP Duke, Roll 49.

45. See especially Johnpoll, Pacifist's Progress, 205-231.

CHAPTER I

The Socialists Debate War

PARANOIA BORDERING ON RESIGNATION: NORMAN THOMAS AND
THE AMERICAN SOCIALIST PARTY, 1939-48

CHAPTER I

THE SOCIALISTS DEBATE WAR

A basic question for the American Socialist Party during the Great Depression was what it should do in case of a second world war. Like most Americans, socialists would rather have concentrated on domestic economic problems than on foreign affairs, but events foretold another European conflagration. Would socialists accept it like the European socialists of 1914? Or should they repeat the 1917 stand of the American party which emphasized theory over reality? Could the party find a way to balance theory with reality? Throughout the 1930s, the SP searched for a unity of theory and practice. Socialists accepted reality and handled it according to what theory dictated the party should desire. But political tightrope walking of this type alienated both those who valued the real over the ideal, and those who stressed the ideal over the real.

Centrifugal forces tore the party apart in 1936. The old guard, most of whom had been with the party since its formation in 1901, believed that party weakness dictated a stand on the question of war which would not alienate the capitalist power structure. Using the

war issue as a weapon, they attempted to solidify their control of the party. They saw no future in obstruction of a national war effort. They stressed immediate reform over long-term goals so much that they lost sight of those goals, especially the goal of democratic socialism. They chose the road of cooperation, remembering well the government and popular repression of 1917-19. The old guard attempted to save New Deal social gains, accepted capitalist hegemony, tried to influence the Democratic party from the outside. To oppose American participation in any war hardly seemed a viable course. Opposition was to destroy whatever influence socialists might obtain in the American political process.

Younger socialists disagreed. They believed the party should not accept any position that departed at all from its goal of a democratic socialist United States. They argued that SP support for any American war would be support for its capitalist-imperialist system, a system that would fight the forces of democratic socialism bitterly on all fronts, political, economic, cultural and social.¹ This group won control of the SP by 1936.

Norman Thomas supported the younger group in the middle 1930s, probably to solidify his party leadership. He believed that an idealistic, close-knit, anti-capitalist democratic radical organization, could form the nucleus of a new leftist coalition which might alter the face of American politics. He sought an all-inclusive socialist party, whose ideals would attract both farmer-labor and leftist splinter-group support, and spoke often of the need for a new Farmer-Labor party. Meanwhile, he courted communist party splinter groups, the Trotskyites

and Lovestonites.² In the 1930s, Thomas tended to stress the ideal over the real. He wanted support from both the isolationist right and the internationalist left. Although he paid lip-service to practical politics, he stressed transcendent ideals which he believed promised a better life for all.

As long as Europe remained at peace, the party's war stand could remain firmly anchored in the realm of the ideal. The old guard withdrew, leaving the SP to suffer Trotskyite panic tactics designed to capture the party for the "world revolution." But when Hitler ignited the Second World War in September 1939, Thomas and the SP cautiously turned to a tight-rope walking act. They stressed that only the ideal of democratic socialism could defeat real fascist aggression. As in 1936, the party's refusal to surrender utterly to the dictates of reality lost it members, mostly on the right wing. Those socialists whose fear of fascism in Europe overwhelmed their distaste for and mistrust of capitalism, left the party between 1939 and 1941. They followed the same path their elders blazed in 1936. The same path that, to a lesser extent, Norman Thomas and most socialists were to follow in the post-war years.

Even before Hitler attacked Poland, some socialists succumbed to the siren call of the "lesser evil" argument. In July 1939, Jack Utter of Puyallup, Washington, wrote to Arthur McDowell, SP labor secretary, that Norman Thomas was "certainly a great man," but Utter did not see how the Nazis could be stopped "except by force." Utter doubted whether the capitalist powers would make much effort to stop Hitler "unless he threatens to take the whole world." His chagrin

reflected the party's problem: how to fight Hitler without supporting capitalist-imperialism. Officially the party emphasized non-violent opposition through American social regeneration, at least until Pearl Harbor.³ But that position, as finely tuned to the contemporary realities as it may have seemed to most socialists, did not satisfy everyone in the party.⁴

Hitler's sweep into Poland on the heels of his non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union jarred socialists. The ideals of the 1934 Detroit Declaration of Principles, of total war against the capitalist war machine, no longer seemed relevant. Socialist reaction paralleled most Americans' reaction to the war; the party urged the United States to remain neutral. But many socialists thought that the party's refusal to support any United States aid to the Allies reflected an ostrich-like timidity. Socialist party battles between 1939 and 1941 swirled around the issue of American aid to Great Britain and France. Those who favored American aid to the liberal-capitalist-imperialist European democracies thought the destruction of Hitler's evil justified measures they would not have accepted in any other context. Norman Thomas and his supporters believed that Hitler's defeat necessitated a strong, truly free America, not a nation slowly treading the bloody road to war, to domestic fascism. America was inexorably sinking into a totalitarian morass; aid to the Allies would drag the United States into a sea of blood. Or so Norman Thomas reasoned. "To furnish supplies for other people's wars is to the profit seekers a welcome alternative to supplying our own people with their daily bread," wrote the SP National Convention of 1940. " . . . the search for war profits and

armament economics leads straight to war and war means the totalitarian state, not socialist freedom."⁵ The party opposed aid to the Allies for two reasons. Aid proposals increased the president's discretionary powers, the first step toward totalitarianism. Any gestures of support for one imperialist over another would be a step down the road to war, a road many socialists remembered well from the years before the entry of the nation into the First World War. Each time congress granted the Allies aid, it granted Franklin Roosevelt power. He could use the power to move "toward a confrontation with Hitler, which will leave congress no choice but to declare war."⁶ The more power Roosevelt gained for the executive branch, the greater the danger of American totalitarianism. If the president used that power to plunge the nation into a war, a fascist United States was inevitable.

Thomas and the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Socialist Party used this argument against all forms of United States aid, from "cash and carry" on, especially during the congressional debate on FDR's Lend-Lease proposal. According to the NEC, that would "give the President dictatorial powers almost equal in scope to those assumed by Hitler. . . ." Thomas emphasized, testifying to the Senate Foreign Relations committee, that his fear of executive powers was "in no sense personal." No man, "not even an angel from heaven," should be trusted with "such breath-taking powers of war or peace with such vague limitations." A democracy could never bestow the power of conducting war on one person unless it expected, indeed yearned for dictatorship. The American Guardian's Oscar Ameringer expressed Thomas's fears in a fashion all could understand: "Now that the Lend Lease bill is passed,

it should not be long before the Let-Loose bill is let loose."⁷

Any further aid to the Allied powers threatened to suck the nation into war. Lend-Lease would mean that "external events will largely determine our fate." Aid would tie the American economy more and more to Allied welfare. "What Churchill wants will be almost as important for us as what Roosevelt wants."⁸ Thomas worried that "our own economy is even more closely tied up with complete British victory than in 1917."⁹ Particularly he shared the 1936 Nye Committee's conclusion about the nefarious goals of the "merchants of death," and feared the armament makers' influence in government circles.¹⁰

Thomas, other mainline Socialists and most Americans wished for a British victory, especially after the fall of France. But if that victory necessitated American participation, which aid would almost certainly guarantee, then it was not worth the price. "I should not oppose further aid to the Allies, if I could see any aid . . . which would save them and not lead us straight into war," wrote Thomas in June of 1940. He would support any aid "not given in a form which involves acts of war."¹¹ Cash and carry, destroyers for bases, Lend-Lease and convoying involved acts of war, and the SP opposed these moves. But it did not oppose other actions which aided but did not abet England's struggle. United States naval presence in the Pacific Ocean aided Great Britain. The American guarantee of Canadian independence and the purchase of British gold aided Great Britain. Thomas and the party supported these types of aid. This aid guaranteed what its advocates could only promise: help to Great Britain which would keep America out of the war.¹²

The whole controversy over aid bothered Thomas. The debate was drawing the American people closer to an interventionist stance. Aid advocates, especially the William Allen White Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, seemed intent on convincing the public that America "could play God to the world," while picking up "a little money . . . in war trade and yet keep out of war."¹³ Any aid was one-half of war participation; any war matériel drove in "the wedge." Thomas claimed he had yet "to meet a leader of the aid short of war school who doesn't really want war."¹⁴

The burden of aid to the allies, like that of full war participation, would fall on the working class. In the end, labor paid for Lend-Lease. The armament economy might provide more jobs and higher wages for all workers, but more currency in circulation would invite inflation, which would cancel the workers' gains.¹⁵ Even if aid could insure an Allied victory without American combat involvement, the SP could not afford to support aid proposals.¹⁶ "By lending our voices to the call for aid to Britain," wrote a Chicago Socialist, "we will become just one more force behind the movement that is making public opinion pro-war today."¹⁷

Thomas sympathized with the Socialists who deserted the party over its war stand. "So many good people want it [aid to Great Britain] and for reasons some of which are wholly credible."¹⁸ It was not surprising that he felt sympathetic toward the party minority who agitated for aid to the Allies. By 1941, some of his most trusted supporters, including Arthur McDowell, Paul Porter, Reinhold Niebuhr, Alfred Baker Lewis and John Lester Lewine, had left the party because

it would not support substantive aid to the Allies. The issues of the Second World War seemed too important to this group for the party to continue to tread the thin line between realism and idealism. The reality of a possible fascist victory was too horrible to contemplate. Democracy certainly could not fight fascism solely with ideology. Yet it was ideology the party dissidents used to try to change the war stand of the Socialist Party of America.

Within one month of Hitler's strike into Poland in September 1939, Thomas beheld the first signs of a challenge to the party line. Alfred Baker Lewis, wealthy socialist pillar of the Massachusetts state organization, wrote the state Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) that unless the United States granted "substantial economic aid" to Great Britain and France, the war would degenerate into a bloody morass at best. Or a Nazi victory at worst. It was to America's advantage to aid the Allies, for the longer the war lasted, "the greater is the chance for America getting in."¹⁹

Lewis likened the party's attitude toward the war to a cross-eyed child, who learned to "suppress one image completely and guide his actions wholly by the other." With one eye, the SP saw "an America . . . in which democracy and peace are none too surely founded." Peaceful democracy was the best medium for socialism's growth; on this Thomas and Baker fully agreed. Lewis knew the party feared "a rising wave of reaction," war-spawned, which would surely destroy American democracy and peace. But the party ignored its other eye, a different and much more frightful vision. This vision, which came from across the ocean, was "contemptuous of peace, and boasting its intention to destroy

democracy." The fascist "Beast" of this world "takes advantage of the scruples of its opponents and overwhelms them so completely as to banish all hope of successful revolt." Baker admitted the actual danger of a Nazi invasion in the west was slight, but the American ruling class surely would view Hitler as a menace to be defeated. "And that means arms, and perhaps men too, for the Allies."

That was reality. How could the Socialist Party face it adequately, Lewis wondered. Should it ignore the image of the eye that viewed Nazi oppression and concentrate on the eye that beheld the fragility of American peace and freedom? Lewis believed that was "the method of the majority of American Socialists" at the 1940 Washington convention. It made for solid, simple propaganda, and had "also (for those who care) the merit of being in the sound Marxist tradition." But in this case to ignore the image of the fascist danger abroad was not "a legitimate method of securing consistency in action." The SP was suppressing the vision of "a real contradiction in the world itself." It was not a contradiction socialists could ignore in the postwar era.

This war was not just a replay of the Great War of 1914-18. New circumstances and dangers, required a fresh SP policy. Unlike its predecessor, this war would not be a long, bloody and inconclusive struggle. Hitler's rapid victories in Norway and Denmark demonstrated that fascism, for all its hideous repressions, was "spectacularly successful in practice." This new reality, one which had no precedent in World War One, must dictate a new SP policy. Only aid to the Allies could promise a stop to the Nazi juggernaut, or so Lewis thought.²⁰

Lewis and others thought the SP's war stand inadequate to meet the barbarous reality of a possible Nazi victory. "We do not find the Party or the Call offering any real international alternative." Many Americans doubtless agreed with Lewis when he stated that the majority war stand was an aid to Hitler's ambitions.²¹

SP members who opposed the party's official war stand harped on the horror of a Nazi victory in Europe. Hitler's triumph would signal a rapid growth of world-wide racism, and Jewish extermination. It would mean a one-man rule of terror throughout Europe. Hitler would destroy the European labor movement and crush civil liberties. But if the Allies destroyed Nazism, the European environment, while not perfect, might allow socialism, unionism and civil liberties to advance. An Allied victory would present the world with a chance to escape racism. Lewis and his supporters believed that a Nazi victory would insure a fascist America. American capitalists would fight viciously to save their markets, assuring United States war participation under the worst of circumstances.²²

Unlike the social democrats of the American Social Democratic Federation (SDF), pro-aid socialists did not favor American war participation. The SP minority agreed with FDR's main contention that aid was better than war; that aid presented the only realistic course of action for the United States if it wished to remain at peace.²³ American aid was not half-way war but was a realistic program which the minority of the party hoped would help England prevent a Nazi victory. Lewis and his followers believed that if the party ceased its anti-aid propaganda, the administration might restrict its pro-war agitation.²⁴

Socialist supporters of the Allied cause capped their case with a time-honored argument. "The United States, because of its strength, its remoteness, and its freedom from European ambitions, is in a unique position" to lead the non-belligerent nations of the world in a struggle for "collective action for peace" through a policy of "non-military discrimination against aggressors."²⁵ Both pro and anti-aid SP members utilized the idea of American exceptionalism. Thomas and the majority of the party wanted to make America even more exceptional as a bastion of democracy and peace. The pro-aid minority argued that the United States, by virtue of its present exceptional democracy, should lead others in aiding the Allies. Both sides believed essentially the same about America. The pro-aid socialists stepped off the tightrope on which Norman Thomas placed the party, toward almost exclusive emphasis on reality. Most socialists believed the party should balance its position between the need to accept the real and their obligation to work for the ideal. The minority paid little attention to what ought to be. They were drifting toward an SDF-type position, one which placed total emphasis on means, with the goals distorted or ignored.²⁶ The pro-aid minority was well on its way down the road toward tacit support of the United States government because its political and economic system was the lesser of two evils.

The aid issue dominated intraparty affairs during 1940, especially at the April 1940 national convention in Washington D. C. Alfred Baker Lewis led the pro-aid forces. He introduced a motion, signed by William A. Ahren, Albert Sprague Coolidge, Lewis Epstein and Eileen O'Connor Lewis, which advocated SP support for United States aid

to the Allies as the surest method of keeping the nation out of actual combat. Lewis's motion favored aid to victims of fascist aggression, economic, not military aid to the Allies, and passage of a war referendum. The party could not remain "indifferent to the results of the war," Lewis wrote in a minority report on the war question, because an Allied victory would release "the forces of revolution . . . throughout Central Europe." Both his motion and the minority report lost by a two-thirds majority.²⁷

Within weeks of the convention, Denmark and Norway fell to the Nazis. More than ever, some socialists thought this dictated a revision of the party's stand. It was acceptable to eschew aid to England. It was an imperialist power, not worthy of support. But the Danish and Norwegian governments were socialist. The ranks of the dissenters grew. "It would seem . . . that Socialists . . . to maintain their international solidarity, could not fail to advocate aid to the allies," if that aid would succor European socialist movements, wrote Morris Berzon of Boston to the New York Times. Berzon's letter was a breach of socialist morals. He opposed the party's published policy, not a cardinal sin in the democratic organization, but he did so in the capitalist press. That indeed was a grave error. That Berzon went outside the party to complain indicated the seriousness of the debate.²⁸

The ease with which Hitler conquered France accelerated defections from the party. The list of those who abandoned the SP was large and prestigious: Arthur McDowell, the party labor secretary, Paul Porter and Andrew Biemiller of Wisconsin, both later active in Democratic politics, Reinhold Niebuhr, who was soon to found the Union of

Democratic Action, ex-NEC members Frank Trager and Frank Crosswaith, Gerry Allard, former editor of the Call, and wealthy supporters Alfred Baker Lewis and John Lester Lewine. Influential supporters, such as Lewis Mumford, Max Eastman, and Oskar Lange, withdrew their intellectual and financial support. Whole elements of the party, especially Jewish, Italian and union branches, deserted organized socialism.

The reasons were simple. The pro-aid advocates believed that the SP had "lost sight of the Socialist ideal," becoming "predominantly a party of pacifist isolationists."²⁹ In hindsight, it appears as though the pro-aid party members had lost sight of socialist ideals, fixing their gaze firmly on the supposed fruits of a capitalist victory. Neither side of the debate ever really lost sight of the socialist ideal. The Lewis and Thomas factions were convinced that democratic socialism was one of the few viable alternate routes to freedom, peace and plenty which remained open to industrialized society. The Lewis faction believed Thomas and his followers were dangerously blind to the threat foreign fascism posed to that route. The Thomas faction charged that the Lewis group was blind to the reality of the internal American fascist danger. Both factions were partially correct. The danger was internal and external. Lewis's supporters believed socialists must advocate preservation of political democracy first. Thomas and his allies argued that political democracy was not an effective barrier to fascism, at home or abroad. Only economic and political democracy could protect freedom. The debate raged so furiously because both factions were partially correct in their analysis of the problem. Lewis's faction leader, Frank Crosswaith, believed "the duty of every

Socialist who values democracy [was] . . . to show some concern in the triumph of Britain and her allies over the totalitarian combination in Europe."³⁰ Arthur McDowell wrote the NEC that the Thomas attitude "towards fascism . . . seems to be increasingly like that of a man who had his prayers on a card above his bed and at which he pointed just before . . . bed, saying 'Lord, them's my sentiments.'" McDowell thought that Thomas was "heading us imperceptibly to gentler and gentler utterance on the terrible meaning of fascism."³¹ But McDowell and other aid supporters were trying to lead the party toward gentler and gentler utterance on the equally depressing weaknesses of capitalist-imperialism. Lewis Mumford wrote V. F. Calverton that he, Mumford, had known since May 1938 "the scope of the approaching catastrophe." It should be clear to all by 1940 that "the only choice open to us was . . . a choice between the greater and lesser evil. Today the lesser evil is war; the greater one is slavery." Mumford chided Calverton that his definition of courage as standing firm against war hysteria was actually "willful blindness. You are like a person who persists . . . with his plan for a picnic after an earthquake."³²

Socialist organizers probably thought that an earthquake had hit them in 1940 and 1941. Whole branches left the party; disagreement with the official war stand seemed once again to be destroying its formal organization. The Italian Federation was the first to go, immediately after the April 1940 national convention. The Italians believed it was the workers' duty "to cooperate for the defeat of fascism, which today can only be accomplished through the victory of the Allies." The branch attacked the party's war stand as a violation of socialist

internationalism "essential to the theory and practice of Socialism."³³

The dressmaker union branch, mostly Jewish, followed the Italians in September 1940. They believed that the war stand moved the party away from its correct working class orientation, which was suicidal for an organization whose reason for existence was "active participation in labor struggles." The branch urged the NEC to reorient party propaganda toward domestic economic issues and seek to gain from what the branch saw as a factionalized Democratic party. The socialist party should accept the fight against fascism as valid, and pursue its normal domestic agitation.³⁴

Finally in June 1941, the largest foreign language element of the SP, the Jewish Section of New York City, resigned en masse. In a declaration dated the twenty-eighth of June, the section labeled the party's official war stand a "fatal error," and an "anti-socialist stand." The section admitted the war was imperialistic, but said that fact should not obscure the reality that the fate of the world's "working humanity" hung on its outcome. In a war between "unbridled despotism" which "wants to enslave the whole world" and "the democratic sections of the world," any attempt to remain neutral was "practically to assist the side which wishes to enslave." The New York City Jewish Section neither disbanded nor moved to any other political organization. It merely resigned its SP affiliation. All in all, the party lost approximately one thousand members during the war debate.³⁵

The party did try to reassure Jews that its anti-war activity was not anti-semitic and that war against Nazism would not help American Jews protect their rights. Spokesmen pointed out that anti-

semitism was not a disease particular to fascism; the ruling classes of England, France, the United States and especially Poland were all guilty of it in some form. The party's main counter-argument to Jews demanding American intervention to save their European brethren was that American intervention would produce much the same atmosphere in the United States as it had in Germany.³⁶

It was ironic that the SP was as much a victim of the pull of nationalism as the rest of society. Socialists were, by their own definition, internationalists. Yet Jewish and Italian socialists were more interested in national developments than the world-wide picture. Hardly surprising, yet ironic; this nationalism presaged a postwar party-wide shift toward American internationalism (internationalism with a decidedly American flavor) which was so instrumental in allowing socialists to become ardent cold warriors.

But in 1941 Thomas and the party majority appeared very sure of their position. Thomas seemed guilty of dogmatism on the war issue in refusing to sanction any American aid to the Allies. Many leftists, Democrats, even Republican internationalists believed so. And perhaps he was. He did insist that the party accept his war stand at the April 1940 convention before he agreed to accept its presidential nomination.³⁷

Thomas was well aware of the violent controversy his position caused and he knew that the debate was "hurting the party." But he did not think aid to the Allies "as a substitute for war" [had] "merit--there couldn't have been enough of it given soon enough." He wrote in his diary in June of 1940 that "these days are hell." For all his

criticism of British imperialism and blundering, he realized his whole theoretical and mental equilibrium "at least subconsciously" depended on "the probability that Germany could not beat the Western Powers to their knees." He understood why many socialists experienced "sudden conversion" to interventionism. He sympathized with those who believed Great Britain had to win, even if the United States had to enter the conflict on the side of the Allies. Thomas sympathized, but did not accept the arguments his opponents advanced. He could not see the logic of plunging the nation into the hell of fascism in order to fight the same evil overseas.³⁸

Socialist leaders desired party unity on the issue of the war. They recognized that the debate on this question might be the most divisive in the party's recent past. So they created an intraparty discussion organ, Hammer and Tongs, to "provide both freedom [of discussion and opinion] and unity at the same time."³⁹ Discussion of such a significant topic was bound to become public at some point. Some of the more volatile dissenters, such as prominent New York City socialist Jack Altman, wrote letters to the capitalist press, gathered signatures for the William Allen White Committee, and publicly called on fellow party members to repent and support the president's interventionist foreign policy.⁴⁰

The anti-socialist press, especially the SDF's New Leader, was quick to sense the discontent in the party, and try to take advantage of it. Victor Riesel, an ex-socialist like most members of the SDF, reported in June of 1940 that the rift between the non-interventionists and the pro-aid factions within the party had "spread to all sections

of the group, turning the recent convention 'majority' into a distinct minority. Scrapping is intense and will soon break into the open."⁴¹ A typical example of wishful thinking and proof that the SDF was even more guilty of factional fratricide than its brothers in the SP.

The struggle within the SP, 1939-41, mirrored a similar process among all Americans. As Hitler and the Japanese rolled over their European and Asian foes, Americans' neutrality dissipated like a mist on a summer's morning. War crept upon the nation and most Americans realized it. So did the Socialist Party, but instead of flowing with the popular movement, it held back, more than ever convinced that American war participation would be the death of democracy.

Most SP members supported the Thomas anti-aid position and agreed with their leader's reasoning, that war would spawn domestic fascism. An allied victory would do nothing more than insure imperialist wars. Only a concentrated campaign, stressing the two policies which presented the best chance of a United States free from fascism and war, political and economic democracy, could keep the nation at once free and at peace. Most socialists recognized that the pro-aid faction was abandoning the party's emphasis on socialism by "their support of the lesser evil (free capitalism) against the greater evil (dictated capitalism)." Such tactics did not make much sense to most socialist party members. To ignore the need for economic democracy to protect political democracy would guarantee that American society would never enjoy economic democracy and probably lose political democracy in the bargain.⁴²

Within the party hierarchy, panic was not nearly as pervasive

as the opposition wanted to believe. Thomas officially denied rumors that the SP was splitting over whether to support FDR's request for Lend-Lease aid.⁴³ He and his supporters were sure they controlled a large majority of rank and file support. They believed those members who most vociferously attacked the official war stand were those "already in a very distinctly disturbed state of mind. They are using [the war issue] . . . as an excuse to sever their Party ties."⁴⁴ The National Office (NO) reported to the NEC in February 1941 that "about 80%" of war related correspondence favored the official war stand. Harry Fleischman, SP organizer for the midwest district, reported an "overwhelming majority of Party members in Chicago" supported the war stand and opposed any weakening of the party line. Travers Clement reported that the mail the Call received favored the party line ten to one, and noted that the main opposition came from several party leaders and enjoyed little support from the rank and file.⁴⁵

So sure was Thomas of his following among the rank and file that he voted for an NEC resolution to submit the war stand to the members for a referendum vote. Thomas and his supporters on the NEC, Aaron Levenstein, Travers Clement, David Felix, Alexander Hamilton and Judah Drob, all voted for the resolution, while two of the major pro-aid advocates, Arthur McDowell and Leonard Woodcock, voted against it. The resolution failed for lack of a two-thirds majority.⁴⁶

The debate on the party war stand cost the organization some strength.⁴⁷ And at first glance, one could fault Thomas and his supporters for their idealism, their refusal to accept the reality of the world-wide fascist danger. The official war stand of the Socialist

Party seemed to many to be ostrich-like. The SP's message to Europe appeared to be "Gee, we really do feel sorry for you fellows, but from your concentration camps, we hope you'll watch us build Utopia." Perhaps Thomas should have adopted the cry the pro-aid faction derisively suggested: "Chamberlain is our leader! We shall not be moved!"⁴⁸

But accepting this would oversimplify the party's view of the objective realities the United States faced between 1939 and 1941. The Thomas majority war stand was neither a retreat from reality, nor a short-sighted, over-idealistic rhetorical exercise. It was an attempt to spare the United States the horrors of fascism while effectively combating it abroad. Party theorists looked backward to World War I, looked at the lessons of fascism's rise in Europe, at the lessons of American radical politics since 1917, and finally, saw with an undistorted vision the weaknesses of the American political system which might well have spawned fascist, racist totalitarianism in this nation. The war stand of the Socialist Party of America was unique among political parties: it sought to balance reality with transcendent goals. Reality shaped its form; ideals shaped its content. Only a penetrating look at the war stand can demonstrate how in line with reality, domestic, foreign, political and economic the Socialist Party really was when it adopted its war stand in early 1940.

NOTES

Chapter I

1. Swanberg, Norman Thomas, Chps. viii-x.
2. Ibid., 166-90; John Dennis McGreen, "Norman Thomas and the Search for an All Inclusive Socialist Party," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University, 1976), 173-234.
3. See Chapter II, below.
4. Jack Utter to Arthur McDowell, 17 July 1939, SP Duke, Roll 36.
5. See the SP platform reprinted in NYT, 9 April 1940, 19.
6. Kenneth Fowley, "Final Drive is Launched to . . . War," Call, 17 May 1941, 1.
7. NEC quote from Socialist Campaigner, 15 January 1941, 2, SP Duke, Roll 130; Thomas quote from NYT, 23 January 1941, 8; cf., Socialist Campaigner, 5 February 1941, 1, SP Duke, Roll 130; NYT 21 February 1941, 7; [Oscar Ameringer], "That's All," American Guardian, 21 March 1941, 4.
8. Norman Thomas, "Your World and Mine: The War Outlook," Call, 22 February 1941, 5.
9. Thomas, "Our Party and the War Situation," Hammer and Tongs, December 1940-January 1941, 3, SP Duke, Roll 128.
10. Thomas to James Montgomery, 6 November 1941, Norman Thomas Papers, New York Public Library, Box 21; hereafter cited as NTP.
11. Thomas, "The Party and the War Situation," Hammer and Tongs, December 1940-January 1941, 3, SP Duke, Roll 128; Thomas to Maynard Krueger, 14 June 1940, ibid., Roll 39; Thomas diary, 13-14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176.
12. Thomas to Ralph Herbow, 3 April 1940, NTP, Box 17; Thomas to Gerry Allard, 5 June 1940, SP Duke, Roll 39; Thomas, speech, "America and the War," 5 September 1940, ibid., Roll 41.

13. Thomas to Dorothy Delzer and Frederick Libby, 9 February 1940, NTP, Box 17.

14. NYT, 9 May 1940, 10; Thomas, speech, "America and the War," 5 September 1940, SP Duke, Roll 41; Thomas diary, 13-14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176.

15. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: False Assumptions and Illusions," Call, 28 December 1940, 5.

16. Thomas felt even all-out aid could not turn the tide toward an allied victory after the fall of France. See Thomas diary, 13-14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176.

17. Kevin Royt to NEC., 6 February 1941, SP Duke, Roll 43.

18. Thomas diary, 13-14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176.

19. Alfred Baker Lewis to Massachusetts State Fellowship of Reconciliation, 7 October 1939, ibid., Box 16.

20. A. B. Lewis, "Changed Facts--Changed Position," Hammer and Tongs, June 1940, 11-12; cf., A. G. McDowell, "Changed Facts," ibid., 7-10, both in SP Duke, Roll 128.

21. Kellum Foster, et al., "For Aid to Britain," Hammer and Tongs, February-March 1941, 9; Lewis, "Changed Facts--Changed Position," ibid., June 1940, 12, both in SP Duke, Roll 128.

22. Na, nd, "Supporting Arguments," SP Duke, Roll 38; Arthur G. McDowell, "Revise 'Defense' Policy," Hammer and Tongs, June 1940, 7-8, ibid., Roll 128; Kellum Foster, et al., "For Aid to Britain," Hammer and Tongs, February-March 1940, 7, 8, ibid.; John Lester Lewine, "Some Ever-Present Problems Before Us," Hammer and Tongs, August 1941, 11, ibid.; Albert Sprague Coolidge and Alfred Baker Lewis, "Imperialist War?" Hammer and Tongs, March 1940, 12, ibid.; cf., Arthur G. McDowell, "An Address to the NEC of the Socialist Party," 15 January 1940, ibid., Roll 43.

23. Albert Sprague Coolidge and Alfred Baker Lewis, "Imperialist War?" Hammer and Tongs, March 1940, 11, 12; ibid., Roll 128; na, nd, "Supporting Arguments," 1, 2, ibid., Roll 38; Kellum Foster et al., "For Aid to Britain," Hammer and Tongs, February-March 1940, 9, ibid., Roll 128.

24. Na, nd, "Supporting Arguments," 1, ibid., Roll 38; Kellum Foster et al., "For Aid to Britain," Hammer and Tongs, February-March 1940, 8, ibid., Roll 128; Albert Sprague Coolidge and Alfred Baker Lewis, "Imperialist War?" Hammer and Tongs, March 1940, 10, 12, ibid.

25. Coolidge and Lewis, "Imperialist War?" Hammer and Tongs,

March 1940, 12, ibid.

26. For SDF position on aid, see "SDF Resolution Backs Democracies," New Leader, 30 September 1939, 1; "National SDF Urges Aid to Democracies," ibid., 7 October 1939, 2.

27. "Motion with Supporting Arguments by Alfred Baker Lewis" and "Minority Report on Peace Resolution Submitted by Alfred Baker Lewis" in "Agenda: SP National Convention, Washington, D. C., 6-8 April 1940," SP Duke, Roll 38; for vote count, see "Minority Position of War Outlined at Convention," Call, 20 April 1940, 3; the Lewis motion lost by a margin of 158 to 28.

28. Morris Berzon to editor, NYT, 14 April 1940, IV:9; cf., Joseph H. Cormack to Travers Clement, 17 April 1940, SP Duke, Roll 38.

29. Paul Porter and Frank Traeger, "Statement Accompanying Resignation From the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party," February 1941, ibid., Roll 44.

30. Frank Crosswaith to Irving Barshop, printed in New Leader, 14 December 1940, 8.

31. Memo, Arthur McDowell to NEC, 24 December 1940, 2, 3, SP Duke, Roll 43; cf., Nathaniel M. Minkoff to Thomas, 27 January 1941, NTP, Box 19.

32. Lewis Mumford to V. F. Calverton, 29 October 1940, Calverton Papers, Box 8; for examples of the protest the SP war stand garnered, see NYT, 11 June 1940, 10; Gerry Allard to Thomas, 1 June 1940, SP Duke, Roll 39; Frank Zeidler to Arthur McDowell, 10 June 1940, ibid.; Gerry Allard to Travers Clement, 12 June 1940, ibid.; Paul Porter to NEC, 26 June 1940, ibid.; Rinehold Neibuhr, "An End to Illusions," Nation, 129 (29 June 1940), 778; A. B. Lewis to Frank Traeger, 12 July 1940, SP Duke, Roll 39; minutes of NEC meeting, 20-21 July 1940, ibid., Roll 40; Oskar Lange, "The Socialist Attitude Toward War," Modern Quarterly, 20 (Summer 1940), 11-22; Arthur McDowell, memo, to NEC, 24 December 1940, NTP, Box 150; Nate Sadowsky, "Memo to Norman Thomas and Travers Clement on the Wisconsin Situation," nd [1940], ibid.; Arthur McDowell, "An Address to the NEC," 15 January 1941, SP Duke, Roll 43; Frank Traeger to NEC, 25 February 1941, ibid., Roll 44; John Lester Lewine to Judah Drob, 18 March 1941, ibid.; MacAlister Coleman to Thomas, 5 June 1941, NTP, Box 20.

33. "Minutes of Italian SP Federation Meeting," 22 April 1941, SP Duke, Roll 38.

34. "Statement by the Dressmakers Branch of the Socialist Party," 23 September 1940, ibid., Roll 41.

35. This action did not occur without warning. See Jewish

Section to NEC, 7 February 1941, ibid., Roll 43; for the story of the section's defection, see "Declaration of the Jewish Section of the Socialist Party," 20 June 1941, ibid., Roll 45; cf., Mordecai Shulman to Travers Clement, 28 June 1941, ibid.; Shulman says his Chicago Jewish comrades agree heartily with the New Yorkers, but are not ready to resign and will not do so if the NEC will "put the Party on record in favor of defeating fascism by helping Britain and its Allies." SP membership fell from 2,852 in 1939 to 1,141 in 1942; for the 1939 figures, see "Dues Stamp Report," [April 1940], ibid., Roll 38, and for the 1942 figures, Johnpoll, Pacifist's Progress, 232; cf., William Becker to Morris Stampa, 21 August 1947, SP Duke, Roll 57; Becker puts the 1942 figure at 1,800. It is impossible to tell, from the written records, how many of the resigners did so for reasons related to the war stand debate. Some, like Harry T. Smith, were angered over Thomas's emphasis on the war issue over the usual SP socio-economic line. See Thomas to Smith, 17 January 1941, NTP, Box 19. Most who quit the SP in this period, however, probably did so to protest the party's position on the war.

36. Grace Milgram and Belle Kussy, "Jewish Socialists and Anti-Semitism," Hammer and Tongs, January 1940, 5-6, SP Duke, Roll 128.

37. Travers Clement to Arthur McDowell, 14 June 1940, ibid., Roll 39; NYT, 8 April 1940, 1.

38. Thomas diary, 13-14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176.

39. "National Office Bulletin," 22 November 1939, 1, SP Duke, Roll 129.

40. Irving Barshop to Arthur McDowell, 8 August 1940, ibid., Roll 40; "Local Executive Committee Vs. Altman," nd [1940], NTP, Box 140; cf., Jack Altman, "Press Release," nd [early 1941], SP Duke, Roll 46.

41. Victor Riesel, "Heard on the Left," New Leader, 1 June 1940, 1.

42. Samuel Slyman to "Dear Comrade," 19 March 1941, SP Duke, Roll 44; cf., August and Jil ? to "Various Comrade Overseers of My Humble Work," 21 July 1940, ibid., Roll 40.

43. "Press Release," 24 January 1941, ibid., Roll 43; Thomas's statement was a reaction to a story in NYT, 23 January 1941, 8.

44. Arthur McDowell to Travers Clement, 29 May 1940, SP Duke, Roll 38.

45. Minutes of NEC meeting, 7-9 February 1941, 2, ibid., Roll 43; Harry Fleischman to Robert Parker, 1 February 1941, ibid.; Travers Clement to NEC, May 1941, ibid., Roll 44; cf., William C. Pratt, "The

Reading Socialist Experience: A Study of Working Class Politics," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Emory University, 1969), 427.

46. Minutes of NEC meeting, 7-9 February 1941, 2, SP Duke, Roll 43; the impetus for the resolution came from both factions. See Harry Fleischman to Robert Parker, 1 February 1941, ibid., for the supporters' demand for a membership referendum, and NYT, 11 June 1940, 10, for the minority's first demand. See also Frank Zeidler to Arthur McDowell, 10 June 1940, SP Duke, Roll 39; Paul Porter to NEC, 26 June 1940, ibid.

47. See SP Duke, Roll 43 for most of the resignation letters. Membership figures accompany most minutes of NEC meetings, and all national convention reports. National conventions occurred every two years.

48. Paul Porter to NEC, 26 June 1940, SP Duke, Roll 39.

CHAPTER II

Diminishing Alternatives: The SP War Stand 1939-42

CHAPTER II

DIMINISHING ALTERNATIVES: THE SP WAR STAND

1939-42

When Paris fell before the might of the Nazi Blitzkrieg, Norman Thomas was "close to despair." He bemoaned an "enervating degree of guilt over lost opportunities and what might have been."¹ The obscene haste with which France capitulated to Hitler's war machine underlined the validity of the socialist party's war stand. Capitalism could not alone withstand what the SP understood as the racist fury of fascism. Capitalists would come to terms with fascism as a last resort to avoid socialism. Political democracy was not a weapon sufficiently potent to defend the barricades. Only democratic socialism could tread the thin line between totalitarian collectivism and capitalism. The lessons of France were clear to Norman Thomas.

But he understood that this lesson would be less clear to most others, including members of his own party. Most Americans viewed France's fall as the final proof that capitalist democracy could not halt fascism's expansion except by armed force if at all. This lesson was the one Thomas feared, the one he actively tried to combat in the 1940 presidential election. Perhaps he was spitting into the wind, but spit he would. No one else would or could. Thomas used his unique

position as the genteel radical to drive his lesson home to the American people, even if they would not listen.

The usual view of Norman Thomas and the Socialist Party is of a group of idealist rebels who consistently butted their collective strong-willed head against the wall of the American character and political institutions. Advocates of peaceful, yet radical, change (itself an apparently impossible combination), Thomas and his followers failed because they were too idealistic, because they expended too much of their limited strength on factional infighting, because they lacked vision grounded in American political, social and economic realities.²

Those who hold this view are guilty of gross oversimplification. A cursory view of the war stand of the Socialist Party, from 1934 through mid-1942, shows that the socialists were well aware of the complexities of the issues they faced and severely limited in their policy options. The usual scholarly explanations of the demise of the old left ignore the objective circumstances of the world political realities as the socialists perceived them. Thomas, his supporters and friends, died a slow political death because they felt unable to formulate any program that skirted the twin dangers of fascism and communism. The non-communist old left died not of its own hand, but was crushed between the rock of means and the hard place of ends. A maturing industrial society offered few new alternatives. Thomas and the SP had to choose from among those few. It is hardly surprising they chose as they did.

The Socialists' simplistic rhetoric has often misled historians. More often than not, the party's official positions masked more

complex ideas. When party spokesmen warned of suicidal consequences if the United States were to enter the war, they spoke not of individual blood sacrifices but of the deepening domestic totalitarian government control which war necessitated. The SP's official war stand evolved from the fear that American participation would inevitably change American democracy, flawed as it was, into fascism, which socialists perceived to be social suicide.

By 1940, the socialists were certain that the United States was well down the path of fascist totalitarianism. They viewed Franklin Roosevelt's use of executive power, and his demand for more, as one of the most obvious manifestations of this dangerous slide. Thomas wrote to Helen Phelps Stokes, a wealthy sympathizer, that "Roosevelt's obsession, from whatever motive, in saving the world by war, with himself possibly as a messiah, makes him extraordinarily dangerous, for he is not big enough to put this America into this war and accomplish the result he wants, rather vaguely,"³

If the totalitarian danger had come only from the growth of executive power, perhaps socialists would have escaped their paranoid assessments of Roosevelt's motives.⁴ Socialists saw the president's moves as only the tip of an evil iceberg frozen in the sea of American life between the wars. Americans' racial and religious prejudices, lynchings, the Ku Klux Klan and other "gangsters" revealed much potential for native fascism. "We had our night-shirted native fascists long before we heard of black and brown shirts," Thomas thundered in a campaign speech broadcast over the CBS radio network in 1940.⁵

Even the Supreme Court acquiesced in measures which diluted

constitutional freedoms. The Court had denied the Jehovah's Witnesses the right to refuse to salute the flag or repeat the pledge of allegiance in schools and public meetings.⁶ The party noted the willingness of mobs to endorse this decision "by more than fifty cases of shameful violence against these religious sectarians."⁷ And Congress seemed all too happy to help turn the wheels of official repression. Thomas attacked the passage of the Smith "Alien and Sedition" Act of 1940 often and gave his support to all charged under it, including Trotskyites and native reactionaries such as Elizabeth Dilling. He believed the law to be "potentially far more destructive of civil liberties than any legislation of the First World War."⁸

If all these events occurred even before American participation in the Second World War, the NEC of the socialist party reasoned, could Americans realistically expect to retain even a semblance of their civil liberties once their nation entered actual combat?⁹ War-spawned centralization would signal restricted civil liberties; the experience of the SP in World War One was too fresh to allow socialists to doubt that. But centralization and repression were not socialists' main worries. The American economic system, more than any government action or popular repression, dictated that should the nation enter the war, it would emerge a fascist state.

In an economic system geared to production for profit, a government guaranteed profit should be enough to spur full production. Socialists saw much of Roosevelt's New Deal as government power guaranteeing profit. Even then the industrialists did not produce. War certainly required full production, re-tooling existing factories and con-

structing new ones. Even if the government guaranteed profits, would industrialists meet the nation's war needs for guns and butter? Not without government coercion, thought the socialists. Looking again to the nation's experience in the First World War, Thomas and other socialist theorists expected a centralization of control over industrial production in the federal government. War production in a capitalist economy necessitated state-collectivism. Perhaps FDR's christian paternalism would prevent state power from becoming too destructive of personal freedom. But the war would set the precedent, and the American system of periodic leadership change could not guarantee that a future president would not misuse state power to create a collectivist totalitarian state.¹⁰

At the war's end the state might return its power to control production to its prewar owners. World War I set this precedent. But public fear of renewed depression might demand that the state retain production control. And if the capitalist class were willing to renounce this power in exchange for guaranteed profits, state collectivism, or corporatism, would become an accepted feature of the American political economy. America would be a fascist state.

The SP evaluation of the danger of domestic fascism centered on contemporary events and apparent parallels between the First and Second World Wars. Certainly they could not foresee the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Socialists reasoned that the repressive government and popular evils which surfaced between 1917 and 1919 would reappear in even more hideous and destructive forms; repression in World War Two and the precedents of fascism and the First World War from which to

draw strength and ideas. It was little wonder that socialists and their allies feared domestic fascism and its repercussions more than they feared a dictator in far-off Germany.

Even if the "free enterprise" system could produce enough to win the war without totalitarian government control, socialists reasoned that the United States had neither the wisdom nor power to play the role of peacemaker as it tried in 1918. American participation in an imperialist war could not re-make that conflict into anything but what it was. And if the United States tried, the nation would groan under government repression of the popular will. "The liberty we should lose we could not bestow on other lands."¹¹

The SP was not officially a pacifist party, nor were its leaders pacifist, as many critics charged.¹² Although Thomas joined the SP as a pacifist in 1918, he eschewed the position in the mid-1930s as too simplistic in a complex world where people could seldom clearly distinguish between good and evil. He supported the loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, believing that some valid causes warranted protective or defensive conflict.¹³ Pacifist socialists did exercise a voice in party circles, and in turn the NEC listened to their views, but the socialist reaction to the coming of war rested squarely on the party's fear of domestic fascism.¹⁴ Most socialists agreed with Thomas that while contemporary pacifism may have been the herald of a new and better world order, it was an unrealistic answer to the twin dangers of bolshevism and fascism.¹⁵

Unlike leftists of a later generation, the socialists of the 1930s and 1940s did not throw the term "fascist" around with abandon.

The SP and its allies had a sophisticated understanding of fascism, especially its roots, even if socialist publications often chose to simplify their definition of fascism. It was "the product of the failure of political democracy to solve the problems of economic insecurity . . . [and] also a symptom of the breakdown of private capitalism." Perhaps socialist leaders suffered from the politician's disease that dictated public material be simplified to the point of absurdity; the SP's hierarchy had a much deeper understanding of the roots of fascism.

Thomas saw fascists as the "illegitimate children" of the post-1918 international socialist movement.¹⁷ This knowledge counseled caution in radical politics. If a radical group adopted the idea that it represented the "little man against Wall Street and Communism," tinged with nationalism an unscrupulous leader might turn it into a fascist organization.¹⁸ Thomas and other socialist theorists understood the pivotal role of the middle class in fascism's rise.¹⁹ V. F. Calverton, owner and publisher of the radical journal Modern Monthly, believed fascism was a "lower middle class phenomenon superimposing itself upon the capitalist state."²⁰ He concluded that the lower middle class desire to return to an economic structure based on competition among small business, "parading under the banner of nationalist psychology" fed the rise of German fascism. In the United States, the nation's complex economy precluded such a return. Calverton saw the basic economic contradiction of fascism in this reactionary urge, but noted that the attraction of the idea of returning to a simpler past, in the wrong hands, could well serve fascism's cause in the United

States.²¹ The apparent middle class role in the rise of European fascism dictated that the American left try to cater to middle class hopes and fears without alienating what they considered, perhaps erroneously, as their base of support, the working class. Cautions of this type, gleaned from the experiences of both the organized left and right, severely inhibited the SP's attempts to alter its program, to remain a viable choice, in a rapidly changing international situation. The realities of fascism's appeal necessitated a less rhetorically revolutionary party line and spokesmen acceptable to the middle class. Thomas's alliance with the America First anti-war organization in 1940-1941, and his increasing emphasis on the need for majoritarian support for any change pointed this way, and partially explained why he kept his position as the party's major spokesman.

To most socialist theorists, capitalism's decay fertilized the roots of fascism. This was the major reason Americans should fear fascism's growth. "Recent history gives us little hope that we can make the change from capitalism to socialism without fascism destroying political democracy," wrote SP leader Alfred Baker Lewis in 1935.²² Capitalism insured not only inequality and poverty, but future fascism. "So long as private ownership of the natural resources and industrial machinery is unchallenged," wrote Gerry Allard, editor of the Socialist Call, "political democracy is sure to lead to fascism."²³ These two positions reflected the boundaries of Socialist Party theory in the late 1930s and early 1940s. If political democracy presented the only viable vehicle of evolution from capitalism to socialism, as the failure of the Bolshevik revolution so graphically demonstrated, then radi-

cals must nurse and protect it. But if political democracy was an ineffective tool against the power of big business, radicals had to emasculate that power. Only radical maneuvering between excessive political action to protect political democracy, ignoring democratic means, could promise success in preventing the rise of American fascism. "The choice between collectivism and private capitalism is gone. The choice between democratic collectivism which is socialism and some form of totalitarian collectivism is still before us. The Socialist Party travels the road to freedom."²⁴ It was this thin line that the Socialist Party tried to toe, and the possibility of war made the line thinner still. The question of the role the United States should play in the defeat of fascism clearly delineated these narrow options. There was never any question within the SP that fascism had to be stopped.

The SP deemed America's role in the defeat of fascism to be two-fold: first, to build true economic and political democracy within, strong enough to withstand fascist pressure domestic and foreign; second, to remain out of war to provide Europe's working class with a "beacon," an example of the beneficent society the masses could build by cooperation. Only an America at peace could signal the way for the world.²⁵

A truly democratic America would guarantee that capital's power could not be a potential dictator's springboard to power. A truly democratic America would promote a victory of European anti-fascists. It would be a concrete demonstration of total democracy's success in providing all with the amenities of life. As "otherworldly"

as this position appeared to the SP's critics, it seemed to the SP to be the only road which promised avoidance of domestic fascism.²⁶ This program preserved and extended democracy, while removing the power of those most likely to use political democracy to build fascism by degrees. And it provided a unique weapon to combat fascism in Europe--experience, not explosives; the good life personified through total democracy, not dictated through the barrel of a rifle.

The SP war stand was balanced between retention of peaceful, majoritarian and evolutionary means and rational, well ordered goals or ends. It avoided the danger of the Bolshevik heresy, totally subordinating the means to the end. It avoided the classic American trap so deadly to the populists in the 1890s and the Social Democratic Federation in the 1930s, subliminating goals to a quest for political influence. The SP war stand evolved through a complex process of attempts to avoid the mistakes of the past so clearly written in America's World War One experience, the bloody death of the Russian Revolution, and the backstabbing factional disputes within the American left. To the majority of the SP, the war stand was only a logical response to the world as it stood in the first few years of the Second World War.

In retrospect, the SP's war stand provided ample evidence of the complexities facing the "free-thinking" non-Communist left in the 1930s and 1940s. And it offered a series of specific clues to the complex workings of the socialist party. The war stand was, like Norman Thomas, a unique blend of American ideals and European Marxism. The socialist fear of rising native fascism was Marxist. It saw social development as inexorable and alike from nation to nation. Yet social-

ist insistence on America's role as beacon of true economic and political democracy drew heavily from the idea of American exceptionalism. The party's belief that the European masses would throw off their fascist oppressors if shown how well democratic socialism could work paralleled turn-of-the-century progressive beliefs in the social role of education, environmentalism, and the essential wisdom of the masses. Just as Woodrow Wilson inferred that the Russian masses would welcome United States help to return a liberal capitalist democracy to power in 1918, Norman Thomas assumed the European masses would ignite into anti-fascist revolution if the United States could demonstrate concretely the attractions of democratic socialism.

Socialists' perception of the limits within which they had to operate to fight fascism, foreign and domestic, stood out boldly in the positions they took on the war question between 1934 and 1941. The party supported the proposed Ludlow Amendment to the Constitution, which would have denied the government power to declare war without the approval of a majority of voters in a public referendum. The SP's support for the Ludlow Amendment, and its increasing fear of presidential power, expressed its knowledge that only democratic means, in political and economic life, could insure against domestic fascism while guaranteeing a united front against fascist aggression overseas. "Those of us who genuinely believe in democracy think this [Ludlow Amendment] is an issue upon which the people who must fight have a right to pass," wrote Thomas to the New York Times in 1939.²⁷ He noted that in case of an invasion, the President and Congress need not defer to the will of the majority. Invasion would insure popular war support; "genuine

democracy" was a curb to what the SP perceived to be a dangerous trend toward presidential dictatorship. SP support for the Ludlow Amendment was nearly unanimous.²⁸ The public also supported it; a late 1938 American Institute of Public Opinion poll reported that sixty-eight percent of those questioned favored its passage.²⁹

Thomas and the SP readily admitted that a war referendum was not a panacea, but it would at least insure that the ruling class would not coerce the people into war ex post facto as had happened in 1917.³⁰ No more Creel Committees or Espionage and Sedition Acts. Transferring war-making power from the central government to the masses would "take this fateful decision from the hands of the money powers, armament and political interests who might blindly lead us into war."³¹ If passed, the amendment promised an extension of political democracy; it was a perfect weapon in the SP's fight against creeping fascism at home and its bloody European parent.³²

If a war referendum never became part of the Constitution or public law, it still had an important purpose. The SP's campaign for its passage "would certainly, by exposing the hypocrisy of the opposition to it, strengthen the determination of the people to keep out of the slaughter."³³ Thomas used the issue to warn Americans that Roosevelt was not the democrat many seemed to think. The president's push to defeat the Ludlow Amendment was "proof of the first dangerous trend away from democracy in the Roosevelt Administration," Thomas told an audience at a Newark, New Jersey Community Forum in 1938.³⁴

By early 1941, Thomas was aware that time was running short, that it would be impossible to include a war referendum amendment in

the United States Constitution before the nation would probably go to war. He chose instead to try to influence individual congressmen to pledge "not to put us into war without consulting the people."³⁵

Thomas was an idealist to be sure; he was often guilty of a lack of political vision which frequently accompanies strong belief. But just as often he recognized political realities and worked within them to the best of his ability. This prescription fit most socialists, idealism heavily colored by acute political perception. They usually recognized the immediate futility of their work, but this did not make the work unimportant.

Among the most important tasks of the party, before and after the attack on Pearl Harbor, was the fight for individual civil liberties through organizations such as the Workers' Defense League (WDL) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). If SP theorists were correct, this was the most important, if the most futile, task the party attempted.³⁶ If any type of democracy were to be an efficient buffer against domestic fascism, the individual must have access to all opinions. If a war referendum were to be an efficient guard against executive and legislative adventurism, voters had to be free to hear all sides and cast secret ballots.

Throughout the 1930s, Thomas, the SP, the WDL and the ACLU had struggled to protect individual rights on various levels. Thomas fought for the economic and political rights of southern sharecroppers, for free speech in Frank Hague's fiefdom of Jersey City, and for various other causes.³⁷ Democracy without effective legal and organizational guarantees was useless. Seeing in war a great danger to individ-

ual liberty, Thomas urged the SP to redouble its vigilance.³⁸

And so it did. Thomas was active in various fights, especially to protect the rights of those charged under the Smith Act of 1940.³⁹ He and other SP leaders admitted "the necessity for efficient police work to apprehend real spies," but they unambiguously denounced "The actions of mobs, administration agencies, legislatures and courts which in the name of protecting our liberty are steadily denying the liberty of . . . citizens generally."⁴⁰ "It is impossible to win victories for democracy using the weapons of totalitarianism. It is freedom we seek to win and it is the method of freedom that we must use."⁴¹ Rarely, if ever, did the party deviate from this position, unlike its competitors, the SDF and the CPUSA.⁴²

The SP fight against the conscription bill of 1940 was consistent with an all out defense of democracy. "I am against a large conscript army, because it is not democratic, because it is not necessary for defense, because it is a standing invitation by an aggressor in high office to use it for imperialist purposes," wrote Thomas to Ernest K. Lindley.⁴³ If the Roosevelt administration's description of the draft were correct that it was a democratic defense measure which would also enrich the individuals' concept of citizenship, then Thomas believed one could find the same equality in slavery.⁴⁴

If the SP had accepted the draft as a vital necessity to national defense as had the SDF, it would not have fought its implementation so emphatically.⁴⁵ Socialists denied that a draft was a necessity. "Military experts are in agreement," wrote Aaron Levenstein in a draft of an early 1941 NEC statement, "that conscription is intended to

raise an army larger than any needed for defense against invasion." If so, what use did the government intend for the troops? To augment the British army for an invasion of Europe?⁴⁶

But perhaps FDR had a non-militaristic reason for rushing conscription legislation through congress. Perhaps he sought to draft young men to help solve the vexing problem of unemployment.⁴⁷ Other conscription legislation supporters, less attuned to the needs of the working class, had more insidious reasons for demanding the draft, reasoned members of the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL). "Most important is the opportunity . . . to get rid of active trade unionists by refusing to recommend them for deferments. . . . The bosses are already licking their chops over the prospect."⁴⁸ Most importantly, conscription would accelerate the nation's drift toward war and fascism. It was the "thin edge of the wedge toward total dictatorship. . . . It is the key that will unlock a Bluebeard's chamber-into which the corpses of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, all democratic rights, and the organization of the country for the common good, will be hurled and the door slammed shut."⁴⁹ Conscription was "Treason to the People," it "Imitates Hitler," and was a "Basic Principle of Totalitarianism."⁵⁰ Above all, conscription opened a pandora's box of government suppression of civil liberties and unionism. It promised imperial adventures, war and fascism.

If domestic and foreign developments in the late 1930s and early 1940s demanded SP emphasis on political democracy, then both demanded the party work for a realization of popular economic control, democratic socialism. To promote popular acceptance of that concept

was the second part of the SP's war stand. The party believed it could never ignore democracy, political or economic. To promote one at the expense of the other would skew American social and economic development toward totalitarianism.⁵¹ The NEC's initial reaction to the war in September 1939 charted the party's course from then until Pearl Harbor. "Our first duty to the ideal of democracy, as well as to the interests of 130,000,000 men, women and children, is to Keep America Out of War."⁵² Thomas agreed that this was one prerequisite for peace and plenty; the other was to solve "the problem of production and distribution" for those one hundred and thirty million people.⁵³

Throughout the 1930s Thomas and the SP tried to convince Americans that the nation's economy could easily produce enough for all if production were for use not profit.⁵⁴ When the Roosevelt government began to divert funds from welfare spending to defense spending, the SP attacked this as a double danger. An armament economy would insure American war participation and would rob funds from those who needed help most--the poor and the unemployed. The party urged Roosevelt to build homes, not battleships, to plan for peace, not war, to use war funds for unemployment payments, to accumulate basic raw materials the war would effect.⁵⁵

Economic democracy demanded worker control of their jobs, working conditions and wages. But war preparations required "repressions against workers and their organizations."⁵⁶ Continuing socialist support for unionized labor was a facet of its fight to balance political and economic democracy. Unionization was a beginning, but no guarantee of economic democracy; the working class must exert financial as

well as political power. The party saw in war preparations a slim chance to increase working class economic clout through an emphasis on taxation of war profits.⁵⁷ Stronger unions and an economically independent working class were steps in the correct direction. But until imperialism disappeared, socialists feared for the worst. Only "international cooperation looking toward a world when natural resources and markets will be developed in the interests of world peace" could insure that peace, and this was not possible until "governments have been wrested from imperialist control and brought in line with the popular needs."⁵⁸

Support for the Ludlow Amendment gave the SP a simple, understandable, means for insuring the health of political democracy in America. The problem of how to exert popular control over the nation's economic life was not so simple. It was within this realm, the question of means for achieving popular economic control, that one sees the beginning of a subtle shift away from a faith in the revolutionary ideals of mass independent direct action, political and economic, toward faith in governmental action. This shift laid the groundwork for the SP's tacit support of the social and economic status quo in America's postwar confrontation with Soviet power.

Throughout the decade of the Great Depression, SP theorists emphasized the role of independent working class action to gain both a cooperative economy and real political democracy. "Once again we are brought face to face with the conclusion that . . . the capitalists are no longer willing to defend democracy," wrote the leftist Socialist Herbert Zam after the Munich Pact. "This task devolves upon the work-

ing class, which cannot . . . preserve democracy over the opposition of the . . . capitalist order without entirely destroying that order."⁵⁹ "No alliance with any capitalist nation in any war can bring peace, no collaboration with our boss enemies can bring security," declared the editor of the Socialist Call in 1938.⁶⁰ Only working class independent action could prevent war's outbreak, or at least American participation in a war. So stated the 1938 SP convention at Kenosha, Wisconsin. Thomas supported that line, as he had the radical anti-war plank of the 1934 Detroit Declaration of Principles. Pressure on the right from the newly formed SDF and pressure on the left from CPUSA-sponsored Popular Front organizations were the major reasons for Thomas's support.⁶¹

Socialist fear that the existing order would seduce the working class into war, using patriotic slogans and chauvinistic appeals, was apparent throughout the 1930s. "The struggle against capitalist war must be a struggle against all capitalist powers, including the U.S. government," commented Gerry Allard in 1937.⁶² One major thrust of SP propaganda before Hitler invaded Poland was the idea that his defeat would no more protect democracy than the Kaiser's defeat had in 1918. If the imperialist powers of France and Great Britain managed to defeat Hitler, which was unlikely, as capitalism could never match fascism's productive capacity, capitalists would still repress and rob the working class. "The workers must ask themselves if they would die for an order which would shoot them on the picket lines."⁶³ The ideal of the working class as an efficient third force, strong enough to balance between the twin evils of fascism and imperialism-capitalism was pre-

dominant in SP theory until late 1939.⁶⁴ Socialist theorists argued that peace could only last "if the workers forced it by means of a general strike against war, should it come."⁶⁵ Even those who would desert the party when American war participation seemed inevitable in the early 1940s, supported this view. "If I cannot participate with the workers against more war," said Daniel Hoan, Socialist Mayor of Milwaukee and later a minor official in Roosevelt's war government, "I am not worth the powder to blow me to hell."⁶⁶

Thomas's support for this radical sounding resolution to avoid war through independent working class action was part and parcel of his struggle for party leadership with the old guard between 1934 and 1936. Thomas referred to the general strike idea as "left-wing infantilism."⁶⁷ But Thomas's support was more than opportunistic rhetoric. The ideal of the working class as power balance, as the engine of social revolution, was thoroughly Marxist. It led the party to eschew the CPUSA's popular front line as non-Marxist and to portray the SP as the only truly Marxist party still alive in America during the CPUSA's flirtation with Roosevelt liberalism.⁶⁸

The Socialist Party did not consciously set theoretical limits, on war, on socialism, on working class action, on political and economic questions. The desire to avoid the amoral, cynical stance of the communists on the left and the toothless, impotent SDF on the right delineated the limits of SP theory. Nothing demonstrated this more clearly than the gradual disappearance of the party's emphasis on independent working class action to fight war and the growth of faith in government action to achieve the same end, after the opening guns of

conflict roared in September 1939.

In place of the ideal of independent political and economic working class action, the socialists began to emphasize political action within the confines of the system. The shift was due in large part to the socialist feeling that if he chose, Roosevelt could lead the nation away from war the same way he appeared to be leading it toward war, through a series of small aggressive actions. But the shift also reflected a growing ambivalence within the party about the war. Perhaps this war was not merely a re-staged World War One. Perhaps the issues at stake were more important than mere imperial aggrandizement. Even Lilian Symes, a leader of the party's left wing and later a vocal dissenter from the party's post-Pearl Harbor war stand, recognized that the Second World War was "not an exact duplicate of the imperialist conflict of 1914-1918." She agreed with those who argued that "Allied imperialism even in its present stage is politically more progressive than fascist imperialism;" at least the Allied ruling class allowed the masses a voice in the government.⁶⁹ Thomas agreed with the Symes analysis (one of the few times the two saw eye to eye). He recognized the imperialist roots of the conflict; but he also recognized that it was an imperialism on two different planes. "However great our faults, it is true that we and the British have made some gains worth keeping."⁷⁰

It was precisely these gains--political democracy, welfare and labor legislation, and a modicum of government regulation of capitalism's worst abuses--that allowed many socialists to transfer their emphasis on the means of avoiding war from independent working class

political and economic action to government action. If Roosevelt had accrued enough power to lead the United States into war then he could use that power to keep America at peace. Thomas assumed that FDR was not a budding dictator who sought power for self-aggrandizement.⁷¹ If Americans could convince FDR they would not support a United States war effort, and if the SP could supply a means to fight fascism without war, as the party tried to do in its emphasis on America as the beacon of democracy, then Roosevelt and Congress would keep America out of the war. This view produced the September 1941 NEC anti-war plank and its six points. The ruling body of the Socialist Party instructed members to fight for the Ludlow Amendment, to seek a congressional investigation of the circumstances of the Anglo-American occupation of Iceland, demand Congressional repudiation of the Anglo-American alliance implicit in the Atlantic Charter, urge congressional refusal to extend the draft, insist that congress "exercise vigilance against . . . war in the Far East," and whip up "active opposition to extension and maintenance of an armament economy."⁷² This program was a far cry from the "left-wing infantilism" of the 1934 Detroit Declaration of Principles, with its emphasis on the general strike as the only effective method to prevent war. The NEC and the party were not moving away from the mainstream of American politics, but into its heart, demanding that the existing institutions function in the manner they were designed, reacting to the will of the people.⁷³

The SP emphasis on government action to restrain the drift into war did not signal a general socialist acceptance of the war as necessary. Most socialists still agreed with Zam's mid-1941 analysis

of the war as a conflict to decide whether the fascist-capitalist-imperialists would rule Europe or if that dubious honor would fall to the Anglo-French democratic-capitalist-imperialists.⁷⁴ The shift illustrated not a change of heart, but the continued evolution of the SP line to fit changing circumstances. Most socialists were neither unaware of the shift nor unhappy with it, although some felt it to be not enough and others too much.⁷⁵ It was part of the party's attempt to remain a vital force within the American system. Travers Clement, National Chairman and husband of Lillian Symes, agreed with the need to alter policy, to rethink the party line continually, although he was not eager to "throw over concepts which I've held over several decades" as some of his comrades appeared to be. Clement avoided a strict Leninist or pacifist line on the war, and urged others to do the same.⁷⁶ Thomas agreed. "My position on . . . this war . . . was never based on any absolutes; neither . . . pacifism or [sic] . . . Marxism." he wrote to Maynard Krueger, his running mate in the 1940 election.⁷⁷ Sam Romer, a union-oriented socialist, summed up the feelings of the majority of socialists on the war question. He did not think "that the party position is the pacifism of Al Hamilton or the Marxism of Judah Drob or the Rooseveltism of Jack Altman; I think it is a position of rational defense of our liberties and our independence from both foreign and domestic enemies."⁷⁸

The evolution of the SP war stand from 1934 through 1941 showed the emergence of a socialist philosophy stripped bare of Marxist rhetoric. It was in the main line of American progressive political theory. The program's emphasis was on democracy and the government as

the articulation of the people's wishes, which empowered government to act. The socialist acceptance of this idea and their belief that it could halt the nation's drift into war, placed the party deep within the mainstream of American political thought, not on the outside, wistfully gazing in.

The party's initial reaction to the war after Pearl Harbor was rooted solidly in the realities of the war and American politics. The National Action Committee (NAC), the core of the NEC, met on the eighth of December 1941 to begin discussion on the party's reaction to the war. Issued the next day, the committee's statement set the tone for later official SP statements on American war participation. The SP "unreservedly" condemned the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and the "despotic military dictatorship" which forced war on the Japanese masses. The NAC statement noted that the Japanese attack was to be expected. It was the result of "a long struggle of European, American and Asiatic imperialisms for advantage and dominance in the Far East," a struggle the SP had always opposed. Socialist leaders warned that to ignore this would "perpetuate - after this war is over - the conditions which led to it." Up to this point, the NAC statement was a reiteration of the two major themes of the party's pre-war stance--that the war was imperialist and that democratic capitalist victory could not insure future world peace.⁷⁹

The major portion of the statement was an outline of the SP reaction to the new reality of war. Socialists, the NAC advised, must accept that the party had failed to keep America at peace but not lose heart. Socialists should continue to fight for victory in the larger

war, the metaphoric war to create an American democratic socialist society, the cooperative commonwealth.

It was not enough to battle to protect existing civil and human rights from the ravages of war-spawned "necessity." All socialists should fight to "extend the procedures and institutions of democracy in the very midst of war." They must fight for increased civil liberties, increased rights for labor, increased racial tolerance, the "advancement of American living standards and the general fight to achieve democratic socialism." The NAC statement accepted the war, and did not advocate any form of defeatism. It neither questioned the war, nor doubted that America should seek victory. It was a document finely tuned to the situation, free of excessive romanticized revolutionary rhetoric. Essentially it told socialists to accept what was and fight for what could be, to channel their efforts into the struggle, within the system, to make the status quo more equitable. The NAC statement was not the work of men twisted by intrafactional struggle; it was neither a call to arms nor a cry for violence. It was a thoroughly worldly and realistic attempt to provide socialists and their sympathizers with a workable program, designed to fight the pitfalls of domestic fascism and avoid the fallacy of political esotericism. It was in line with New York Socialist leader Irving Barshop's admonition that "The test of any position is in its practice."⁸⁰

The NAC's realistic view of the war and the party's role in it became what Thomas identified as "critical support" for America's war effort.⁸¹ Not all socialists accepted this view. A proposed NAC statement dated the eighth of December, 1941 put much more emphasis on

socialists' political and agitational independence. The agitation would provide the working class of fascist nations an example to emulate, an example which was to hold out a promise of "complete freedom, economic and political" to Europe's oppressed classes. Above all, the proposed statement read, the Socialist Party's role in war should extend mass revolutionary freedom through resistance to government oppression under the guise of "national unity."⁸² Other socialists expressed ideas to the committee covering a whole range of theories, from absolute unquestioning support of the war effort, to "revolutionary defeatism," similar to the war stand of the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party.⁸³

Thomas and many socialists chose to support the war effort critically for reasons easy to ascertain. Thomas warned in his acceptance speech at the 1940 SP convention that should the United States enter the war, the SP would have to redouble efforts to guard what democratic rights Americans already had at the expense of working to realize democratic socialism.⁸⁴ Since the beginning of the conflict in September 1939, many leftists traveled a similar route which began with a belief that neither capitalism nor fascism contained any progressive ideals. Victory "of one set rather than the other will no more solve Europe's problems . . . in 1939 than 1918." The route led, in the end, to full support for the allies in most cases.⁸⁵

By December 1941, Thomas and other socialist leaders softened their absolute position of damning both sides of the conflict. Thomas commented that "there are things worth defending in our . . . way of life even if it means politically accepting the awful, almost com-

pletely self-frustrating means of war."⁸⁶ Now that war had come uninvited to the American people, commented Ben Fischer, a Detroit-based SP-United Auto Workers organizer, "I am for the war," although "I continue to oppose capitalism and imperialism."⁸⁷ "It seems to me," wrote Herman Erickson, a rank and file party member, "that if we spend our time opposing the war as such, we render ourselves less effective in combating the causes of war," especially the capitalist system.⁸⁸ Many socialists were well on their way down the road toward critical support of American foreign policy, based on the assumption that the American system was the lesser of two (or three) evils.

Ex-socialist party members of the SDF were the vanguard on this road. First they urged all out aid to the allies. By 1940, these right-wing socialists screamed for American war participation. The question was not of lesser evils to SDF members, but of the children of light (democrats) fighting for survival of goodness and truth against the amoral, bloodthirsty children of darkness (fascists and bolsheviks), conspirators intent on destroying democracy. If one were not on democracy's side and showed it by refusing to back the Allied cause heart-and-soul, then one was, by definition, a dupe of the anti-democrats.⁸⁹

Less opinionated than the SDF, the newly founded Union of Democratic Action, led by ex-socialists James Loeb and Reinhold Niebuhr, also supported FDR's steps toward war. The major reason most of the ex-socialist members of the UDA broke with the party was their disgust that it continued to decry both sides in the European conflict.⁹⁰

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor moved many leftists toward a position of tacit support for the Roosevelt foreign policy, or at

least acquiescence in the war. So Thomas thought, so many socialists thought. To reject the war effort out of a horror of carnage, a distrust of the Allied war-motives or any other reason, however correct, would "unnecessarily jeopardize" the party. Especially if it could offer no viable political alternative to war-support. The war was "an imperialist war, not truly a war for democracy in a real sense, but the differences between the kinds of imperialism are real now," wrote Thomas soon after Pearl Harbor.⁹¹

The only viable political alternative Thomas thought the SP could offer was to demand a negotiated peace. That was foolish, as the war stood in the first two years of American participation. A negotiated peace in early 1942 would have been a Hitler-dominated peace, certainly not one which would protect that spark of democracy which made Anglo-French-American imperialism "different" from German imperialism.⁹² Until the SP could offer a realistic peace program which would protect and foster worldwide democracy, economic and political, and not grant fascism an advantage, most socialists could find no choice but to support, at least tacitly, the American war effort.⁹³ This program did not discount political realities. Rather it was rooted in reality, as painful as it was to most socialists.

The NEC Resolution on War, published in late December 1941 was, as critics were to charge, a bit vague. It restated the SP's reasons for trying to keep America out of the war. The resolution laid the blame for war squarely on the shoulders of the Axis. It noted that American war participation "came after a long series of acts by the Roosevelt Administration which the Socialist Party had steadily pre-

dicted would lead to war." The NEC statement reiterated the SP's hatred for fascism and its anti-fascist record, which began "long before Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese ruling class launched their aggressions" which challenged the world "leadership of democratic capitalism."

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor "has ended the hope of keeping our country at peace and imposed new and onerous conditions on our struggle" to bring democratic socialism to the United States. The reality of war and the SP's historic hatred of fascism were the bases of the NEC proclamation that the party was "irrevocably committed to the conflict against Nazism, fascism or any other totalitarianism." The party supported the war in theory; fascism was evil and deserved a violent death.

SP support for the government's war effort should be very conditional. If the SP theorists could find little reason to oppose the war, they found numerous faults in the Roosevelt administration's prosecution of it. The administration's record of totalitarian acts such as conscription and Lend-Lease were "such that we cannot trust them to carry out the war in accordance with aims and methods which will strengthen democracy" let alone advance the cause of a social-democratic world. An Allied victory neither insured nor promised a victory for democracy, especially in view of the presence of the Soviet Union on the Allied side. "No victory for democracy against totalitarianism will be won by such nations as the Soviet Union or Chiang-Kai-shek's China." George H. Couch of Arkansas described the SP dilemma well: "We . . . know that . . . the private profit system is destruc-

tive to democracy. How then can we trust the safety of democracy in the hands of capitalist leaders fighting a world war?"

The NEC stated bluntly that "it is necessary to face the hard and stubborn fact that the war is here and now being waged." Socialists and most of the working class did not want it and would be the first to suffer from it, but reality was reality. The party's role must be to try to shape the nation's method of war and peace plans along democratic socialist lines, thus "bringing the war to a speedy end and insuring it will not happen again." Military victory over European and Asian foes was not enough to guarantee a democratic peace. Victory "over the hidden and latent danger of native fascism" was also necessary. "To combat this second danger the Socialist Party reserves the fullest measure of political independence and right of criticism."⁹⁴

The phrase "critical support" appeared nowhere in this initial NEC statement. Yet the idea pervaded it. Critical support, like the earlier SP war stand, was an amalgam of the SP's twin goals of protecting existent political democracy while agitating for its strengthening, its extension to the economic realm. It was also a classic example of a political organization's balancing of reality with a desired goal. The party's judgement that the small amount of political democracy existent in American institutions was worth protecting opened the door for party members to begin to view American democratic capitalism as the lesser evil in a world full of greater evils. It was that view that presaged the party's slowly building acceptance of liberal democratic capitalism that characterized it in the cold war years. "Criti-

cal Support" for the war effort marked the beginning of the process by which liberal capitalist hegemony slowly drained American socialism of what little strength it had.

To a substantial minority of socialists, this balance between what was and what ought to be put too much emphasis on acceptance of what was. The leftwing Symes faction of the party, which fought the NEC's position tooth and nail until the convention in May 1942, were idealists who demanded the party swim upstream regardless of how fast or treacherous the current. The NEC emphasis on working for civil liberties and racial equality while the war raged seemed "treason to Socialism" to the Symes faction and small groups to the left of it. "Not to fight the imperialist war means liquidation of the socialist movement," wrote Dan Rodgers of California.⁹⁵ Thomas sympathized with these idealistic comrades but did not "credit them with too much intelligence. . . . To talk Revolutionary Socialism at this juncture is wishful thinking."⁹⁶ Most opposition to Thomas's worldly advice was more moderate than the Californian's. The Symes/Clement faction, led by National Secretary and Call editor Travers Clement and Lillian Symes, generally agreed that an anti-war party, violent in its vocal opposition to the war, would wither and disappear for lack of support, or collapse under official repression. But they believed that to condone an imperialist war necessitated a compromise with capitalism and was just as dangerous to party survival and growth. Supporting Thomas's ideas in practice, but desiring ideologic purity, the Symes/Clement group wanted the first official SP pronouncement on the war to specify the party's "political non-support" for the war. The NEC emergency

meeting of 19-21 December 1941 and the party convention of late May 1942 were the battlegrounds for the Symes/Clement group. In the NEC they lost, but were strong enough in the rank and file to force a compromise at the convention.

At the NEC meeting, Symes and Clement refused to vote for the proposed statement unless it was amended to include a declaration which recognized that decaying capitalism produced fascism, and that war accelerated that decay. The SP should not "give our political support to any war conducted for imperialist aims."⁹⁷ This phrase Symes supposed would clarify the NEC statement. Otherwise, the Symes/Clement group supported the NEC statement. Clement reported to the Call readers that the amendment clearly limited the SP's "non-support to the political or ideological field," and in no way would expose the party to the danger of government repression. Thomas and Harry Fleischman, national secretary to be, both indicated they would support the NEC statement with or without the Symes Amendment. But David Felix, Aaron Levenstein and Robert Parker refused to back the statement should the NEC vote to include the amendment. The final vote was four to include (Symes, Clement, Al Hamilton and Fleischman) and four to exclude (Thomas, Parker, Felix and Levenstein). Maynard Krueger mailed his vote for inclusion; Ben Fischer and Frank McCallister voted against inclusion, also by mail.⁹⁸

Disagreement over the exact wording of the NEC statement could not obscure the party's intense desire to remain within the law, to avoid government repression. The NEC passed unanimously Aaron Levenstein's motion which reaffirmed the SP's "traditional repudiation of

the doctrines of revolutionary defeatism, sabotage, or any other philosophy of physical hindrance of governmental action. The Socialist Party will continue . . . to advance its program through channels of democratic political action."⁹⁹ The close vote on the amendment did signify that many members had not traveled as far down the "lesser evil" road as Thomas and his allies. But then Thomas had not traveled as far down that road as others such as Max Eastman, Reinhold Niebuhr, or most of the members of the UDA.¹⁰⁰

Thomas was not happy with the Symes Amendment. He understood its inclusion would not place the SP outside of the law, make it liable to government prosecution under the hated Smith Act. He preferred the NEC statement as it stood, but would have voted for it even if the Symes Amendment had passed. He realized that his concept of "critical support" "might seem to carry the wrong overtones." But otherwise to ignore the reality of the war and how the nation entered it, might "unnecessarily jeopardize our present usefulness when we have no political alternative to offer."¹⁰¹ Thomas thought the SP would sign its own death warrant for sure if it did not acknowledge that "Hitler must be defeated for the sake of the world."¹⁰² Certainly the phrase "critical support" was ambiguous, but in a direction that would not harm the party in most Americans' eyes. To embrace the Symes conception of "political non-support" was to invite misinterpretation more harmful to the party's future. Many socialists would use it as an excuse to run off on a "romantic, infantile left-wing mysticism which is at once futile . . . and dangerous to the Party." If the SP's official position on the war was to invite ambiguity, let it be the type that would

increase its public standing, not the type that would identify it with the radical lunatic fringe.¹⁰³

This episode in party history showed Thomas at his best as a political conciliator. He fought for a war position which would recognize grim realities while keeping the goal of democratic socialism in view. His objection to the Symes/Clement group was valid, but he was willing to accept their phraseology for the sake of party unity. His actions in December of 1941 certainly did not conform with his historical image as an unrealistic idealist, who for the sake of his nebulous ideals, would destroy a viable political organization.

Party rank and file endorsement of the Thomas/NEC position was not overwhelming. In a poll the national office (NO) conducted in 1942, probably before the May national convention, forty percent responded in favor of "critical support," thirty-three percent said the SP should in no way support the war effort, twenty-three percent said the SP should "express neither support nor disagreement on the general issue of the war effort." Only four percent advocated total SP support for the war.¹⁰⁴

As soon as the first rumors of the Thomas position hit the well-developed party rumor-mill, protest mounted. Besides the Symes/Clement objections, the idea of "critical support" stunned many. "At what moment did the war change from one which Socialists could not condone to one which they should and must support?" asked one disgruntled member.¹⁰⁵ A New Jersey member, agreeing with this sentiment, wondered if the party had forgotten the main enemy was the danger of domestic fascism. The party, she wrote, was too weak to "start crusading for

the rest of the world." And if Thomas designed his position to capture more popularity he was "forgetting these [Socialist] ideals, if for mere tactics or politics, we give our support to this capitalist war."¹⁰⁶ Many who protested the NEC statement complained that to sell out socialist tradition for a few years' grace from popular hatred, was to destroy the party and its reason for existence. Hereward Senior, the executive secretary of the New York YPSL wrote the NEC that if it abandoned the party's historic strict and total condemnation of capitalism, as "critical support" appeared to do, "there can be little reason to hope that the party will ever develop into an important social factor on the American scene."¹⁰⁷ A New York City member reminded the NEC that the 1934 and 1940 anti-war resolutions "were not excursions or fantasies; they clearly spoke for today and tomorrow as well as a month ago."¹⁰⁸

Pressure from the small extreme left-wing was intense. "Socialists cannot support either side" in this imperialist conflict, proclaimed leftist Dan Rodgers of Los Angeles. The party must "strive to end the war by calling upon the masses to carry through the Socialist revolution." Rodgers eschewed the Symes position. He claimed it was nothing more than "patriotism-with-secondary-reservations." As for Thomas's call for party unity, Rodgers found it "impermissible" if unity signaled "the abandonment of the anti-imperialist war struggle." Only "a clear-cut Marxist position" on the war and "irreconcilable opposition" to the "pro-war Thomasites" could unify the party. To accept the principle of "critical support" would kill the socialist movement.¹⁰⁹

Intraparty debate raged throughout the first five months of 1942. The Socialist Party was the most democratic of American anti-capitalist political groups. A vote at the May 1942 national convention would decide the issue. In April of 1942, the NO mailed a special pre-convention issue of Hammer and Tongs to all members, devoted entirely to the debate on the SP's war stand. This one time, if never before in the short life of this intraparty discussion organ, Hammer and Tongs really sizzled.

The statement of the Newark, New Jersey Branch of the SP led off the wordy brawl. The New Jersey comrades aimed short, brutally logical punches at the midriff of "critical support." The SP, they said, had for years maintained that only a socialist economic and political system could defeat fascism. Any other system that tried would end up sinking to Hitler's level to defeat him, using military and labor conscription, restriction of free speech, and state control of production to coerce popular and business support for war. If Norman Thomas and his allies still believed this, and the New Jersey Socialists thought they did, then how could they advocate "critical support?" Perhaps because they had lost hope of achieving a socialist America with which to destroy fascism. If so, Thomas and his allies were quitters, slackers and worse - "if the hope of achieving socialism seems remote, surely without Socialism there is no hope at all." How Thomas must have blushed!¹¹⁰

The California state party's opinion was not much different, which was easy to understand, as Clement and Symes were Californians. The "California Convention Statement on War" called the NEC document

"ambiguous and evasive." The California comrades urged the party to state its position clearly in the upcoming convention, to offer leadership to all American anti-war forces. Any SP support for the war, critical or non-critical, was "wholly inconsistent with a struggle for democracy at home." At the least, the Californians hoped the convention would adopt the Symes Amendment in some form.¹¹¹

The Thomas article, "For Democratic Socialism," followed on the heels of the New Jersey and California polemics. As usual, his arguments were clear and contained biting epithets. The Socialist Party's goal, he stated, was democratic socialism. To attain that goal, socialists must deal daily with "all the practical problems" of the world, which in 1942 were bloody war and unsure peace prospects. At some point the SP should offer a workable alternative to war, like a "Peace Now" movement. But April 1942 was not that point; to offer such a plan now would lead only to a "dreadful armed truce." Non-support for the war effort was useless demagoguery until "political opposition can be made effective in action." Unless the party wished to retreat into absolute pacifism, or infantile and dangerous cries for direct action, it had little choice but to support the war effort while working to guard political democracy at home. Those who advocated a slogan of "Socialism Now," or "those who began the war shall not end it," Thomas urged, must abandon their "romantic nonsense." The Symes position would emasculate the SP, Thomas wrote, turning it into a "private wailing wall" and forcing it out of the mainstream of American politics. Thomas characterized the Symes Amendment and any other position which demanded total socialist non-support of the war as "dangerous half-

baked Bolshevism," which would attract cranks and misfits to the party, most of whom probably would be pro-fascist. After the Thomas article came one by Howard Penley, organizer of the Massachusetts State SP. Penley supported Thomas and added that the war might have some positive effects, such as raising the working class standard of living. Total support or total opposition were incorrect positions, Penley wrote, as either would isolate the party further from American political realities.¹¹²

"The war issue will trouble this convention," wrote Irving Barshop, New York State organizer, who was not famous for his flashes of brilliant polemic. But he made some interesting points in his Hammer and Tongs contribution. To those who favored a revolutionary anti-war stance, Barshop said fine, but "what program of action follows? . . . The test of any position is in its practice." Barshop supported the Symes Amendment. It would strengthen "the anti-imperialist content of that [NEC] resolution." He declared valid the fear that "critical support" would open the SP's doors to an element that would accept the democratic capitalism of the ruling class. The SP did not want the war. The party should operate in the light of that fact and not change horses in the middle of the stream.¹¹³

Barshop's article was the most inclusive and interesting in this issue of Hammer and Tongs. The New York socialist pleaded with his comrades not to split the party over the war issue. Socialists agreed on anti-imperialist peace aims and on extension of democracy in American political and economic life. Write a declaration of principles centered on these points and forget the others, Barshop urged.

His emphasis on socialism and democracy placed him squarely within the boundaries of socialist thought. And his insistence on pragmatism and faith in democracy placed him in direct line with the political thought of the progressive era, the era which gave life to the SP. His opinions in this article, and the opinions the other SP leaders expressed in this issue of Hammer and Tongs demonstrated that the party was indeed well within the mainstream of twentieth century American political thought. Those who seek to blame the old left's demise on their bungling idealism and refusal to accept the realities of American political thought and action, must seek other answers.

The remaining articles in the April 1942 pre-convention issue of Hammer and Tongs agreed with either the Thomas or the Symes/Clement position. Those who favored the Symes formula of "political non-support" emphasized socialist thought and ethics. Robin Meyers, YPSL (non-voting) delegate to the NEC, thundered, "we do not build an organization, but for the sake of its program." Travers Clement and Lillian Symes agreed, stating that cooperation with non-socialist or leftist anti-war groups before Pearl Harbor was "quite proper," as the object of cooperation was specific. The SP should not follow those organizations after the objective situation changed, after the war began, just because those ex-allies now demanded total support for the war effort. The Clement/Symes article said, in so many words, what Meyers had said--the SP must remain faithful to its theories, even if those "truths" condemned the party to death, or at best, continued impotence. This faction, the Symes/Clement faction, was vulnerable to the charge of "other-worldliness," of fanatic insistence on theoretical

purity at the cost of popular support.¹¹⁴

The national convention of the Socialist Party, held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, heeded Barshop's plea for compromise. After heated debate, it adopted a "Resolution on War and Fascism," incorporating the best paragraphs of both the Thomas and the Symes/Clement proposals. The resolution deleted Thomas's idea that the SP should "support now and continue to support in the future, those steps that are necessary for the defeat of fascism or any other totalitarian dictatorship." The convention substituted the Symes/Clement version, which stated that socialists understood that capitalism "which is destroying democracy will not and cannot conduct a war for democratic ends." The delegates refused to include the Symes/Clement phrase that "we cannot support, politically, any war conducted for imperialist aims," and substituted Thomas's phrase, "the Socialist Party does not give its blessing to this war--or any other war--as a proper method of obtaining social objectives--national or international." A rather adroit compromise, worthy of any Republican or Democratic platform committee.¹¹⁵

The resolution adopted at the national convention was a synopsis of the main points of the party's anti-war attitude, thinly glazed with an ambiguous support/non-support paragraph. In hindsight, this document was chillingly prophetic. After an almost obligatory statement that this war was but the second chapter of the imperialist World War I, the resolution proclaimed that free enterprise versus collectivism was no longer an issue.

"Free enterprise" economic theory and practice had shown its

inability to cope with the twin body-blows of depression and war. Capitalism could not "even compete with fascism in purely military terms, because an economy geared to profits and scarcity cannot match the complete and efficient production of a planned totalitarian collectivism." The question was no longer planning or laissez-faire, but what type of planning, democratic or dictatorial?

The resolution noted that the American economic system's conversion to state control since 1933 was accomplished "within a general framework of the capitalist economy, with big industry . . . playing a decisive role within the controlling state apparatus." Those who controlled big industry became those who administered the state regulatory apparatus, the "dollar-a-year" men. This development, above all else, smacked of state capitalism, state coordinated corporatism, fascism.

With the American entry into the European and Asian wars, the state-capitalist wanted to incorporate organized labor into its system, to build a ruling triad. The state used public pressure, "social and economic intimidation," appeals to "military necessity," and most importantly, absorption of labor leaders into the bureaucracy, to strip labor of its independence. The state sought to liquidate labor's "basic political criticism and dissent, to usurp labor's independent power, which was as essential to democracy in war as in peace." This statement was prophetic. Since World War II, the growth of state corporatism was evident to all who lived through the period, including Dwight Eisenhower. But also significant was the SP's insistence on the independent political and economic power of organized labor as necessary for democracy. This idea of balancing powers within the society

to insure liberty was truly American.

The SP resolution concluded that a state-controlled collective economy, run on the profit motive, could provide no real alternative to fascism. At least not an alternative attractive enough to inspire the dispossessed of the world to fight. Socialists must fight for democratic socialism, which would provide that alternative. To postpone this struggle and concentrate on an Allied military victory alone was "to lose the race to fascism."

The SP did not end the resolution on that note, for to have so done would have put the party into Thomas's "infantile romantic" category. Instead, the 1942 convention proposed a specific set of actions designed on "the fundamental premise that DEMOCRACY political and economic is the primary concern" of all socialists and the only workable answer to the threat of domestic war-spawned fascism. The party promised to fight for "the building and strengthening of all present democratic institutions of the people, labor unions, co-operatives and other functional groups, as a bulwark against the growing totalitarian political and economic powers of the State." Specifically, the party promised to fight for all people's constitutional rights, for full racial equality, economic, political and social, for repeal of all Asiatic exclusion laws, for abolition of concentration camps in which the state had imprisoned innocent Japanese-Americans, for repeal of the poll tax, for the rights of conscientious objectors, and for a democratic rationing system under which the masses would have a voice in government rationing decisions.¹¹⁶

This program was at once prophetic, realistic, and sensitive

to the needs of all Americans, the dispossessed, the middle class, the working class, and the wealthy. It was a uniquely American document, fueled by a spirit of charity, self-help and democracy, political and economic.

NOTES

Chapter II

1. Thomas Diary, 13 & 14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176.
2. See, for example, Daniel Bell, "The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons, eds., Socialism and American Life, Volume I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America (New York: Macmillan, 1955); Johnpoll, Pacifist's Progress.
3. Thomas to Stokes, 24 January 1941, NTP, Box 19; cf., Thomas, "American Democracy and the future of the Socialist Party," memo to NEC, nd [late 1940, early 1941], ibid., Box 150. It was this fear of executive power which lay behind many of the SP's attempts to block war-related legislation, like conscription and Lend-Lease.
4. Members of the SDF were the most vociferous critics of the SP war stand. See editorials in New Leader, especially 13 April 1940; 11 May 1940; cf., R. Grenville to editor, ibid., 13 April 1940, 8; Sidney Hook, "Leftist War Stand Ignores Consequences to Socialists," ibid., 31 August 1940, 7.
5. Thomas, speech, "How We Shall Fight Hitlerism," 4 September 1940, 3, SP Duke, Roll 40; the speech was broadcast over NBC radio at 10:45 P.M.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 4.
8. Ibid.
9. See Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Pattern for U.S. Totalitarianism," Call, 16 August 1941, 5.
10. Full delineation of the SP's belief that capitalists would not produce enough to fight a war, and the concomitant necessity for government collectivism can be found in "Arms Makers Willing to Save U.S. at Cost Plus 10%," Call, 24 August 1940, 1; Herbert Zam, speech,

"Socialism and the War," 5 March 1941, SP Duke, Roll 44; Thomas, speech, "Stumbling Toward Total War," included in Minutes of NEC meeting, 2-4 May 1941, ibid.; Richard Lloyd, "OPM Data Indicates Big Firms for Production Stoppages," Call, 31 May 1941, 1; Kenneth Foley, "Defense Failures Mount," ibid., 28 June 1941; "Questions and Answers," ibid., 16 August 1941, 4; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Pattern for U.S. Totalitarianism," ibid., 5; Interestingly, the pro-war SDF recognized this problem and charged U.S. industrialists with isolationism. See Ferdinand Lundberg, "Money Mentality . . . Slows Defense," New Leader, 19 October 1940, 4; Bruce Oliver, "Isolation Yields Bigger Profits . . .," ibid., 30 November 1940, 5; Daniel Bell, "Defense Monopoly Hits Small Business, Chokes Production," ibid., 2 August 1941, 1.

11. Thomas, speech, "America and the War," 5 September 1940, 1-2, SP Duke, Roll 41; Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 8 June 1940, 3; Thomas to Marguerite Roseberg, 28 January 1941, NTP, Box 19; Thomas to Henry Goddard Leach, editor of Fortune, 26 May 1940, ibid., Box 17; Zam, "Against the Imperialist War," Socialist Review, 6 (September-October 1939), 2; quote from Travers Clement to NEC, "Statement Adopted by National Campaign Committee," 21 June '40, SP Duke, Roll 39.

12. There was, to be sure, a pacifist minority in the SP, led by NEC member Winston Dancis, who headed the SP's Committee of CO's during the war. See the SP Duke collection, Rolls 39-47 for the correspondence of this committee. Especially interesting is the recurrent idea that pacifists were drawn to the party not so much for its anti-war stand but for the promise of a war-free world that socialism seemed to furnish.

13. Swanberg, Norman Thomas, 215-18.

14. See letters to CO's from the National Office, various places in SP Duke, Rolls 39-47.

15. For Thomas's view of pacifists, see Thomas Diary, 13-14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176; Thomas to Maynard Krueger, 11 December 1941, ibid., Box 21.

16. "Declaration of Principles - Majority Report," 1940 SP convention, SP Duke, Roll 38.

17. Thomas Diary, 13-14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176; cf., F. L. Carsten, The Rise of Fascism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 46-8, 235.

18. Quote is from Thomas's 1936 definition of fascism, quoted in John Scott Wilson, "Norman Thomas: Critic of New America," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1965), 288.

19. Carsten, Rise of Fascism, 54, 232-37; cf., SP NEC, "Against the Imperialist War," Socialist Review, 6 (September-October 1939), 1; this NEC resolution pointed out the middle class and its so-called democracy had been instrumental in Hitler's rise to power.

20. V. F. Calverton, "What is Fascism?" manuscript, [1933 or 1934], 2, V. F. Calverton Papers, New York Public Library, Box 21.

21. Ibid. cf., Wilson, "Norman Thomas: Critic of New America," 288 for Thomas's 1936 definition of fascism, very close to Calverton's; see also Theodore Dan, "Socialism and War," Socialist Review, 6 (September-October 1937), 11.

22. Alfred Baker Lewis, "Political Democracy - Blind Alley of Road to Power?" American Socialist Quarterly, 4 (June 1935), 41.

23. See editorial, "What do They Mean - Democracy?" Call, 27 May 1939, 4.

24. Quote from Al Hamilton, "The Issue Remains," The Socialist, 15 November 1940, 1-2, SP Duke, Roll 130; cf., Zam, "Munich and After," Socialist Review, 6 (September-October 1938), 3; the Christian Science Monitor, 8 April 1940, 2, reported that Thomas and the SP "turned a cold shoulder to both the USSR and the National Socialists."
.... "

25. [Aaron] Levenstein, "New Statement," typescript, 9 February 1941, 6, SP Duke, Roll 43; Mary Hillyer, "Keep America Out of War Statement," 22 July 1941, ibid., Roll 45; The Socialist, 15 May 1941, ibid., Roll 130; Thomas to Max Raskin, 6 March 1941, NTP, Box 19; Thomas explained in this letter that unless the United States could present a truly democratic face to the world, other nations would feel as though they had to deal with the fascists on German terms. The United States had to provide democratic support for the democratic aspirations of the masses.

26. For examples of SP critics chiding the party for its idealistic war stand, see editorial in New Leader, 13 April 1940, 8; ibid., 20 April 1940, 8; ibid., 11 May 1940, 8; Sidney Hook, "Leftist War Stand Ignores Consequences to Socialists' Struggles if Hitler Wins," ibid., 31 August 1940, 7; Alfred Baker Lewis to Frank McAllister, 12 July 1940, SP Duke Roll 39; Lewis was one of the significant number of party members to leave the party over the war stand question; see above, Chapter I.

27. Thomas to editor, NYT, 24 July 1939, 12.

28. "Socialists Vote Anti-War Plea," NYT, 24 April 1938, 34; cf., "Notes on Current Events," Socialist Review, 6 (July-August 1938), 17.

29. Poll reported in Milwaukee Leader, 23 December 1938, 6.
30. Thomas in NYT, 27 January 1938, 11; Thomas, "Dangerous Illusions About the Next War," Socialist Review, 6 (March-April 1939), 4; "After the Lend-Lease Bill," The Socialist, 15 March 1941, 1, SP Duke, Roll 130.
31. "Local KAOW Pushes Ludlow Petition Campaign," The Bulletin (Morningside Heights, New York Branch), 14 March 1940, 1, 3, SP Duke, Roll 131.
32. For further pro-Ludlow statements, see Thomas's columns in the Call, between 1938 and mid-1941. See especially Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Let the People Vote on War," Call, 8 March 1941, 5; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: America on the Eve of War," Call, 31 May 1941, 5.
33. "After the Lendlease Bill," The Socialist, 15 March 1941, 1; see NEC Minutes, 2-4 May 1941, SP Duke Roll 44 for NEC's recommendation that all party members push for Ludlow's passage.
34. "Roosevelt 'Power' Decried by Thomas," NYT, 24 January 1938, 6.
35. Thomas to Frank Boscaine, 18 March 1941, NTP, Box 19.
36. See any of Thomas's columns in Call, 1939-1941; see also Travers Clement to Loring Wood, 25 May 1939, SP Duke, Roll 36; Clement asks Wood to undertake the task of "a special study of what would be likely to happen to minority groups immediately upon the declaration of war, what new laws have piled up which would affect us which were not in operation at the beginning of the last world war, what are the exact plans of the federal government insofar as they can be determined." Clement's letter is a classic example of socialist resignation. Let's do what we can even if it is next to nothing.
37. For the story of Thomas's efforts in the civil liberties realm during the 1930s, see Swanberg, Norman Thomas, 158-63, 221-28; Mitchell, Mean Things, 38-41, 76-78, 123-26 and passim.
38. See especially Thomas's columns in the Call immediately before and after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; cf., Thomas in NYT, 22 September 1939, 21; SP NEC "Against the Imperialist War," Socialist Review, 6 (September-October 1939), 5.
39. See Swanberg, Norman Thomas, 166-99.
40. Travers Clement, Memo to NEC, "War and Militarism," 21 June 1940, 3, SP Duke, Roll 39.
41. Jack Sessions, et al., "Fight Against Fascism," Hammer

and Tongs, October 1941, 3. The authors of this article were members of the Young Peoples' Socialist League (YPSL), usually more to the left than its parent organization. But on the topic of civil liberties, the SP and the YPSL were in agreement.

42. The SDF's New Leader was especially paranoid of a fifth column in the United States. See Jerry Voorhis, "Insecurity Greater Threat to United States Than Axis," New Leader, 5 August 1939, 5; Ben Stolberg, "Pact Exposes Stalin's 'Fifth Column' in U.S. Labor, Progressive Circles," ibid., 16 September 1939, 5; "Mailing Permit of Ham Fish Spreads Antisemitic Tracts," ibid., 30 August 1941, 1; Vincent Rogers, "Fascists, Coughlinites, Communists, Bundists Aid Republican Campaign," ibid., 21 September 1940, 1; "Now that War has Come, Each to His Place," ibid., 13 December 1941, 1.

43. Thomas to Ernest K. Lindley, nd [1939 or 1940], NTP, Box 16.

44. Thomas, speech, "Statement on Conscription," 16 October 1940, SP Duke, Roll 42; cf., Henry N. Dorris, "Draft Dodgers Get Prison Under Bill," NYT, 27 July 1940, 5.

45. Judge Jacob Pankin, "Conscription Potentially a Threat to Our Freedom, But Dictated By Nazi Threat," New Leader, 10 August 1940, 5.

46. Aaron Levenstein, "N.E.C. Statement," 9 February 1941, 6, SP Duke, Roll 43.

47. "Public Statement on Conscription," 28 August 1940, ibid., Roll 47.

48. "Bosses Attack," YPSL Solidarity, September 1940, 4, ibid., Roll 132; Arthur G. McDowell, Memo to NEC, "Conscription and Organized Labor," September 1940, ibid., Roll 41; SP Press Release, "Norman Thomas Attacks Conscription . . ." 9 July 1940, ibid., Roll 39.

49. "Stop Conscription," Illinois Campaigner, 24 May and 22 June 1940, 2, ibid., Roll 132.

50. Headline, Call, 30 August 1940, 1; "Menace of Compulsory Military Training," ibid., 27 July 1940, 4; Henry N. Dorris, "Draft Dodgers Get Prison Under Bill," NYT, 27 July 1940, 5.

51. Thomas, speech, "The America that Might be Ours," 29 October 1940. Thomas noted that if the American machinery was not used for and controlled by the people, it would be used for armament economics, militarism, imperialism and war; cf., Thomas to Harry T. Smith, 17 January 1941, NTP, Box 19. In this letter, Thomas emphasized the need for "total democracy" to concentrate on the war question in 1941 to avert American war entry, and tries to still Smith's anger at

the party's decision to concentrate on the war question in 1941 to the exclusion of its usual economics-oriented line. Essentially Thomas maintained that the war question and socialist economics were one and the same. See also Herbert Zam, "No Support for Imperialism," Socialist Review, 6 (September 1937), 25.

52. SP NEC, "Against the Imperialist War," ibid., (September-October 1939), 2.

53. Thomas, speech to the League for Industrial Democracy (LID), reported in NYT, 18 June 1939, 7.

54. For good explanations of Thomas's philosophy in the 1930s, see Frank A. Warren, An Alternative Vision: The Socialist Party in the 1930s (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), 123-33; James C. Duram, Norman Thomas (New York: Twayne, 1974), 56-69.

55. Thomas, "Collective Security and Socialism," Socialist Review, 6 (May-June 1938), 15; cf., "Pro-War Forces Defer Anti-War Referendum," Call, 15 January 1938, 1, 5; "NEC Maps 6-Point Drive Against War," ibid., 4 October 1941, 7; Thomas in NYT, 5 April 1941, 7; Thomas to Gerry Allard, 5 June 1940, SP Duke, Roll 39.

56. "Current Repressions Against Workers Part of War Preparations," Call, 12 February 1938, 7.

57. See especially Tucker P. Smith, Keep America Out of War Speakers Handbook (Detroit: np, 1938), Chapter 4, "Taking Profit Out of War," in NTP, Box 155.

58. "Proposed Platform of KAOWC," [May 1936?], ibid.; cf., "A New War Looms Large on the European Horizon," Call, 11 September 1937, 1; Thomas, "Dangerous Illusions About the Next War," Socialist Review, 6 (March-April 1939), 4; "Proposed Resolution on War," in 1940 national convention Agenda, SP Duke, Roll 38.

59. Zam, "Munich and After," Socialist Review, 6 (September-October 1939), 2.

60. "War on Capitalism! War on War!" Call, 2 April 1938, 1.

61. Venkataramani, "Norman Thomas," 320; "Socialists Vote Anti-War Plan," NYT, 24 April 1938, 34.

62. "War and Revolution," Call, 28 August 1937, 4; cf., editorial by Thomas, ibid., 24 February 1938, 5; Zam, "No Support For Imperialism," Socialist Review, 6 (September 1937), 25.

63. Venkataramani, "Norman Thomas," 352; "Panic Over Panay," Call, 1 January 1938, 4.

64. See, for example, Arthur McDowell, "Local and Branch Bulletin," 31 March 1939, 1, 2, SP Duke, Roll 39; McDowell later resigned his position as National Office labor secretary when the party refused to alter its war stand and support aid to the allies.

65. Henry Haskell, "Class-Collaboration - A Policy of Ruin," Call, 1 October 1938, 2; Gus Tyler, "Should Labor Back a War Against Hitler?" ibid., 13 November 1938, 8; Henry Haskell, "Popular Front - Middle Class Weapon," Socialist Review, 6 (July-August 1938), 10; SP anti-war plank reprinted in Call, 25 December 1937, 8.

66. Quoted in Venkataramani, "Norman Thomas," 342; Hoan so remarked during the debate on the war plank of the 1934 Detroit Declaration of Principles.

67. Quoted in ibid., 302.

68. Editorial in Call, 5 February 1938, 4; for SP reaction to the Popular Front; see Zam, "No Support for Imperialism," Socialist Review, 6 (September 1937), 13-15; Sidney Hook, "Thoughts in Season," ibid., (May-June 1938), 7; Thomas, "Collective Security and Socialism," ibid., 4-5, 15; Henry Haskell, "Popular Front - Middle Class Weapon," ibid., (July-August 1938), 8-11; Haskell, "Collective Security, Litvinoff's Frankenstein," Call, 13 May 1939, 4.

69. Lillian Symes to Oskar Lange, 7 November 1939, NTP, Box 16.

70. Thomas to Maynard Krueger, 11 December 1941, ibid., Box 24.

71. Thomas to Franklin Roosevelt, 17 July 1940, and FDR's reply, 31 July 1940, NTP, Box 17; FDR accused Thomas of getting "things a bit twisted" by suggesting that the president was seeking to build the power of the executive office.

72. "Program of the Socialist Party for Immediate Action Against the March Toward War," included in the minutes of the NEC meeting of 19-21 September 1941, SP Duke, Roll 45.

73. For an example of the party's increasing emphasis on government action, see Thomas, "It's Still an Imperialist War," Modern Quarterly, 11 (Fall 1939), 16-17; Thomas in Newsweek, 9 (9 July 1940), 26-27; "Report of the Anti-War Committee," included in the minutes of the NEC meeting, 2-4 May 1941, SP Duke, Roll 44.

74. Zam, Speech, "Socialism and War," 5 March 1941, ibid.

75. See Chapter I for details of the war stand debate.

76. Travers Clement to Arthur McDowell, 25 June 1940, SP

Duke, Roll 39.

77. Thomas to Maynard Krueger, 11 December 1941, NTP, Box 21.

78. Sam Romer to Gerry Allard, [16 July 1940], SP Duke, Roll 39.

79. See National Action Committee Statement, Press Release, 9 December 1941, ibid., Roll 46; cf., Call, 20 December 1941, 1.

80. Irving Barshop, "It's the Deed! Not the Word!" Hammer and Tongs, April 1942, 4, SP Duke, Roll 130.

81. Thomas to Maynard Krueger, 11 December 1941, NTP, Box 21.

82. "Typscript of Proposed NAC Statement," 8 December 1941, SP Duke, Roll 46.

83. For examples of socialists urging the party to declare its unrestrained support for the war, see John Lester Lewine's article in Hammer and Tongs, April 1942, SP Duke, Roll 130; cf., Wisconsin state executive committee statement, 13 December 1941, ibid., Roll 46.

84. Thomas's speech reported in NYT, 8 April 1940, 5.

85. Quote from SP NEC "Against the Imperialist War," Socialist Review, 6 (September-October 1939), 1.

86. Thomas Diary, 14 December 1941, NTP, Box 176.

87. Ben Fischer to NEC, nd [late 1941], SP Duke, Roll 46.

88. Herman and Pauline Erickson to Travers Clement, 16 December 1941, ibid.

89. The SDF never left any doubt as to its war stand. Even before Pearl Harbor, the New Leader was demanding American participation. See especially "War Aims, Peace Terms, and the World After the War," ibid., 8 August 1941, 2.

90. For an excellent discussion of the formation of the UDA, see Robert Clayton Pierce, "Liberals in the Cold War: Union for Democratic Action and Americans for Democratic Action, 1940-1949," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1979), 15.

91. All the quotations in this paragraph are from Thomas, Diary, 14 December 1941, NTP, Box 176.

92. Ibid.; Thomas to Devere Allen, 11 December 1941, ibid., Box 21; Thomas to Maynard Krueger, 11 December 1941, ibid.

93. See SP Duke, Roll 46 for various letters between 8 December 1941 and May 1942 which debate Thomas's conclusions. Many support his reasoning, but almost one-half the letters the National Office received came to different conclusions based on approximately the same reasoning.

94. For NEC statement, see Call, 17 January 1942, 2, 7; Minutes of NEC meeting, 19-21 December 1941, SP Duke, Roll 46; William Hollister to Robert Parker, 9 December 1941, ibid., for outline of feelings which paralleled those stated by the NEC. See also George Crouch to editor, Call, 17 January 1942, 4.

95. Dan Rogers to NEC, 23 May 1942, 4, SP Duke, Roll 46.

96. Thomas to Maynard Krueger, 11 December 1941, NTP, Box 21.

97. See state by Clement in Call, 17 January 1942, 7; cf., copy of Symes amendment in minutes of NEC meeting, 19-21 December 1941, SP Duke, Roll 46.

98. For voting and debate, see minutes of NEC meeting, 19-21 December 1941, especially the first four pages, in ibid. See also Irving Barshop to Robert Parker, 24 December 1941; telegram, Frank McCallister to Travers Clement, 31 December 1941, ibid., for mail votes and reasons.

99. Minutes of NEC meeting, 19-21 December 1941, 4, ibid.

100. See Pierce, "Liberals in the Cold War," passim; William L. O'Neill, The Last Romantic: A Life of Max Eastman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), passim.

101. Thomas Diary, 14 December 1941, 3 January 1942, NTP, Box 176.

102. Thomas, "Statement Against the Symes Amendment," nd [December 1941], 2, SP Duke, Roll 46.

103. Ibid., 1, 2; copy of this statement also in NTP, Box 156.

104. See "Poll on War," nd [pre May 1942], SP Duke, Roll 46; the poll shows that mail to the National Office ran a little over fifty percent for the Thomas position.

105. Sam Horn to "Trav and Bob" [Clement and Parker], 18 December 1941, ibid.

106. Janice Lyle Green to NEC, 24 January 1942, ibid.

107. Herward Senior to NEC, 12 December 1941, ibid.

108. David Telchin to NEC, 19 December 1941, ibid.; for other interesting anti-critical-support opinions, see especially Chicago YPSL statement to NEC, nd [December 1941]; Walter Uphoff to NEC, 15 December 1941; Amanda Lee to NEC, 14 December 1941, all in ibid.

109. Dan Rogers to NEC, "Resolution on War," 23 May 1942, ibid. Interestingly, someone at the National Office pencilled above the title of this piece the words "from Cannon personally," an allusion no doubt to the leader of the Trotskyites. The war stand of the Socialist Workers (Trotskyite) Party was much the same as Rogers. For other leftist attacks on "critical support," see Philip Liely to Travers Clement, 30 January 1942; Rosalee P. Thompson to NEC, 10 February 1942; Telegram, Stanley Rapoport to SP national convention, 30 May 1942; Robert J. Pearsall to NEC, 15 February 1942, 22 June 1942, all in ibid.; see also Constance Wagner to Natalie Fleischman, 8 February 1943, ibid., Roll 47.

110. "Newark Branch Statement on War," Hammer and Tongs, April 1942, 2, ibid., Roll 128.

111. "California Convention Statement on War," Hammer and Tongs, 2-3, ibid.

112. Thomas, "For Democratic Socialism;" Howard Penley, "Toward a Sane War Position," Hammer and Tongs, 3-4, ibid.

113. Irving Barshop, "It's the Deed! Not the Word!" Hammer and Tongs, 4, ibid.

114. See the Meyer and the Clement/Symes articles in Hammer and Tongs, 5-8, ibid.

115. Official SP resolution and synopsis of both the Thomas and Clement/Symes positions are in Call, 12 June 1942, 5-6; for a synopsis of the debate in the national convention, see "National Convention Minutes," 30 May-1 June 1942, 6 (31 May), in SP Duke, Roll 46; ibid., contains typescripts of two documents, although no authors are given. The "Substitute Statement on War," appears substantially to be the final resolution. The typescript labeled "Socialist Statement on War," appears to be Thomas's. No copy seems to exist of the Clement/Symes version, except for excerpts in the Call. See also Pearl Weiner to Harry Fleischman, 7 July 1942, SP Duke, Roll 46, for proof that compromise was an dangerous to party stability as rigid factionalization. Weiner reported that "some people are leaving [the party] because they think the war resolution is too pro-war . . . and some are leaving because it is anti-war - the situation is what one might call screwy!"

116. All of the above is found in "Socialist Resolution on War and Fascism," Call, 12 June 1942, 5-6.

CHAPTER III

Critical Support: The SP and World War II

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Above all, socialists were Americans. They reacted to the war in the same manner as their countrymen. They cheered allied victories, suffered through defeats. They lost friends and relatives, served in the armed forces and contributed to fund raising drives. Socialists endured the dark year of 1942, the year of defeat, stoically. They cheered lustily 1944, the year of victories. In one major area, however, socialists were different from most Americans. SP members and sympathizers were as afraid of internal repression as they were of the victory of the fascist forces overseas. Instead of focusing solely on Europe and the Pacific, socialists kept one eye on the war, the other on domestic events.

Socialist "critical support" for the United States' war effort indicated party support for an allied victory over fascism as a major social goal. Norman Thomas and the party were critical of the hows and whys of the war effort, but not of its goal. The socialist response to the war, and their wartime political actions again demonstrated their commitment to remaining a viable political alternative in the American political circus. Socialists designed party philosophy and actions to negotiate society through the shallow channel between fascist and com-

munist totalitarianism. Although the SP stood outside the mainstream of American political and economic thought, it shared many of the same assumptions, the most significant of which was American exceptionalism. As outsiders, as individuals who sought no gain from the status quo, socialists had a clear grasp of the problems and promises of American life. They were conscious of contradictions between the American goals of equality, justice, freedom and peace and American realities of racism, poverty, industrial slavery, long before those problems intruded into the average person's life. The party was cognizant of the dangers American society faced from racism, imperialism and growing state control. During the war the party tried, within its theory-boundaries, to combat those dangers as best it could. And all the while, it believed that if a just society were possible anywhere, it was possible in the United States.

While the party was optimistic about the chances to save the patient, it was not about the patient's desire for salvation. "Shouting the praises of Democracy, the American people march straight towards an almost totalitarian dictatorship, based on popular approval, guided not by the actions . . . of legislatures, but by the haphazard and uncoordinated Gallup Polls. It is indeed later than we think."¹ Oscar Ameringer, the Will Rogers of the working class press, summed up the socialist attitude. His opinion bore witness to the pain of recognition of social ills compounded by an inability to do more to solve them: "Nobody asked us yet," he wrote, "but if we were called upon to draw a picture of contemporary civilization, we'd draw a bunch of naked blind men trying to pick each other's pockets with pitchforks."²

Within the boundaries of a rapidly maturing twentieth-century civilization, the party charged full speed ahead to fight the various dragons of war-spawned hysteria and intolerance and to win the peace, to guard against future wars. Goals with which all Americans could agree.

The party's struggle to protect Americans' civil liberties during the war was the keystone of the fight "toward democratic socialism as the alternative to bureaucratic collectivism," Thomas reported in a radio address soon after Pearl Harbor. Unfortunately, most of the stations which had carried Thomas's speeches before the war refused to broadcast this one because it contained "controversial material."³ Socialists believed American political democracy could not survive without the basic liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. But they recognized their society's propensity to subordinate liberty to military necessity in wartime, although socialists were aware as the war progressed that government repression was much less harsh than it had been in World War I. When "liberals" appeared acquiescent to government-sponsored repression, socialists were scared. Lillian Symes wrote that democracy could not exist without "diversity . . . originality . . . intellectual and artistic integrity," that is, without its freedom to create outside or independent of government or even social control. The vitality of American life would expire rapidly if the American government accepted an "artist-in-uniform" attitude.⁴

Liberals did not seem to worry much about civil liberties. They appeared to Thomas and other socialists more than pleased to support government repression. "Your theory about what should and shouldn't be suppressed would only be tenable," Thomas wrote Freda

Kirchwey, "if a very superior sort of god were on the job in Washington." Roosevelt, even assuming he could judge fairly each case on its merits, was not immortal. "Principles once established are apt to outlive men."⁵

That self-styled liberals were willing to subvert democracy for any reason seemed ominous.⁶ Even if liberal cries for selective repression met with little action, their attitude was anti-democratic. The government, not heeding the lessons of World War I, moved with alarming speed to silence war protest. Government censorship, first under Archibald MacLeish's Office of Facts and Figures and later Elmer Davis's Office of War Information, the Post Office banning of "subversive" materials, and the government-sponsored racist suppression of Japanese-Americans on the west coast, all spelled tyranny to socialists. Within one year of the Japanese attack, Thomas's pre-Pearl Harbor predictions seemed tragically correct.⁷

To protect civil liberties from concentrated government attack was no easy task. The 1940 passage of the Smith Act signaled the opening salvo against free expression. The law made it illegal to advocate the violent overthrow of the United States government. Thomas urged Roosevelt to veto the act, complaining that it was an example of using fascist tactics to fight fascism.⁸ Throughout the war, the government used the measure to strike at groups it considered, often for odd reasons, subversive to the war effort.

The first group to feel the government's lash was ex-communist Joseph Cannon's Socialist Workers Party (Trotskyite). The SWP was an extremely small faction, even by American radical standards. Its

strength was in Minneapolis, in the local Teamsters Union #520. In July 1941, the government moved against the Minneapolis SWP members, arresting, trying and convicting them under the Smith Act.

The SP resisted as best it could. The government's action, according to the Call, was a "despotic act . . . an assault upon the freedom we are urged to spread at the point of a bayonet abroad." The very idea that this small radical faction would present any danger, let alone a clear and present one, to the United States government "so outrages common sense that it would be a waste of space to argue the question."⁹ Certainly Cannon and his fellows had "done some wild talking," but to convict them of that crime under the Smith Act would "establish a precedent that . . . can be used anytime, anywhere the government has local support to silence or punish anyone who dares to criticize the Administration's foreign policy. . . ." ¹⁰

The party did not fight alone. The SDF-controlled New Leader and the New Republic and Nation rebelled at the government's action. Only the communist party press supported the Justice Department in this instance, but then the CP supported anything the Roosevelt Administration did during the war. Even Time magazine was not convinced that the SWP posed a danger to American security. The Luce publication, which prided itself so objectively on its objectivity, limited its comment to an observation that Roosevelt's friend, "Uncle Dan Tobin," head of the Teamsters Union, "had good reason to rejoice" about the arrests. Time accepted widespread rumors that the case was Roosevelt's political payment to Tobin, who feared the radical control of one of his strongest locals.¹¹ Socialists received like support when they protested Post

Office suppression of the Militant, the SWP organ, in late 1942.¹²

Thomas and the party did not limit their fight to maintain civil liberties in wartime to the defense of fellow leftists. Thomas believed that "American democracy could be very seriously jeopardized by the conviction of even the most undesirable defendants under a law fought by all lovers of civil liberty and under wartime prejudice." He recognized that the Smith Act was an anti-conspiracy law and perceived the danger to civil liberty when the central government confused intent with commission of a criminal act. Thomas received no liberal support at all when he defended American nazis using this rationale.¹³

Thomas and the party even urged Roosevelt to release Earl Browder from jail, not because they thought he was innocent, but because they believed that a five-year sentence for traveling under a false passport was unconstitutional, an example of cruel and unusual punishment. The SP commitment to civil liberties was total. It had to be-- without political democracy, all hope of economic democracy was lost. And an American radical party has little but hope upon which to run.¹⁴

Hope was the fuel for SP action to oppose Administration programs the party viewed as dangerous to political democracy in America. Socialists fought various proposals for "total mobilization" or "total conscription" of labor which surfaced throughout the war. "Under no circumstances is the right of the state to take an indefinite period of a man's life and make him do its bidding consistent with liberty," thundered Thomas.¹⁵

Through the war years, various groups sponsored legislation designed to centralize control of labor in the hands of the federal

executive. Roosevelt first tried to exercise domination over labor by executive fiat. He appointed Indiana's ex-governor Paul V. McNutt head of the War Manpower Board. Socialists were enraged. McNutt was a "Hoosier Hitler," and a strike breaker.¹⁶ Thomas noted in his diary that all schemes for total mobilization--labor draft, women draft, extension of the draft to eighteen and forty year olds--were "fascist." He did not alter this opinion the rest of his life.¹⁷

Socialists opposed total mobilization as slavery "in the strictest moral and legal sense," as the Supreme Court defined it.¹⁸ Thomas suspected administration cries for labor control were to counteract military mishandling of manpower. Thomas judged that Roosevelt desired a large military braced with total government control of the economy as a "trump card at the peace table with respect . . . to our present allies." The president's demands were evidence of his growing lust for power, at home and abroad. America's situation in the war did not warrant a labor draft; the administration had not exhausted voluntary means of obtaining workers. To draft some men for the profit of others was totally undemocratic.¹⁹ Total conscription of society, especially near the end of the war, meant only one thing to socialists, that Roosevelt was "looking forward to the continuance of a completely militarist state under which workers were perpetually controlled." Legislation for total mobilization was "totalitarian in technique" and "fascist in concept."²⁰ Certainly, SP leaders misinterpreted Roosevelt's intentions.

Total mobilization legislation never passed both houses of Congress. The SP may have had something to do with the failure. It

was impossible to gauge the impact of Thomas's and other SP leaders' numerous trips to testify before various congressional committees, but to assume the party had no effect at all is foolish. The SP did what it could with what it had, noticeably little, but in this case, obvious enough.

During the war the party stressed attempts to promote economic democracy through advocacy of a tax on war profits and an interest in small business and its fate. Small business was democratic, monopolies were not. Socialist support for small business, the petite bourgeois, as democratic, showed the party's shift away from classical Marxism toward a more general emphasis on any and all forms of economic democracy. Critical support dictated a fight to distribute war profits equitably throughout the society, as the fruits of a vicious yet necessary effort to stem the tide of militant totalitarianism.

Soon after Pearl Harbor party spokesmen noted a curious American political phenomenon. The two major parties talked incessantly about small business but did little to foster it. The administration did nothing to arrest the drift toward big business control of the nation's economic life. Only large corporations appeared to receive war-production contracts from an administration supposedly attuned solely to the needs of the common man. Big business seemed to be taking on all the functions of the government during the war; hence the socialists' extreme fear of growing American fascism. Only big business appeared interested in postwar planning. Look at big business advertisements, wrote Lillian Symes in 1942. They were all the same. They extolled their own patriotism and intimated that all that really

stood between Hitler and New Jersey was United States Steel, General Motors and General Electric. "In short," Symes wrote, the lesson big business is pushing is that "democracy is merely another name for private enterprise and we can't get rid of one without sacrificing the other." If democracy is free enterprise, and free enterprise is big business, then big business is government. Symes termed this disgusting development the "Big Business blitzkrieg."²¹

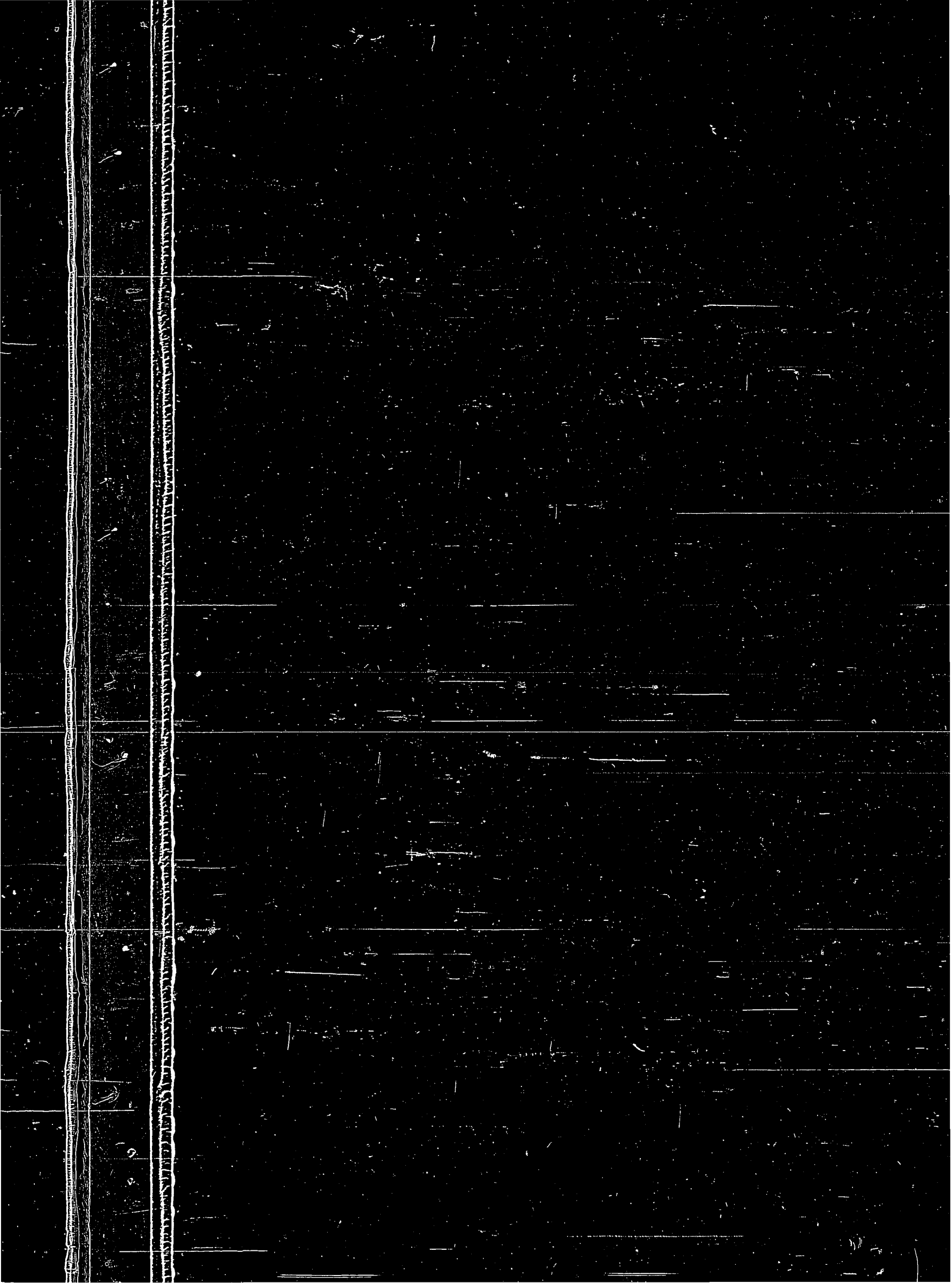
The only sane method of financing the war, and of distributing its blood-money throughout society, was through progressive taxation--excise, gift, estate, corporate and private income taxes. Even Roosevelt believed this. No one group should wax fat from war. If it had to be fought, its profits should go to the organism which fights it, the society. Since the New Deal had done nothing to re-distribute income, perhaps the war might. Paradoxically, most socialists believed only democratic socialism could re-distribute the national income effectively but simultaneously viewed such redistribution as a first step toward democratic socialism. Socialist theory was not always clear or consistent. But one way or another, the party had to work for taxation of war profits. They were totally unsuccessful, as was Roosevelt.²²

Any measures which guarded or increased American political and economic democracy the SP joyously supported. The general outline of the party's program stressed these two goals as absolute prerequisites for democratic socialism. Increasingly in the war years a new issue found its way into the SP demands, an issue as important to democratic socialism as political and economic liberty. "In the generation that

lies ahead," Thomas lectured American soldiers in 1944, "the most irrational and perhaps the strongest and most dangerous prejudice is racial. It threatens us with riots at home as well as abroad."²³ Racism in wartime America gave "rise to the chief danger to civil liberties;" the ruling class could and would use it to exploit all workers, white and non-white.²⁴

Thomas and other SP leaders attacked white racial prejudice stridently. "Either you advance toward real democracy and take the Negro with you," wrote leftist YPSL Robin Meyers, "or you go backwards to racialism and fascism."²⁵ Racist America could no more hope for a postwar world of peace and stability than could Nazi Germany. "In the generation to come, white supremacy will be as incompatible with peace as the Nazi doctrine of the master race."²⁶ It was "silly" to try to destroy odious Nazi racism in Europe while condoning the same ideas at home.²⁷

Since its organization in 1901, the Socialist Party linked its position on black rights to its general economic program. "The Socialist understands clearly that the Negro problem is basically a labor problem and can find its eventual solution only in the industrial field," wrote theorist Ernest Doerfler in 1933. Doerfler judged that the party should make only one concession to the special circumstances of black American life. Socialists should understand that they would have to wage "a longer and harder fight to help Negro workers obtain social and economic equality than is required . . . for white workers." So socialists presumed the communist demand for black self-determination was foolish and harmful to the extreme. It substituted the weak bond



of race for the stronger one of economic class.²⁸ "Race prejudice is based essentially on . . . economic exploitation of the poor by the rich. Any system which abolishes the exploitation of workers strikes a death blow at race prejudice."²⁹

Socialist demands for black Americans during the war were radical. In June 1943, the NEC passed a multi-faceted program to correct racial abuse in America, to guarantee blacks a more equitable existence, even in a "free enterprise" economy. The NEC demanded that Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) be revitalized and made permanent, that government action should outlaw the poll-tax and lynching. The SP's National Committee wanted government-funded low cost housing for all races, legislation to prevent educational discrimination, a desegregated armed force and union structures. The SP desired to obtain a fair share of the welfare state for all its citizens. The NEC demands were a blueprint of black demands in the 1960s.³⁰

The party supported A. Phillip Randolph's proposed 1941 and 1943 marches on Washington and related attempts to put teeth into the FEPC, although few SP members felt the agency would or could do much good. This bureaucratic agency, wrote Washington local organizer Albert Hamilton, would probably turn into another New Deal platitude, exactly what occurred.³¹ Socialists charged Roosevelt with conspiring with the communist party to "sabotage" black rights through his compulsive desire to win the war at any cost. The party was in the forefront of those organizations which urged the government to use its power to ameliorate the plight of blacks in America.³² As Roosevelt and his administration drifted further from the original promise of the FEPC,

the SP increased its agitation for legislation, which unlike executive fiat, the government could not ignore on whim.³³

The party was idealistically adamant on the question of race relations, even at the risk of alienating southern members. George H. Couch, state secretary of the Arkansas organization, wrote to National Secretary Harry Fleischman in 1942 that the SP should not stress a "crusade for social equality for the Negro. I'm afraid this mistake will mean political suicide for the party. The South I'm sure will never accept this status." Couch claimed to agree with the party's position, especially its emphasis on economic and political equality. But why bring in social relations? That just made his organizational efforts much more difficult.³⁴

Fleischman replied quickly and none too diplomatically. He avowed that the party's support for black rights was not opportunistic as Couch charged; the SP national office did not care if the south could not support it. "We are interested in doing away with racial antagonism, as part of our contribution to making this world one of peace, plenty and freedom." Fleischman defended the SP position as consistent with Lincoln and Marx. He rejected Couch's contention that the SP would force racial mixing. The SP, in power, would never dictate to anyone with whom he had to associate. A socialist regime would guarantee that each would have an equal opportunity to mix with whom he pleased.³⁵ Fleischman's decisive answer to Couch's complaints revealed an idealistic SP. The party's goals were idealistic. But its comprehension of the social consequences should the United States fail to achieve those goals was not idealistic or wide of the mark.

White hatred and distrust of non-whites in the United States was a massive roadblock to democratic socialism and to peace. This racism was blatant in the government's forced relocation of Americans of Japanese ancestry and the SP raised a loud voice in protest. Thomas believed the American political and economic system made the relocation "absolutely inevitable," but he fought it all the same. He later rated the evacuation and concentration of Japanese-Americans as an atrocity of "overwhelming magnitude."³⁶

The party's initial response to Roosevelt's executive order of 19 February 1942, proclaiming presidential power over the proposed relocation of enemy aliens, was mild, even meek, a perfect example of critical support. The editor of the Call admitted that this war required the government to take legitimate steps to curb enemy espionage and sabotage. If the FBI round-ups of west-coast Japanese-Americans were in response to a real and present danger, they were necessary. The editor did warn against anti-enemy hysteria serving "other and more dubious ends."³⁷

Within a month of Pearl Harbor, information SP leaders received from California led them to conclude that land hunger, racism, the desire for plunder and hate were the real explanation for western cries to relocate Japanese-Americans. This charge first surfaced in the Call under the byline of leftist Travers Clement, then residing in California.³⁹ Clement called the relocation drive "a shameful chapter in the history of this war . . . which the Nazis may well claim we plagiarized."⁴⁰

By mid-March 1942, the editor of the Call was pulling no

punches. In one of his rare departures from civil libertarianism, he remarked that if "honest Japanese farmers are in danger from vigilantes and hysterical mobs, it is our duty to repress the vigilantes and quiet the hysteria." The administration's handling of the west coast racial problem was "the most brutal method . . . short of mass execution."⁴¹ The NEC approved of the Call's tone. In April 1942, it issued a statement charging the administration with carrying out a program "essentially fascist in nature."⁴²

Socialists did what they could to help the nisei (American-born Japanese) and issei (born in Japan) in the relocation centers. Thomas was well aware of the foul conditions in the camps. His personal papers are a gold mine for information about the concentration camps.⁴³ Thomas wrote and spoke to congressmen and administration officials, including Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy. He tried to institute processes by which loyal nisei could so prove themselves and leave the camps.⁴⁴ Socialists actively helped individual Japanese-Americans, chiefly after the government allowed some nisei to leave the relocation centers if they were going to a job. Thomas, the Boston local branch and various other individual members gave or found jobs for many nisei.⁴⁵

The inaction of his beloved American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in the Japanese-American matter hurt Thomas more than the government actions. From the government he expected repression; from the ACLU he expected defense of liberty. The ACLU reaction to Roosevelt's relocation order was support. The Union judged that the government had to deal with dangerous enemy aliens and establish military zones from

which they would be barred.⁴⁶ Thomas believed this was an abdication of responsibility, particularly as white Californians' true motives surfaced. He was enraged. He complained to ACLU board member John Haynes Holmes in early March that their fellow board members, particularly those who were Jewish, were foolish to "so willingly accept the principle of military control of citizens. They are not wise to the things that belong to their own salvation."⁴⁷ The attitude of the California state ACLU was even worse. Clement reported to the SP leader that many of his fellow California state board members were "willing to give up . . . [their] civil liberties for the duration if necessary to defeat the Axis." Clement urged Thomas to sway the national board "to put up a fight . . . unless we're ready to sacrifice our civil rights every time the President or the Army says there's an 'emergency.'"⁴⁸ Thomas fought but got nowhere.

He kept his feelings much to himself, unusual and perhaps proof of his admiration for the ACLU. He did not attack the ACLU on paper until October 1942.⁴⁹ He then complained that he could understand how the Union, having agreed to the Roosevelt administration's original order, might reverse itself later. But the Union seemed to be doing the opposite, acting as if it did not agree with the president's order any more but refusing to attack it openly or urge its revocation. Why the hesitancy? Was the ACLU that afraid of government repression?⁵⁰

John Haynes Holmes answered for the Union. He took refuge precisely in the inconsistency Thomas noted in his October letter.⁵¹ Thomas replied quickly and stingingly. "Whatever legal action we have taken," he lectured Holmes, "is rendered exceedingly ineffective legally

and in the public mind by our endorsement of the [President's] basic principle."⁵² Thomas and the ACLU remained on cool terms throughout the war.

The SP reaction to the problems of fascism and civil liberties during the Second World War was the reaction of idealists. Socialists believed, at a visceral level, that official and unofficial harrassment of minorities, political, ethnic and religious, was wrong and immoral. But to view socialists as a group of "political old ladies" or bleeding heart liberals was too simplistic. Racism morally outraged socialists, especially the ex-presbyterian minister Norman Thomas. But socialist reaction was not grounded only in moral outrage. It was firmly anchored in what the party viewed as the realities of twentieth century American and world development. If the party had a special knack for prophecy, it was probably because of their clear-headed view of those underlying realities.

Civil liberties were important if any society wished to progress toward freedom, peace, plenty. But civil liberties could never flourish in the acidic soil of racism. When one group could deny liberty to another because of race, religion, or political belief, liberty suffered, even for the dominant group. The SP took this familiar argument one significant step further. Socialists believed that racism was one of the most important roots of imperialism.⁵³

The argument was a variation of the DeLeon/Lenin description of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. Socialists understood this theory and accepted it. They added their own non-economic corollary to it, that imperialism would not exist without its blood-

brother: racism. This theory explained the SP's major thrusts during the war to "win the peace." The party foresaw neither lasting peace nor democratic socialism after an Axis defeat if imperialism outlived the war. Thomas outlined the party's fears in reply to the Elmer Davis remark, in 1943, that "the free people are on the march. Nothing on earth can stop them!"

"Admirable oratory," Thomas remarked. "But who are the free people and where are we going on that march that nothing on earth can stop? How free are the Americans in the [relocation] camps and the cities [Detroit, Harlem] that the riots have revealed?" How free were the draftees? The jailed conscientious objectors? How free was America if it preserved the British and French empires? How, queried Thomas, can America seek to spread its blessings far and wide when it still suffered at home?⁵⁴ Thomas and his party realized racism would cause the United States problems in dealing with emerging nationalism among the world's colonial peoples. In their vision socialists tried throughout the war to influence a peace which would grant the world at least a chance of escaping the bloodshed of future racist imperial wars.

The major aspect of the American war effort the SP most criticized was the idea of necessitarianism--whatever helped America to victory was good, regardless of its morality or later repercussions. Whatever slowed the advance toward victory was bad, no matter how moral it may have seemed in more peaceful circumstances.⁵⁵ To socialists, and this showed so clearly in their wartime attitudes, victory which did nothing but defeat the enemy, which did not at least hold out the hope of a lasting peace, was worse than worthless. "I am no blooming

optimist," wrote Thomas in 1942, "who believes we can shoot our way to utopia."⁵⁶ It was clear that the Roosevelt administration was bent on pursuing victory at any cost, moral and physical. It was as clear that the SP would do whatever possible to shift American priorities from victory at any cost to victory for a lasting peace. The SP did what it could to warn Americans of the dangers of a victory with vindictiveness.

The Roosevelt administration's actions in Italy illustrated the extreme danger of necessitarianism. The SP viewed Allied negotiations with Marshall Pietro Bagdoglio and King Victor Emanuel with great trepidation. Italy's treatment at Allied hands would set significant precedents. It looked to socialists as though the Allies were negotiating with "two of the key men in the fascist regime . . . is this a people's war? Is this how fascism is destroyed?"⁵⁷ The Allied decision to deal with Italian and French rightists did not seem to socialists a reasonable method of trying to "win the peace."

Unlike the necessitarian American government, the socialists initiated their drive to "win the peace" as soon as the nation entered the war. After Pearl Harbor, Thomas advised immediate preparations to build a non-imperialist peace. He urged Americans to "stop the business of trying to play Lord God Almighty around the world" and to design "such plans for peace as will be an inspiration and a challenge to the peoples of the world."⁵⁸

Privately, Thomas was pessimistic. American attitudes on the war and the Axis bore out his "fear for our future 'democracy'--even if we escape bold and open totalitarian dictatorship." Thomas was afraid that postwar American society would be "primarily concerned for secu-

rity; it will be mass minded. Its concept of fair play will be more equality under conscription, not true freedom."⁵⁹

The most worrisome fear of the early war period was that America was "fighting to re-establish British imperialism." Thomas urged Roosevelt to repudiate this notion, for in it lay a path to World War III, a war Thomas believed would feature the masses of Asia and Africa revolting against their colonial overlords.⁶⁰ The days when a western nation could build a colonial empire while protecting liberty at home were over. Empire abroad signaled "fascism at home" and continual war.⁶¹ Thomas considered it "the duty of those of us who hate and fear the new Nazi imperialism to insist that a second triumph of the older type of imperialism will not solve the economic, racial and political forces which have given rise to the totalitarian state." Only a "correct answer" to the colonial question could promise a "permanent peace."⁶²

The SP directed most of its anti-colonial agitation at British rule in India. Socialists considered Indian freedom a "downpayment on the promisory note of the four freedoms," and urged Roosevelt to do what he could to pressure Churchill into granting India immediate freedom.⁶³ The SP greatly resented the British charges, often echoed in the United States, that Nehru and Ghandi were compromising with Japanese tyranny, subverting the British effort. Socialists noted that the British treatment of India was in fact true subversion, as it lent credence to Japanese charges that the Anglo-American war effort was aimed at total subjugation of all non-white peoples.⁶⁴

The "real danger" of the Indian situation came not from the

Indians nor for that matter from the British. The true danger was that the United States would assume "an imperialist role toward India and after the war back up British imperialism, of itself not strong enough to maintain its old power," wrote Thomas in 1942. He feared that Americans would "confuse a missionary desire to do 'backward' peoples good with doing them good and plenty."⁶⁵ Thomas and other SP theorists inferred that American postwar expansion would be a combination of "racism and a desire for vengeance." It would take the form either of shoring up existing western empires or American economic expansion necessitated by war-spawned overproduction and peacetime unemployment. Maynard Krueger, economist at the University of Chicago and 1940 SP vice-presidential candidate, warned Americans in 1945 to beware of agitation for free trade. That term, Krueger predicted, was a cover for plans of economic expansion throughout the world. By 1946, SP leaders were lamenting the inability of the western allies to use the colonial issue against the real imperialists, the Soviet Union. Instead, Stalin jumped first onto the anti-colonial bandwagon. He put "the American delegation [to the United Nations] on the spot," using a weapon the United States should have turned against him.⁶⁶

The allied desire to hold on to its colonial empires, the racial antipathy imperialism bred and by which it was often upheld, were the twin underpinnings of what the SP viewed as the most destructive, war-breeding imperialist stupidity of the Second World War, the Stalin/Churchill/Roosevelt policy of unconditional surrender.

At the 1943 Casablanca meeting, the Big Three formalized agreement on a policy they had tacitly accepted since Pearl Harbor, that the

allies would prosecute the war vigorously until the Axis powers surrendered unconditionally. The Big Three favored this policy for two reasons: it guaranteed that none of the Allies would make a separate peace, and it guaranteed the end of the war would find the Axis powers destroyed and defeated. The Allied powers were determined to crush fascism and militarism in the world so fully that it could not re-emerge powerful for generations, if ever.⁶⁷

That was not how the SP viewed unconditional surrender. The SP sought a just, democratic peace. One impossible to achieve "on the basis of the Churchill-Roosevelt concept of 'absolute victory' which envisions an Anglo-American policing of the world."⁶⁸

From September 1939 through V-J Day, the party repeatedly urged the Allies to state peace aims more concrete than the Atlantic Charter, a vague document which reportedly embarrassed even some of Roosevelt's staunchest supporters. Thomas dubbed it a "bad plagiarism of Wilson's Fourteen Points," a document of "pious hopes, not positive pledges."⁶⁹

The socialist approach to peace was simple. The party assumed neither the Germans nor the Japanese "as a people" were "responsible for this war." Those who sought "to make national or race hatred a weapon in the 'arsenal of democracy' . . . are betraying democracy to fascism."⁷⁰ If the Axis people were not responsible for the war, the Allied fight was not with them, but their fascist/militarist rulers. If the Allies could find any tactic which would awaken the Axis masses to the hope of a better life under different, democratic leaders, then the Allies could win the war more quickly, with less destruction. And

the Germans and Japanese would win their redemption in the bargain. Here was a scenario upon which a stable postwar world could be built.⁷¹

The party's position on the Allied policy of unconditional surrender illustrated its critical support of the war effort. Socialists realized the need for an Allied victory, but were extremely critical of the proposed means of achieving it. The SP believed the unconditional surrender demand would make the war last longer, slaughter more troops, and insure a great power controlled postwar world. Hardly an optimistic scenario, but fairly accurate and certainly in line with Roosevelt's ideas. The party did "not want a dictated peace . . . by Hitler and the Japanese militarists and likewise not . . . by Roosevelt or Churchill. We want a people's peace," a peace made by the people, for their needs and concerns.⁷²

Thomas judged the Roosevelt administration's demand for unconditional surrender to be "silly and dangerous." It guaranteed that Germany and Japan would fight longer. It precluded the chance of mass revolution in the Axis nations; why would people revolt against their fascist overlords if their enemies promised a worse fate? And it would cost the blood of thousands of Allied youths to fight until the Axis powers totally crumbled.⁷³ Thomas noted that when the United States iced the cake of unconditional surrender with the Morgenthau plan for the pastoralization of Germany, it was little wonder that the German people fought so tenaciously. The harder the enemy's people fought, the harder it would be to defeat them totally. The more difficult and bloody the defeat, the harder the peace.⁷⁴ The means determine the ends.

It was not merely because unconditional surrender meant needless bloodshed that the SP denounced the policy often and vociferously. Certainly that argument was valid; Harry S. Truman used it to rationalize Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Total victory entailed great danger to lasting peace and that was the important SP argument in the war's early stages. As victory approached, a new argument surfaced that revealed SP members not as merely knee-jerk idealists, but as capable mature political thinkers.

In early 1944, Thomas wrote that the coming second front invasion coupled with unconditional surrender worried him. The invasion would entail an "enormous cost . . . for the probable purpose of making Stalin the boss of Europe."⁷⁵ Perhaps Roosevelt and Churchill could assume peace would hold fast under a firm postwar alliance of victors, but not the SP. Its members were too experienced in dealing with the amoral duplicity of communists to place any trust in Stalin's Russia, or the dictator's desire for a peace of cooperation. SP members knew that one could always trust the Soviets to do exactly what they perceived to be in the best interest of their state, regardless of the morality of any proposed action.⁷⁶ The ends justified the means. That attitude alone was enough to guarantee that the Soviets would not cooperate for long in the postwar world.

The total destruction of German power in Europe and Japanese power in Asia would leave vacuums into which Stalin would be delighted to rush if he judged he could without endangering the continuance of his bureaucratic state totalitarian control. Thomas believed this. In a memorandum written to the NEC in early 1945, he noted that "the one

most probably victor in the complete destruction of Japan will be Stalin . . . we shall have destroyed the only strong nation in Asia independent of him."⁷⁷ Thomas suggested Stalin would love to use the British-American demand for Japan's unconditional surrender as a propaganda tool to prove that the Anglo-Americans hated all non-whites.⁷⁸

After American power annihilated the Axis, who would police the defeated nations? Stalin would love to do so. And that would endanger postwar cooperation with America and England, who would love the job just as much. Shortly after the Yalta conference, Thomas wondered if Roosevelt had not offered to allow Stalin to control postwar Japan in exchange for a promise to help in the Pacific war.⁷⁹ The SP leader worriedly speculated that the Allied leaders were blind to Stalin's ambition. Thomas believed that if this were the case, the blindness reflected "in large part, our own racial prejudice."⁸⁰ This was a strangely prophetic grasp on the essentials of world power politics from one so often condemned as an idealist.

The party did not initiate its drive for a negotiated peace on December 8, 1941. That was not consistent with the party policy of critical support; neither would it have been in keeping with the party's well-documented anti-fascism. Peace would be useless if the fascists and militarists retained control of the Axis nations.⁸¹ The party had to develop its desire for a negotiated peace within clearly defined boundaries. A negotiated peace must continue neither fascist control overseas nor win support of Allied pro-fascist elements. The SP rejected member George Hartman's Peace Now movement in 1944 because it received support "from Coughlinite, Bundist and other fascist ele-

ments."⁸²

SP suggestions that the allies begin to seek a negotiated peace did not appear until mid-1943. The Call reported in August that German prisoners of war were doubtful of their nation's ability to win the war. The time was ripe, then, to begin to try to separate the German (and later the Japanese) masses from their governments. The demands for unconditional surrender, replete with unspoken genocidal threats, were not an acceptable method of wooing Axis peoples away from their rulers.⁸³

The only effective way to move the people to repudiate their leaders was to offer them the hope of a better world, a world of peace and plenty for all, as did Wilson in 1918. A world of democratic socialist nations, federated and peaceful. A Wilsonian vision to be sure; the SP was not the prisoner of the notion that the only way to peace was to avoid the experiments of 1918. In early 1942 Thomas enumerated the three vital principles of what the party termed a "peoples' peace." The peace must be of cooperation, not coercion, must proceed from a real desire for peace and fraternity, it must be a peace of political and economic democracy, not imposed, but "propagated by example and cultivated by the right sort of friendship between peoples."⁸⁴ Thomas later distilled these points into more concrete guidelines: a peoples' peace was one without vengeance or imperialism, guaranteed by a cooperative world federation of republics.⁸⁵

The SP sought a lasting peace. Socialists believed that Europeans and Asians should choose their own destiny, political and economic. Independence must be the promise to all under a regional feder-

ated system, like a United States of Europe. Disarmament must occur, first in the aggressor nations and then among the allies. All must once and for all renounce imperialism, racism and their attendant evils.⁸⁶

Visionary aims. And so idealistic. But how else does one purpose to win the peace other than to try to destroy the causes of war? The SP sought solutions to very real problems before those in power even considered the same to be problems. Again the SP worked within its narrow theoretical boundaries, political and economic democracy. The party's most telling criticism of the American war effort centered on Roosevelt's demand for unconditional surrender. On this point if nowhere else the historian can see the fruit of SP logic. The party took into account power politics as well as the evils of racism and imperialism. It was a pity that those in power did not do likewise.

But the SP had no real power to shape events and had to deal with realities not of its own making. Americans wanted some sort of international organization to keep the peace. So did socialists. They had to live with what Roosevelt and the Allies proposed, whether it matched their thoughts or not. Thomas for years supported the concept of a world "federation of co-operative commonwealths." He did "not want to work for a world government under circumstances that make my efforts . . . contribute to . . . an Anglo-American military alliance," he wrote in 1939.⁸⁷ The SP desired a world "where free men . . . live in fellowship, using the marvelous machinery they have invented for the destruction . . . of poverty."⁸⁸

This was the ideal. And socialists realized it. The party criticized the 1945 San Francisco conference because it did not advance the concept of a world federated cooperative commonwealth.⁸⁹ That the United Nations in final form was not a progressive organization aimed at cooperation over competition surprised few socialists. Thomas predicted in 1941 that there was "no chance at all of any kind of peace following this war which will establish this ideal" form of world government. He assumed that any organization which grew out of the conflict would be "an association for policing the world with an Anglo-American fence around the best parts of it."⁹⁰ He was closer to the truth than he would have liked to hope.

If the SP had been a political group often out of touch with world political, social and economic realities, its stance on any world organization would have changed little throughout the war. If the party were more interested in ideological purity than real events, it would have rejected any international organization which failed to fulfill its ideal of a cooperative world order. The SP was static neither in organization nor ideology. As events developed so did the SP. In reaction to the twin hammerblows of continued Soviet duplicity and the horrors of war, socialists slowly and reluctantly abandoned their goal of a world of federated cooperative commonwealths. Thomas wrote in 1945 that, "I thought and still think that the world is not ready" for the SP's ideal scheme of world organization.⁹¹

Among all the various radical sects in American political life, the SP was the most attuned to world realities. This was not because socialists were any more "pragmatic" or "worldly" than other radicals,

but because they sought to realize their ideal through action in the real world. No escape to the fantasy realm of revolutionary idealism for the SP. Socialists believed democratic socialism offered a positive answer to most human problems. Their actions were not more radical or more mainstream because they were aware of the mistakes others, who professed like goals. The SP traveled a road not of its own choosing. It was one bordered on the left by the actions of the Russian bolsheviks and their American cousins, and on the right by the SDF and liberals.

Throughout the nationwide debate on the postwar peace-keeping organization, the SP followed its normal path. It agitated for the ideal, but worked within the political system to affect the real.⁹² Thomas and SP leaders warned that there would be no real peace if the postwar peace-keeping organization were but a new League of Nations, a "league of victors." Better an isolationist peace than "uneasy cooperation between mutually suspicious big powers."⁹³ Thomas warned that any peace-keeping organization would fail unless it attacked the causes of war: empire, racism, and armament races. He foresaw World War III soon unless the post-war peace organization supported the just aspirations of colonial peoples for freedom.⁹⁴ Certainly, an organization which relied on cooperation between major powers to crush those aspirations was doomed to fail from the start. The party severely criticized the Dumbarton Oaks conference on this basis.⁹⁵

Socialists criticized the United Nations organizational conference at San Francisco just as severely. Party leaders attacked the provision for the great power veto in the Security Council, saying it

would hamstring peace-keeping efforts.⁹⁶ The party assailed the conference for not being all-inclusive, for making the General Assembly a mere advisory body, for neglecting human rights, for in effect ratifying colonialism, and for neglecting the possibility of regional federations, and the all important goal of universal disarmament.⁹⁷ "There is almost no possibility that anything in the machinery set up at San Francisco can save the world from new war," Thomas told a crowd in Washington, D. C., "which an indefinite continuance of this war of annihilation against Japan will invite."⁹⁸

Did these criticisms of the young United Nations deter the SP from supporting it? On the contrary, in the 1944 national convention of the party, Mulford Sibley, a leftist from Chicago, introduced a resolution which stated that if the postwar united nations organization refused to ratify disarmament within three months of the war's end, the SP should agitate for immediate American withdrawal. The SP convention defeated this resolution soundly. Even before the Dumbarton Oaks conference, the party essentially had said it would support almost any type of international organization.⁹⁹

If nothing else, Thomas hoped that the new United Nations would foster a spirit of international cooperation among nations. If it did that, it would be a step in the right direction.¹⁰⁰ He therefore favored Senate ratification of the UN Charter, even though he continued to criticize it, especially because it "left intact the myth of national sovereignty." The NEC voted unanimously to accept Thomas's view.¹⁰¹

The SP reacted to the major issues of the Second World War

within three sets of boundaries. First, it sought to affect issues by working within the system but not at the cost of sublimating their political or ideological identity to the two major parties.¹⁰² Second, the SP sought, through education and political action, to convince as many people as possible that political and economic democracy carried a valid hope of salvation from various forms of totalitarian collectivism. And third, the party sought to walk its self-imposed tightrope of critical support for the American war effort.

Within these three boundaries and in the party's attempts to educate Americans to the dangers of capitalism and imperialism, there were excellent examples of the socialist ability to recognize the major problems in American society before most people were aware the problem's existed. This was especially true in relation to the party's emphasis on the postwar dangers of racism and imperialism. Socialists foresaw the dangers American racism would produce both at home and abroad. The party was one of the few institutions to recognize what would become a major misconception of postwar American foreign policy--confusing emerging colonial nationalism with a mythic international monolithic communist conspiracy.

It is difficult to judge why the socialists had a clearer perception of the postwar world and its major problems than most Americans. Perhaps because socialists stood outside the economic system, seeking no rewards from it, they could judge more clearly the direction in which it was pulling society. Perhaps socialists recognized dangerous social trends more quickly than most because they were not convinced that the system was flexible or equitable enough to allow change.

They did not regard the American system as the best of all worlds as did most of their countrymen. Or perhaps because socialists, having no power, had little to do but play futurist. It was easier to criticize than to formulate policy.

Whatever the explanation, the SP of the 1940s was uncannily correct in its criticisms of the major weaknesses of American society and in its appraisal of the problems those weaknesses would cause the nation as it moved outward into the amoral world of international politics.

NOTES

Chapter III

1. Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 6 November 1942, 1.
2. "Proletarian Press," Time, 31 (21 February 1938), 48-49.
3. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Appraisal of Forces," Call, 2 January 1942, 5.
4. Lillian Symes, "Hold That Line: Total Culture," ibid., 31 January 1942, 5.
5. Thomas to Kirchwey, 3 April 1942, NTP, Box 22; cf., Thomas, "What About the Sixth Column: The Necessity for Criticism in Wartime," Call, 22 May 1942, 1.
6. See, for example, anti-American fascist diatribes in New Leader, 4 April 1942, 1; 18 April 1942, 8; 25 April 1942, 2. In the latter article, Walter K. Lewis complained that Walter K. Pelley's Silvershirts used the mails for subversive propaganda. As ex-socialists, usually from the period of the First World War, many members of the SDF had terribly short memories.
7. For examples of the SP's warnings on the dangers of creeping dictatorship, see editorials in Call, 8 May 1942, 1, and 28 September 1942, 8; see also Coleman Chaney, "Greater Danger on the Home Front," ibid., 6 November 1942, 5; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: It is Indeed Later Than We think," ibid.; see also Thomas's columns in ibid., 20 November 1942, 1; 26 February 1943, 1; 21 January 1944, 1; 27 October 1944, 6.
8. News Release, "Norman Thomas Asks President to Veto Smith Sedition Bill . . .," 26 June 1940, SP Duke, Roll 39; cf., Thomas to Roosevelt, 24 June 1940, ibid.
9. See editorials in Call, 12 July 1941, 8; 13 December 1941, 4; cf., articles in ibid., 26 July 1941, 4; 22 November 1941, 3; 20 December 1941, 2; 10 January 1942, 8; 26 June 1942, 8; 18 September 1942, 5.

10. Thomas to Fay Campbell, 2 November 1941, NTP, Box 21.
11. New Leader, 19 July 1941, 8; 21 December 1941, 8; New Republic, 105 (28 July 1941), 103; (17 November 1941), 639; (8 December 1941), 748; Nation, 153 (12 July 1941), 23; (26 July 1941), 63; I. F. Stone, "The Great G-String Conspiracy," ibid., 66-67; Stone noticed that the SWP made up 1/260th of 1 percent of the total population of the United States; cf., John DosPassos, "To A Liberal in Office," ibid., (6 September 1941), 196; New York Daily Worker, 16 August 1941, 5; Time, 38 (7 July 1941), 16; cf., ibid., 38 (15 December 1941), 29.
12. Albert Goldman, "Memorandum on My Conversation with . . . Post Office Department, With Reference to the withholding of the . . . Militant from the Mails," 19 November 1942, NTP, Box 153; Call, 4 December 1942, 8; Midwestern Young Socialist, 21 November 1942, 1, 23 January 1942, 8; 13 March 1943, 8, SP Duke, Roll 132; New Republic, 107 (21 December 1942), 808.
13. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Who Is . . . Prolonging the War," Call, 14 January 1944, 1, 3; for a typical reaction to the government's anti-American fascist drive, see "The People vs. Coughlin, An Appeal for Action," New Leader, 25 April 1942, 1.
14. On Browder, see Thomas to Roosevelt, 26 November 1941, NTP, Box 21; Call, 21 March 1942, 4; 29 May 1942, 8; New Leader did not support Browder's release, because they no longer considered him an American citizen with full rights. He was a foreign spy, and should be treated as such. See New Leader, 28 October 1939, 8.
15. Thomas speech, "Four Drafts and Four Freedoms," 20 January 1945, 1, SP Duke, Roll 52.
16. Editorial in Call, 7 February 1942, 4; Midwestern Young Socialist, December 1942, 1, calls McNutt the "Hossier Hitler," SP Duke, Roll 132; cf., Thomas, "Your World and Mine: McNutt Won't Worry About Democracy," Call, 18 December 1942, 1.
17. Thomas diary, 10 April 1942, NTP, Box 176; NYT, 30 December 1942, 5, reported on the Thomas trip to Washington to protest total conscription. See also Thomas, "Total Mobilization Bill Means Speeding Growth of Totalitarianism," Call, 26 February 1943, 1, 8; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Must We Accept Total Conscription?" ibid., 23 April 1943, 1; Thomas, "Statement in Opposition to the Austin-Wadsworth Bill Before the Senate Committee on Military Affairs," April 1943, SP Duke, Roll 48; Thomas "President's Labor Draft Proposals Another Big Step Toward Fascism," Call, 21 January 1944, 1; Thomas to Senate Committee on Military Affairs, 2 February 1945, NTP, Box 28; Thomas, "The World About Us: Senate on Manpower," Call, 9 April 1945, 8.
18. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Must We Accept Total Conscription?" Call, 23 April 1943, 1; Thomas, "Statement in Opposition to

the Austin-Wadsworth Bill Before the Senate Committee on Military Affairs," April 1943, SP Duke, Roll 48.

19. Thomas to Senate Committee on Military Affairs, 2 February 1945, NTP, Box 28; "Testimony of Albert Hamilton Before House Military Affairs Committee," 15 January 1945, 1, SP Duke, Roll 51; cf., Thomas, "Total Mobilization Bill Means Speeding Growth of Totalitarianism," Call, 26 February 1943, 1, 8; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Must We Accept Total Conscription?" ibid., 23 April 1943, 1.

20. Editorial in Call, 26 March 1945, 5.

21. Lillian Symes, "Fraternally Yours: Postwar Vision," Call, 16 October 1942, 2; cf., Thomas speech, nd [1944], 2, SP Duke, Roll 51.

22. For the party's ideas on war taxation, see "Memorandum: taxation For Financing Arms Program," July 1941, NTP, Box 150; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Economic Problems of the War," Call, 10 January 1942, 5; "Economic Base Laid for Fascism in United States," ibid., 17 January 1942, 6; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Again, Taxation in Wartime," ibid., 8 May 1942, 3; minutes of NAC meeting, 1 December 1942, 1 SP Duke, Roll 46; "Statement of SPUSA: Holding the Line," Call, 23 April 1943, 8; Travers Clement and Aaron Levenstein, "An Economic Program for Wartime," 1943, SP Duke, Roll 48; for the SP's ideas about small business, see Albert Hamilton, "2 Billion in Arms Contracts Go To Firms of \$1-year Men," Call, 26 July 1941, 1; see also articles in ibid., 31 January 1942, 1; 10 July 1942, 5; 17 July 1942, 5; 22 January 1943, 1; 5 February 1943, 1.

23. Press Release, Thomas speech, 17 October 1944, 1, SP Duke, Roll 50.

24. Thomas, "Wartime Race Tensions in America," Call, 15 September 1944, 6.

25. Robin Meyers, "March On and We Shall Gain the Day," Challenge, June 1943, 2, SP Duke, Roll 133.

26. Thomas, "The World About Us," Call, 12 March 1945, 8.

27. See Thomas in NYT, 25 July 1943, 4.

28. Ernest Doerfler, "Socialism and the Negro Problem," American Socialist Quarterly, 2 (Summer 1933), 31, 33.

29. Layle Lane, "Why a Negro Should be a Socialist," Call, 19 June 1942, 4; cf., "Proposed Resolution on Negro Work," Agenda, 1940 national convention, 6-8 April 1940, SP Duke, Roll 38; H. C. Holdridge, speech, "The Racial Issue in the United States," 31 October 1944, 1, ibid., Roll 51.

30. "Resolution on Discrimination Against Minorities and Racial Conflicts," minutes of NEC meeting, 27 June 1943, ibid., Roll 47; cf., Hazel Whiteman, "My Friend, Jim Jones," Call, 19 February 1943, 3, 7; Press Release, Thomas speech, 17 October 1944, 2, SP Duke, Roll 50; Harry Fleischman to Samuel Reading, 17 May 1944, ibid., Roll 49.

31. Albert Hamilton, "Negro March is Postponed after Forcing FDR Order," Call, 5 July 1941, 3; cf., Washington Call Bureau [Albert Hamilton]. "Defense Jobs for Negroes," ibid., 15 November 1941, 6; "Mr. President, Act Now!" ibid., 29 May 1942, 1.

32. Editorial in Call, 17 July 1942, 8; Jack Sessions, "20,000 Negroes Demand Equal Rights at Home," ibid., 26 June 1942, 1; Harry Fleischman, "Permanent Anti-Discrimination Set-up, With Teeth, Demanded . . .," ibid., 19 February 1943, 1; see also more demands for a permanent FEPC in ibid., 5 November 1943, 3; 25 February 1944, 8; 9 July 1945, 3; cf., telegram, Thomas to Carter Glass, 12 June 1944, NTP, Box 27.

33. See Press Release, 1 November 1943, which includes Thomas to Roosevelt, nd, protesting Comptroller General Linday Warren's statement that FEPC was an advisory commission, with no power to force anything, in SP Duke, Roll 48.

34. George H. Couch to Harry Fleischman, 22 July 1942, ibid., Roll 46.

35. Fleischman to Couch, 28 July 1942, ibid.

36. Thomas diary, 12 April 1942, NTP, Box 176; italics in the original; Thomas to James W. Ivy, 27 September 1945, ibid., Box 29.

37. Editorial, Call, 21 February 1942, 4; cf., Thomas to Attorney General Frances Biddle, 1 February 1942, NTP, Box 22, wherein Thomas praises Biddle for not allowing himself to be swayed by California demands for marshall law.

38. See Ann Ray to Thomas, 14 January 1942, ibid.; Thomas received much of his information on the Japanese-American problem from Ms. Ray; cf., Thomas to Francis Biddle, 1 February 1942, ibid., in which Thomas charges that the anti-spy hysteria was just an excuse to kick Japanese-Americans off their land.

39. Travers Clement, "The Re-Winning of the West," Call, 21 February 1942, 1.

40. Call, 4 April 1942, 1.

41. Editorial, ibid., 14 March 1942, 4.

42. Minutes of NEC Meeting, including "Resolution on Japanese Evacuation," 10-12 April 1942, SP Duke, Roll 46.

43. See NTP, Box 155, folder 2, "Japanese-Americans, 1942." This folder contains several long typewritten reports from Manzanar, California, Heart Mountain, Wyoming, and Camp Amache, Colorado, relocation camps.

44. Thomas to Roosevelt, 15 April 1942, ibid., Box 22; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: France, India and America," Call, 1 May 1942, 3; minutes of NAC meeting, 24 August 1942, 1, SP Duke, Roll 46; "Memo of Interview, Thomas with John J. McCoy," August 1942, ibid.; Thomas to Congressman Herman P. Eberharter, 17 March 1944, NTP, Box 27; Thomas to McCloy, 8 January 1945, ibid.

45. See Harry Fleischman to Sam Hori, Manzanar, 20 May 1943; Gertrude Nash to Fleischman, 7 January 1943; Fleischman to Francis Heisler, 15 April 1943; Fleischman to M. Nikaido, Topaz, Utah, 15 April 1943; Fleischman to Hori, 15 April 1943, Thomas to Nikaido, 10 May 1943, all in ibid., Roll 47.

46. Civil Liberties Board Minutes, 22 June 1942, NTP, Box 153.

47. Thomas to Holmes, 9 March 1942, ibid., Box 22.

48. Travers Clement to Thomas, 9 March 1942, ibid., Box 128.

49. He was not the first to protest. See ? Gallagher to Roger Baldwin, 27 June 1942, ibid.

50. Thomas to ACLU Board, 8 October 1942, ibid.

51. Holmes to Thomas, 13 November 1942, ibid.

52. Thomas to Holmes, 13 November 1942, ibid.

53. Thomas, "The British Labor Party Victory and World Peace," Call, 13 August 1945, 4; cf., "Ideas and Ideals as Weapons," Socialist, November 1942, 1, 7, SP Duke, Roll 130.

54. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Who Are The Free People That Are on the March --- Where?" Call, 13 August 1943, 3.

55. Term "necessitarianism" is from John Morton Blum, V Was For Victory: Politics and Culture During World War II (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), passim.

56. Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 9 October 1942, 3.

57. Minutes of NAC meeting, 17 August 1943, SP Duke, Roll 47; Jim Dinsmoor, "War Against Fascism?" Challenge, February 1944, 4, ibid.

Roll 133; cf., minutes of NAC meeting, 12 January 1943, "Highly Confidential--Keep For Your Information Only," ibid., Roll 47; this document says Elmer Barnes of the Office of War Information told Thomas that Roosevelt was dealing with Italian rightists and asked the SP leader to keep this fact to himself; cf., NEC statement in Call, 6 August 1943, 8.

58. See NYT, 12 December 1941, 26; Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 20 December 1941, 5.

59. Thomas diary, 12 April 1942, NTP, Box 176.

60. Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 28 March 1942, 5; Thomas, "Basic Peace Program must Spurn Imperialism, Plan Cooperative Machinery," ibid., 19 February 1943, 1; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: That 3rd War for 'Real' Freedom," ibid., 25 December 1942, 1.

61. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Appraisal of Forces," ibid., 2 January 1942, 5; for other articles which blast American attempts to uphold European colonialism, see ibid., 3 July 1942, 3; 28 May 1943, 1; 15 October 1943, 1; 25 February 1944, 1; 24 March 1944, 1; 21 April 1944, 1; 12 May 1944, 3; 2 June 1944, 2; 5 March 1945, 5; 15 May 1945, 1.

62. Thomas to Anup Singh, 14 January 1941, NTP, Box 19.

63. Press Release, 19 February 1943, SP Duke, Roll 47; Robert Parker to Harry Fleischman, 24 February 1942, ibid., Roll 46; Press Release, 9 August 1942, ibid., detailed the SP messages to Nehru and Sir Standford Cripps demanding Indian independence; cf., NYT, 18 April 1942, 3.

64. "Toward Indian Freedom," Call, 18 April 1942, 1; Thomas, "Indian Crisis also the Business of America," ibid., 21 August 1942, 1; for SDF position, see New Leader, 15 August 1942, 1. The SDF charged Nehru and Gandhi with "Plunging India into turmoil at the moment when such a course plays directly into the hands of Japan and Germany . . ."; hardly an issue of the Call between November 1940 and September 1947 passed without mention of the Indian problem.

65. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: France, India and America," ibid., 1 May 1942, 3.

66. Thomas, "The World About Us: U. S. Military Imperialism," Call, 17 September 1945, 8; Maynard Krueger, "America's Drive Toward World Imperialism," Call, 11 June 1945, 5; Jim Cork, "The Colonial Question at the U.N.," ibid., 4 November 1946, 5.

67. John Lewis Gaddis, The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1942-1947 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 8-10.

68. NAC Statement on War, 9 December 1941, SP Duke, Roll 46.
69. Henry Haskell, "For a Socialist Peace Plan," Call, 1 November 1941, 6; Thomas to editor, Nation, 155 (31 January 1942, 124; cf., same letter in NTP, Box 22; Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 31 January 1942, 5; Thomas, "Roosevelt-Churchill Meeting and After," ibid., 30 August 1941, 1; Thomas speech, "Maneuvering US Into War," 26 August 1941, 4, SP Duke, Roll 45.
70. Press Release, SP publicity bureau, 24 February 1943, SP Duke, Roll 47 and NTP, Box 156; cf., "Hate-Rousing Propaganda Against Peoples or Races Condemned by Socialists," Call, 5 March 1943, 1; Thomas, "Your World and Mine," ibid., 31 January 1942, 5; Thomas, "What are We Going to do About the Germans," nd [1942?], NTP, Box 155.
71. Lillian Symes to Oskar Lange, 7 November 1939, NTP, Box 16; Thomas speech, "May Day 1942," SP Duke, Roll 46.
72. Thomas to William J. Bradley, 26 March 1942, NTP, Box 22.
73. Thomas, "The World About Us: Thomas Suggests Democratic Peace Offensive Terms," Call, 26 May 1944, 1; cf., Thomas, "Basic Peace Plan Must Spurn Imperialism, Plan Cooperative Machinery," ibid., 19 February 1943, 1; Thomas to editor, NYT, 12 May 1943, 24; Jessie Wallace Hagan, "Peace Without Victory Will Save Jews," nd, [May 1943], SP Duke, Roll 47; SP NEC to British Labour Party, nd, attached to minutes of NEC meeting, 23-25 July 1943, ibid.; Thomas, "The World About Us: Let's Launch that Political Peace Offensive at Once," Call, 5 May 1941, 8; Thomas to editor, NYT, 2 May 1945, 18; editorial in Challenge, February 1945, 4, SP Duke, Roll 133.
74. Thomas speech, "Democratic Socialism or Recurrant War," 4 November 1944, 4, ibid., Roll 51.
75. Thomas, "The World About Us: Still No Statement of War and Peace Plans," Call, 7 April 1944, 1; Thomas, "The World About Us: Triumph of Nihilism," ibid., 16 April 1945, 8; Thomas speech, "The Price of Peace," 30 July 1944, SP Duke, Roll 49.
76. See below, Chapter VI.
77. [Japan and Unconditional Surrender], nd [early 1945], SP Duke, Roll 51; cf., Thomas to Colonel Truman Smith, 10 April 1945, NTP, Box 28.
78. Thomas, "End the Pacific War," Call, 28 May 1945, 1.
79. Thomas, "Draft of Statement on Unconditional Surrender," nd [March 1945], NTP, Box 28.
80. Ibid.; cf., Thomas, "The World About Us: Triumph of

Nihilism," Call, 16 April 1945, 8; see also Thomas, as chairman of the Post War World Council, to Truman, June 1945, reprinted in ibid., 4 June 1945, 5; in this letter, Thomas requests Truman make a concrete peace offer to Japan to save lives and keep Stalin out of Asia.

81. See Thomas's explanation why the SP could not demand a negotiated peace in 1942 in his diary, 12 April 1942, NTP, Box 176.

82. Fleischman to Hartman, 28 January 1944; for the Hartman/Peace Now controversy, see correspondence of January-March 1944, SP Duke, Roll 48.

83. Editorial, Call, 20 August 1943, 8; this was the earliest of the SP proposals. For others, see ibid., 31 March 1944, 8; 7 April 1944, 2, 7; 8 January 1945, 5; "Confidential Memorandum From Norman Thomas For Your Criticism and Advise," 1 May 1944, NTP, Box 153; Thomas believed by May 1944 that any danger of Nazi or Japanese aggression was minimal enough to allow a peace offensive; cf., Travers Clement to Thomas, 12 May 1944, ibid., Box 27, which called for a popular peace offensive "built from the bottom up." Press Releases, 25 June 1944, 22 July 1944, SP Duke, Roll 49; cf., Dwight McDonald, "The Responsibility of Peoples," Politics, February 1945, reprinted in MacDonald, Memoirs of a Revolutionist (Cleveland and New York: Meridian, 1963), 33-74, especially 69.

84. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: What Sort of Peace?" Call, 18 April 1942, 3.

85. NYT, 7 March 1943, 33; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Can We Plan Now For a Decent Peace?" Call, 9 April 1943, 1; Post War World Council, "The Winning of the Peace," March 1944, SP Duke, Roll 48; Thomas, "Thomas Suggests Peace Terms," Call, 26 May 1944; NYT, 31 July 1944, 26.

86. Anton Garden to Travers Clement, 13 December 1941, SP Duke, Roll 46; Thomas, "Memorandum on Peace and War," to NEC, June 1944, ibid., Roll 49; minutes of NEC meeting, 2-4 March 1945, 19, ibid., Roll 52.

87. Thomas to William Bross Lloyd, 1 May 1939, NTP, Box 16.

88. Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 18 April 1942, 5.

89. SP NEC Statement on the San Francisco Conference in ibid., 23 April 1945, 1.

90. Thomas to Dr. Minnie L. Moffett, 26 August 1941, NTP, Box 20.

91. Thomas, "The World About Us," Call, 15 October 1945, 6.

92. See New Jersey SP to NEC, "Resolution on Peace and Post-war Plans," 1 July 1943, SP Duke, Roll 47, for an accurate description of the socialist dilemma--an imperialist, competitive peace organization would guarantee new wars, but to oppose American participation in such an organization would be to "take an isolationist attitude." Neither alternative was palatable. The New Jersey branch advocated the party try to influence the American government into an anti-imperialist policy, hoping it could affect other nations' decisions.

93. Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 2 April 1943, 1.

94. NYT, 29 December 1943, 11; Thomas, "Continued Support for White Imperialism by Allies Means 'Race' War, Thomas Asserts," Call, 27 December 1944, 1; Thomas to editor, United States News, Telegram, 29 May 1944, NTP, Box 27; cf., United States News, 16 (9 June 1944), 32; NYT, 4 June 1944, 3; 13 September 1944, 15; 21 September 1944, 15; Thomas to editor, Idaho Pioneer, 19 September 1944, NTP, Box 27.

95. Press Release, 16 June 1944, SP Duke, Roll 49; NYT, 20 October 1944, 4; cf., Call, 8 September 1944, 6; 20 October 1944, 5, 6; 3 November 1944, 5.

96. See Thomas in United States News, 18 (6 April 1945), 32; Thomas, "The World About Us," Call, 6 January 1947, 8; "NEC Resolution to Security Council," ibid., 25 March 1946, 1.

97. NAC "Socialist Statement on San Francisco Conference," 18 April 1945, SP Duke, Roll 52; cf., "Revised Statement on the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals," nd [May 1944?], ibid., Roll 51; "Socialist Party Statement on the San Francisco Conference," Call, 23 April 1945, 1; Thomas to Raymond L. Buell, 9 May 1945, NTP, Box 28; Thomas to Leslie Charlow, 15 May 1945, ibid.; Thomas, "San Francisco and Geneva," Call, 14 May 1945, 5.

98. Thomas speech, "After San Francisco, What?" 25 May 1945, 1, SP Duke, Roll 52.

99. Minutes of SP national convention, 2-4 June 1944, 12, ibid., Roll 49.

100. Thomas speech, "After San Francisco, What?" 25 May 1945, 1, ibid., Roll 52.

101. Thomas, "The World About Us: Fear of Russia," Call, 18 June 1945, 8; Thomas, as chairman of the Post War World Council, to the NEC of the PWWC, 10 July 1945, SP Duke, Roll 52; Thomas, "Statement to Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the United Nations Charter," Call, 16 July 1945, 4; Travers Clement to editor, ibid., 30 July 1945, 6, reports on the NEC meeting. For more examples of the party's criticisms of the San Francisco Charter, see Call, 2 July 1945, 5, 8; 16 July 1945, 4; 1 April 1946, 1, 2; NYT, 14 July 1945, 1.

102. See below, Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

Catch 22: Reform, American Politics and the SP

1939-48

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CATCH 22: REFORM, AMERICAN POLITICS AND THE SP 1939-48

Socialist programs may well have been realistic and even prophetic, but without power they were exercises in futility. And power is not easy to grasp in the United States. There is a catch-22 in American politics. If a person or group seeks reform he or they must have power. No change is possible without power, political economic, cultural or spiritual. Yet to gain power in America's two party system, one must compromise and dilute his faith to please diverse groups. So the process which promises the power to change also seriously weakens the impulse to reform.

An American leader has two choices. If he wishes to remain ideologically pure, uncompromising in his faith, he will continue powerless. If he concludes that philosophical purity is not worth political impotence, he must enter the jousts of the American two party system and see his philosophy watered down constantly through compromise. By the time the reform leader reaches the stage where he can control a powerful political organization, his philosophy is rarely more than rhetoric aimed at securing his position. The American political system guarantees either purity with impotence, or its antithesis, soul-less

power. The American catch-22 deals with its foes by drawing and quartering them; drawing them into the larger amoral structure, or leaving them impotently free to quarter themselves through uncompromising factional warfare.¹

Change-oriented groups face this catch-22 today as they have for decades. The Populist party of the 1890s ripped itself apart searching for a way to beat it. Within a very few years of the foundation of the SP in 1901, it appeared destined to travel the same path as the Populists. Continuous debate flared between ideologically pure 'impossibilists' who sought what their opponents felt was impossible, immediate, thorough-going social revolution, and the 'sewer socialists,' who advocated evolutionary tactics, education and gentle persuasion.²

Right wing socialists did not advocate the technique of "boring within," trying to influence a major party from inside. Instead, early SP rightists, such as Victor Berger of Milwaukee and Morris Hillquit of New York, sought to create a SP that slowly would supplant one of the major parties as the second of the "perfect pairs of parts."³

This remained the party's official line until it abandoned national political campaigning after the disastrous election of 1952. But official lines and reality, especially in minority political parties, rarely are the same. Since the 1919 socialist-communist split, the SP resembled more and more its Populist predecessor. Three lines of philosophy, left, right, center, co-existed within the party; only the vague goal of a "democratic socialist commonwealth" held them together.

Under the strain of the Great Depression, the glue of the goal

weakened. SP splits in the 1930s were of two types: organized groups or caucuses withdrew from the party and individuals did likewise. These splits set the pattern for the rest of the SP's troubled existence. The right (old guard) split to form the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), essentially an instrument designed to bore within the Democratic Party.⁴ Leftist individuals split to join more activist "revolutionary" groups, especially the Trotskyists.⁵ The SDF's experience proved that goals were inane and sterile if a group worried more about the means than the ends. The right was willing to sublimate ultimate goals to immediate demands, believing that immediate demands, realized through major party action, laid a solid foundation for eventual socialization. "Perhaps I am to blame," wrote ex-SP rightest Daniel Hoan, "but from the time I drew the first workman's compensation act to the present time, my mind had been occupied in getting things done and I have been willing to let DeLeon, Hillquit and Norman Thomas . . . take care of the theories. If it should be any crime to have that kind of mind I will have to plead guilty."⁶

This reasoning was sour to those unwilling to sublimate goals to the struggle for power. It would take more than the addition of a Daniel Hoan to the Democratic party to make "that Party a militant force for the things for which he fought so valiantly," Thomas reminded a gathering in Wisconsin in 1944.⁷ For many socialists, as for Thomas, half a loaf was worth the fight only if a militant anti-capitalist organization presented it to the people.

The party's left wing argued against any sort of half loaf philosophy. It exercised little power, even in SP councils. Often the

radical leftists were young and impatient. It rarely took long for them to gravitate to organizations more in tune with their romantic revolutionism. Party leaders were as impatient as the leftists when it came to dealing with them. "To be forced . . . to be lone and hunted wolves, slinking down back alleys [as the left would wish] is very melodramatic perhaps, the sort of conspiratorial gesture which the old Bolsheviks delighted in, but hardly the attitude of mature people who want to be of real service to socialism," wrote MacAlister Coleman to Thomas in 1942.⁸

In this all-important question of the means toward power, of how to achieve the party's goals, the majority of the SP's membership stood, as the Populists had stood, mid-way between the rabid leftists and the timorous rightists. "Under the present circumstance," Thomas wrote to a leftist in 1940, "any party in as close agreement as you seem to desire, would probably be a sect." Compromises were neither necessarily good nor bad for a radical political organization. Each compromise the party "had to wrestle with further defines and hones it organizationally."⁹

The ideological dangers of fascism, its unwilling ally liberal capitalism, and bolshevism were the boundaries within which the SP believed it had to restrict its official philosophy. The rightist and leftist extremes of organizational philosophy were also the boundaries within which the majority of the party softly trod on matters which dealt with the questions of the road to power. Sometimes the SP and its leaders tended too far right and sometimes too far left. But the party never wavered from its primary task: "Faith in the possibility

of the good life is essential to building the good life. Man does not progress by abandoning the fight for progress."¹⁰

Often mainline socialists veered to one side or the other, toward impossibilism or immediatism, as realities seemed to dictate. But they did so reluctantly, aware of the dangers of both extremes, sectarian impotence on the left and amoral impotence on the right. The party's flirtations with other groups showed the willingness to veer right. It also served as the most effective argument against those who have charged the SP with inability to work within the American political catch-22. Of course the SP could and did work within the political system. In this instance, as in so many others, Thomas and his allies sought to work exactly in the middle of the system, eschewing the dangers of right and left. Hence the appellation of "midroaders."

The clearest examples of the party's ability to veer toward political cooperation or back toward independence, to operate within the limits imposed by America's political catch-22, were its various decisions to ally temporarily with other groups for specific goals. This strategy promised both retention of organizational integrity and concrete results. Such was the tacit alliance that developed between the SP and the America First Committee (AFC) between late 1939 and late 1941.

The official SP position on the war between September of 1939 and December of 1941 stressed the necessity of remaining uninvolved in the European conflict, if Americans were to keep what civil liberties they had. The party's program called for a balance between anti-war agitation and emphasis on protection and extension of political and

economic democracy.¹¹

The America First Committee, founded in 1939, shared with the socialists the desire to keep the United States out of the European war. For Thomas and most socialists, that was enough, as long as the AFC did not retard the SP's fight to extend democracy. Even the "business perspective" of AFC was not enough to destroy its usefulness in the SP's eyes. At least not until prominent AFC members started to sound like the fascists that the socialists so abhorred.¹²

Initially, Thomas and the SP sought a modus vivendi with local AFC organizations "to avoid all possible confusion and duplication of effort . . . "¹³ Many SP members and sympathizers felt that tacit cooperation of the two organizations would strengthen the anti-war movement and open up wider vistas for the SP's message. Some party functionaries went so far as to establish "unofficial" relations with local AFC leaders.¹⁴ If the effort to remain out of World War II was significant enough to sail the dangerous waters of party factionalization, then it was surely an important enough goal to invite support from "a non-socialist but legitimate anti-war group."¹⁵ The struggle to keep America out of war was an immediate issue important enough to veer party strategy significantly to the right, toward immediatism. If Roosevelt had forced the nation into the war, the SP choice would have gained it new strength. As it was, the party lost members and much of its already small influence.

In late 1940, Thomas delivered a memo to the NEC on the America First Committee.¹⁶ He noted that initially AFC was not an organization with which the SP should have cooperated. It was a committee of "pri-

marily businessmen who were all for defense and wanted no dealings with pacifists." But recently, Thomas continued, the organization had "gone through an interesting evolutionary process." It had "lost Henry Ford from its executive committee, effectively purged itself of certain Chicago men and groups suspected of pro-nazi sympathies, begun to look for liberal supporters." It had "set itself unmistakably against anti-semitism of any degree." And miracle of miracles, it had even "gone so far as to have friendly dealings with both pacifists and socialists."

Thomas noted that the AFC still supported many things the SP opposed: the draft, work projects and defense spending at the cost of welfare. But he emphasized that it had "potential usefulness as a counterweight to the organized interventionists," especially the William Allen White Committee.¹⁷ Thomas hoped the NEC would advise SP members to join actively only the SP-front organization Keep American Out of War Congress, but not to eschew support of or by the AFC.¹⁸ And besides, Thomas thought an SP-AFC connection would give socialists "an opportunity to reach an extra crowd with our point of view."¹⁹

Most socialists accepted the Thomas/NEC position on tacit cooperation with AFC, probably because it contained no promise of overt SP support for the isolationist organization. Paul Porter and David Felix, both rightists, were the major NEC opponents of SP-AFC cooperation proposals. Porter believed the SP should avoid the Committee because of its connection with Henry Ford. Both he and Felix were trying to steer the party toward a position favorable to aid for the Allies. That was the real reason they opposed any cooperation with AFC. Thomas believed the goal of no American war participation was important enough

to accept and court outside support. But he recognized that three types of Socialists would disagree with the party's overtures to AFC. They included those, like Porter and Felix, who favored aid to the Allies, the "perfectionists" of the party, with whom Thomas felt great affinity, and those who "consciously or unconsciously are influenced by one of the most damnable smear campaigns especially against [AFC's Charles] Lindbergh which I have ever witnessed."²⁰

Thomas's efforts to court outside support for the party's anti-war crusade quickly ran into trouble from sources over which neither Thomas nor the party had control, the leadership of the AFC, chiefly Charles Lindbergh. Robert Parker, SP national secretary until 1942, reported in early 1941 that recent charges of anti-semitism against the AFC leadership were "ridiculous," but his report did not mention Lindbergh.²¹

Thomas agreed with Parker, but the charges continued. Thomas wrote to Senator Burton K. Wheeler (D.-Montana) in March of 1941 that perhaps Wheeler could combat the anti-semitic reputation of AFC with some rhetorical plastic surgery. "Back here in New York," Thomas wrote, "I find the tendency among our friends to be skeptical of phrases like 'international bankers,' especially coupled with proper names of Jews." Thomas suggested that Wheeler and other AFC speakers always use the House of Morgan as an example of international bankers and only use Jewish names "where they justly apply."²²

Neither Wheeler nor other AFC leaders were receptive to Thomas's suggestions. Throughout 1941, Thomas sought closer ties with AFC. Like the SP leader, the AFC's ruling members were happy to receive

support from other organizations, but not ready to allow a minor political figure chart AFC's course or censor its rhetoric. In early May 1941, AFC leader Robert Wood extended an invitation to Thomas to join AFC. Thomas declined. He said he felt he was more use to the common cause outside the AFC organization.²³

Charges of AFC anti-semitism continued throughout the summer of 1941. Thomas ignored them. He worked on the problem at hand--the war. He believed he could best serve the cause of peace by speaking wherever he could find a vaguely receptive audience, even to an AFC meeting. In late April 1941, R. Douglas Stuart, leader of the St. Louis Branch of AFC, telegraphed Thomas an invitation to speak at an anti-war rally. Thomas, even though he did "not think the N.A.C. has the constitutional right to decide absolutely about the St. Louis meeting," sought its permission in the interests of party unity and loyalty. He hoped the NAC would give him permission to address the meeting because "We have to go where the people are . . . [for] we shall lose our chance to influence unless we are around in these critical days."²⁴ Hardly the opinion of a political naif.

At first the NAC granted Thomas permission, provided that the AFC would publicize the meeting as a joint KAOWC/AFC venture. Thomas agreed and forwarded the demand to Stuart, who quickly accepted it. The NAC soon changed its mind. It voted to ask Thomas not to speak. Thomas and Ben Fischer voted against this resolution at the late spring 1941 NAC meeting, while a strange coalition of left and right voted for it--Lillian Symes, Judah Drob (left), Aaron Levenstein and Frank Traeger (right). The leftists voted against cooperation because it would dilute

the SP's ideological unity, the rightists because they were trying to influence the SP to support American aid to the Allies. In essence, the vote delineated the three groups in the SP: the left, still with a hint of impossiblism, the immediate right, and the midroaders, who sought to balance the party's program with the best of both left and right.²⁵

Thomas did not speak at the St. Louis meeting, but the party soon went on record supporting his stand on the question of cooperation with AFC. In early May 1941, the NEC passed a resolution urging KAOWC/AFC cooperation "under joint auspices, and for well-defined objectives," if, "in every case," it was clear that the proposed event was "free from fascist or communist control and that it repudiates anti-semitism."²⁶ The NEC defeated a move to force all who would cooperate with AFC to obtain NAC permission before so doing.²⁷ A coalition of left and right NEC members again opposed the resolution, but were not strong enough to defeat it. Thomas had won a victory, but it turned out to be short-lived. Despite growing pressure from the left and the right, Thomas agreed to appear with Lindbergh, Wheeler, Oswald Garrison Villard and Amos Pinchot at a New York AFC meeting scheduled for the twenty-third of May 1941.²⁸

At this point, Thomas was acting like a man hell-bent on forcing his party down a road it did not want to travel. One member reminded Thomas that SP support for AFC was helping to build up the reputations of dangerous men. Another, and both were prominent, protested Thomas's appearance with Lindbergh, an "avowed proponent of vicious fascist and anti-socialist views."²⁹ Thomas took no notice.

He defended Lindbergh. He believed the charges that the aviator was an anti-semitic were proof of nothing more than interventionists' fear of his popularity. Thomas did admit that Lindbergh was "a man not prepared by philosophy or contact to deal properly with some of the problems he tackles." Thomas thought that Lindbergh was "a nice fellow," but wished the aviator would make an uncompromising anti-fascist statement to the American people and was very uncomfortable when Lindbergh refused.³⁰

Thomas appeared at the May 1941 AFC rally, and caught hell from all sides in and out of the party.³¹ He was willing to appear with Lindbergh, to support the AFC until both went beyond the pale of good sense, for two very important reasons. Thomas clearly believed the fight to keep America out of war was of such importance as to rate socialist cooperation with all but the most obvious fascist or communist groups. He also recognized that the AFC presented him with an excellent chance to speak to and reason with influential people who under normal circumstances might well have used their power to gag him. Certainly they would not have taken the trouble to attend his speeches. Thomas's actions reveal a man trying anything possible to make his party a true political contender. He played the game to the hilt. If one could criticize Thomas for his behavior in 1941, it must be for his overly optimistic judgment of the true character of Lindbergh and the AFC, not for his attempt to use the war issue as a bridge to close the gap between the SP and the American people.

Unfortunately for the party, the Thomas strategy backfired badly. So bad was the publicity the SP received from the intervention-

ist press, that SP leaders were still explaining their actions six years after the fact. William Becker, the party's labor secretary in 1947, explained to an Iowa unionist that Thomas joined the 1941 rally to bolster growing progressive elements within the AFC against a resurgent group of reactionaries. Becker reported correctly that the NAC reversed itself in mid-May to allow Thomas to speak, but his explanation of Thomas's reason for appearing seemed weak and too full of hindsight.³²

There was a limit to Thomas's patience, even when a golden chance to build American socialism was at stake. After Lindbergh's infamous Des Moines speech of 11 September 1941, in which the aviator charged that pro-war forces were anglophiles and Jews, Thomas moved quickly to disassociate the SP from the AFC. Answering the deluge of criticism the party received after the Des Moines speech, Thomas pointed out that many AFC members were not anti-semites, and that Lindbergh was just a dupe of forces he could not understand. Publicly, Thomas disavowed Lindbergh's statement. He wrote the New York Times criticizing the aviator's reasoning, and voted for an NEC statement condemning the AFC.³³

The NEC statement of September 1941 was not an apology. "The fight to keep America out of war is a fight for democracy," the committee trumpeted. The AFC committed a cardinal sin in seeking to protect democracy using undemocratic methods, especially its appeal to racial prejudice; Lindbergh's statement was a "serious blow to democracy." The SP watched the AFC from "its very inception." Party leaders believed socialists could "influence the Committee in the direction of

a genuine democratic, anti-war program." Cooperation with the AFC opened new doors to the SP.

To have eschewed this opportunity would have been to avoid the party's "plain duty to the American people." But the AFC did not heed the words of its socialist friends. It allowed anti-semites to infiltrate its core. And now the SP, always critical of many AFC beliefs, concluded it should sever its relationship with the Committee. The NEC advised SP members to "refuse cooperation with the America First Committee . . . because it does not represent the progressive, democratic anti-war forces who constitute the groundwork for a better world."³⁴

The SP's brief flirtation with the AFC demonstrated the party's willingness to ally with non-socialist elements, to exploit non-socialist support to realize significant socialist goals. This willingness had its dangers, as the AFC experiment bore witness; but it also illuminated an SP obviously aware of American political realities. Strength was paramount. But those same realities dictated caution. Socialists were aware of the catch-22 in the American system; it determined that the clearest road to power, through one of the two major parties, was off limits.

As the American political catch-22 eliminated the most obvious means of gaining influence in American politics, so did the Soviet experience eliminate the other major road, violent revolutionary action by strictly disciplined cadres. If the means to power were violent, so then would be the result of power. The revolution that thrived by the sword became the sword. The socialists and other non-communist radicals were hamstrung between these two poles, the paradoxical parts of a

catch-22. The means determined the ends; that was Lenin's bloody secret. It was to the credit of non-communist American radicals that they did not simply make elaborate gestures of despair and retire gracefully to the sidelines.

Instead, the SP throughout the 1930s and 1940s sought a middle road between the excesses of compromise and Leninist-vanguardist violence. The party hoped to use the means of immediate demands to gain their end, political power. Immediate demands were a true road to power only if the party could effectively oversee their realization. Otherwise, the proposed reforms could strengthen the existing system. Roosevelt and the New Deal left little doubt of that.

Still the party persisted. An NAC approved list of immediate demands in late August of 1945 was typical. It touched off an interesting debate between spokesmen of the party's three groups, Travers Clement (left), Thomas (midroad), and Darlington Hoopes (right). The NAC list included provisions for full employment, a drastic raise in the minimum wage, a shorter work week, a more equitable tax system, extension of Social Security, government control of monopolies under the existing anti-trust laws ("for whatever good it may do"), extension of domestic political and economic democracy, and racial equality.³⁵ On the international scene, the SP's demands included more emergency relief to the world's starving masses, comprehensive food production planning and distribution, a better United Nations without the Security Council veto. The SP advocated a tripartite program for peace--liquidation of imperialism, multi-lateral disarmament and international control of atomic energy.³⁶

These immediate demands were designed to appeal to the working and middle classes. Even if New Deal liberals adopted these reforms, the result would be social stability, an atmosphere in which democratic socialism could thrive. At least that was the theory that allowed socialists, revolutionary or evolutionary, to advocate immediate reforms from the existing capitalist government.

Rightist socialist opinion about immediate demands was not a simple positive. Rightists were the most vocal supporters of the idea of immediate demands, but only of a certain, eminently realizable type.³⁷ The right concluded that immediate demands essentially nudged society toward its final goal, stateless socialism. So the party must support only those positions which the existing government would accept, only those positions which would actually become a reality. Party demands must be reasonable, attainable, and at least faintly acceptable to the ruling class.

This was Darlington Hoopes's position on the 1945 list of immediate demands. Hoopes was a leading light in the strong Reading, Pennsylvania local (Local Berks County), a labor lawyer and Thomas's running mate in 1944. He was instrumental in persuading the Local Berks to re-affiliate with the SP in 1944 after its short flirtation with the SDF.³⁸ Hoopes was a rightist, an evolutionist, an immediatist. He wrote to William Becker, SP labor and organizational secretary, during the debate on the 1945 immediate demands that he believed the whole list to be "unrealistic." Hoopes believed the NAC accepted the demands because "they are popular," not because they were realizable or even socialist-oriented.

Hoopes particularly attacked the demand for a seventy cent per hour minimum wage as too inflationary; if passed it would constitute a seventy-five percent increase. He singled out the demand for a thirty hour work week as unrealistic when the rest of the world was so in need of American products. He even attacked the SP's anti-monopoly plank because it failed to specify whether privately-owned monopolies alone were liable to anti-trust suits.³⁹

Hoopes and the rightists, centered in Reading and Milwaukee, demanded only what the market could bear. Often the right neglected the needs of the working and middle classes. As Travers Clement pointed out to Becker, the party should not waste its energy contemplating what its demands, if realized, might do to the capitalist system. Its health was not the party's concern.⁴⁰

Clement was the undisputed leader of the left wing of the party, certainly after Lillian Symes died in 1944. He was one of the few SP leaders who remained consistently leftist throughout his active career. Most, like Fleischman and Thomas, slowly drifted right year after year.⁴¹ Leftist SP members of the 1940s were not the impossibilists of the Party's "Golden Years."⁴² Clement and his faction believed immediate demands were valuable, for purposes of education if nothing else.

Clement divided the 1945 list of immediate demands into three categories. First, there were those the party could hope to gain through action of the existing government, such as increased Social Security and medical insurance. He sometimes wondered why the party bothered to publicize this type, as inevitably the major parties "so

easily steal them from us when the heat grows too great." But since he "always rejected" the theory that "increased misery and frustration" among the workers bred revolutionary situations, and believed a relatively prosperous working class would "reach the boiling point quicker," he understood the party's reasons for advancing such reforms; he concluded that "working for these immediate demands is a very legitimate activity of socialists."

Second, the party demands for full employment and freedom for colonial peoples were only legitimate if "there is a good possibility of rallying masses of people in support of them." Popular pressure on the existing government could only forebode ill for the capitalists. But Clement urged caution in stressing these demands; he noted that too much publicity with little public support could weaken the party. It could even invite repression.

The third category Clement labeled "ultimate demands," such as the abolition of war and the ending of all imperialism. "It seems to me to be utterly unrealistic to appeal to the present government" in favor of these demands. Capitalist governments could not grant them without signing their own death warrants. Clement did not see any party profit in massive publicity of the ultimate demands. He hoped the SP would restrict itself to the first and second categories, which would raise the workers' living standard and educate them to the imbecilities of the capitalist system.⁴³

Clement's remarks were neither impossibilist nor immediatist. The important point of this exchange lay in the goals of Hoopes and Clement. Hoopes quaked at the thought of significantly challenging the

status quo. Clement thought of nothing but its destruction, peacefully, democratically to be sure, but destruction nonetheless. Thomas cast his lot between these two extremes. In this instance as in so many others, he was a midroader.

Thomas agreed with Clement on all points except the third category. Thomas remarked that the SP was "conditioned by the possibilities inherent in a given situation, by the practicality of any effective action outside the government, by the degree of advancement of the people in political idealism, and by the nature of the method" the party sought to use in any given situation. The SP leader was rarely so explicit as this in acceptance of the pragmatic ideal that the truth in any given situation is that which works. And if government action solved a specific problem, even if the government was capitalist, then so be it. Thomas thought that if government had "a good method, I should certainly believe that we ought to urge the government to take it." Answering Clement's criticism, Thomas stated that he believed it was "certainly legitimate to call on governments to end imperialism or to guarantee full employment as a means of calling the attention of the people to the fact that this is what government might do."⁴⁴

Thomas had little faith in capitalist democratic government, even though he admitted it had "reduced the number of private wars of civil wars within the nations which have it." He did not think it likely that the United States government would take the lead in disarmament or force its allies to liquidate their colonial empires. But the SP leader hoped that this was "sufficiently possible . . . to be worth tremendous effort. . . . " Democratic capitalism was not "what

it used to be in the western world. The power of labor and other actual or potential anti-imperialist groups is already great and growing." Even conservatives desired peace and increasingly recognized the unprofitability of imperialist capitalism. All these conditions militated for increased socialist activity, within and without established governments, to gain the party's immediate demands, from the smallest to the largest.⁴⁵

Thomas's position on immediate demands was a mixture of the immediate and the long range. His emphasis on ceaseless party agitation for bread and butter reforms to help the working class was reminiscent of Victor Berger's tactics. His stress on long range goals which he believed required democratic socialism paralleled the position of the pre World War I Debs left wing. Thomas sought the middle road, neither too far to the right nor to the left. Compromise in the best American understanding of the word.

Immediate demands always produced heated debate. What made the 1945-46 debate more significant than earlier arguments was that all three positions accepted the idea of the existing government acting to solve social and economic problems. Clement and Thomas clearly believed the present government could not solve the problems with any permanence--unlike Hoopes, whose attitude seemed more protective of the existing government than worried at the workers' plight--but all accepted the government as an active partner in at least some of the party's immediate demands. Like most Americans, socialists at the end of the Second World War were used to a New Deal-type of government. Thomas even admitted that he looked to the government to fulfill cer-

tain actions that would encourage democratic socialism's emergence. In 1946 Thomas was very close to a position of critical support for the established government in its fight against Soviet expansionism.

Thomas believed that if the present government would maintain peace for a decade, democratic socialism could grow to power.⁴⁶ The socialist leader assumed the process would require the growth of an organized democratic socialist movement. Growth required new members and the party tried to obtain strength in two ways, recapturing old supporters and recruiting new ones. To recapture the old, the SP increased its negotiations for "organic unity" with the SDF. It tried to recruit members from those instrumental in forming the Union for Democratic Action (UDA) and its successor, the Americans For Democratic Action (ADA). The greatest push for new members and sympathizers came from SP attempts to influence formation of a new third party in 1948.

SP-SDF unity, whether organic or for specific actions, would reorganize the coalition that produced the hopeful results in 1932. The wish for unity never disappeared, particularly among rightist SP members.⁴⁷ Official negotiations between the two factions flourished in the late 1930s and again after the war.⁴⁸ The negotiators rarely had trouble reaching agreement on important points such as the definition of democracy and its importance, the attitude toward reformism in the major parties, the means of union work, anti-communism and anti-totalitarianism, and social and political reaction.⁴⁹ Likewise, the two groups usually agreed on many specific causes. During the war, both urged militant action against racial discrimination. Both decried government treatment of Japanese-Americans. Both criticized the new

United Nations as a tool of the great powers. And both attacked the United States government for its prosecution of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party.⁵⁰

Unity often seemed just around the corner. But three things always worked against it. There were, in both organizations, sections who refused to accept the idea of unity. The extreme right wing of the SDF and the left wing of the SP would not stomach the idea.⁵¹ Personal animosities left from the 1946 split refused to die. Certain SDF leaders, especially Algernon Lee and William Bohn, thought the SP, and expressly Norman Thomas, were too prone to bolshevism. Thomas "had spent years colloquing with communists [and] sneering at 'the bogus democracy of bourgeois parliamentarianism.'" ⁵² Personal passion was much more difficult to heal than doctrinal difference. If personal antipathy and factional infighting were not enough to insure socialist fratricide, basic disagreement on a major issue, different each time unity seemed near, guaranteed it. In 1939, the SDF could not support the SP's war stand. Negotiations went well on all points except that. The SDF mouthpiece, the New Leader was one of the most vocal opponents of the SP's war stand from 1939 to 1941.⁵³ After the war, the SDF's refusal to abandon its new political home, the New York State Liberal party, made political affiliation the divisive issue. As Travers Clement remarked at the time, if the SP could get a guarantee that the SDF would support it politically, "You'll find it won't mean a damn thing the first time any kind of a lesser evil presents itself." The SDF, Clement commented with obvious disgust, was bound to find a lesser evil wherever it looked.⁵⁴ The SDF's vacillation between socialist

rhetoric and political support of liberal groups made them suspect in the eyes of SP members. Socialists were never sure if the SDF was a socialist or liberal organization.

Why did the SP try so hard for unity with the small, but rich SDF? Doubtless for financial reasons. The Thomas dream of an all inclusive SP was important, as was the SP's emphasis on democratic action. The more votes, the better. SP-SDF unity would have been a politically "smart" move. But Thomas did not grasp the fact that the SDF lust for relevancy had taken it far down the road of support for the American political and social status quo. The socialist-liberal splinter group either ignored the American political catch-22, or chose to sacrifice its socialist principles in a quest for power. Thomas would never let the SP go as far down this road as the SDF had. That was the major reason unity did not occur until the mid 1950s, by which time it was an empty gesture.

The SP was equally unsuccessful in its attempts to influence the Union for Democratic Action (UDA) and its successor, the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). In fact, the party's attitude toward the two organizations demonstrated its growing acceptance of mainstream political action as a means to influence American social and economic development. Ironically, the new attitude of acceptance gained the party neither strength nor influence.

The SP at first wanted little to do with the UDA, formed in 1941. Thomas did hail it as an advance over the William Allen White Committee, as UDA would be a home for left wing interventionists.⁵⁵ In 1941 and 1942, the NEC instructed members that UDA membership was

incompatible with SP membership.⁵⁶ From the first, UDA was a half-way house between the SP, the SDF and the Democratic party. Most of the early members of the Union were ex-SP members who split from the party over the issue of the proper American response to the European war. The Union retained its socialist orientation on domestic issues throughout the war.⁵⁷ So when the SP began to cast around for a political alternative after the disastrous elections of 1946, the party logically considered the UDA. The major division between the SP and the Union throughout the war echoed the division between the SP and the SDF--UDA's continued support for FDR and his method of making and winning the war.⁵⁸ After the war, the party position toward UDA softened. The NEC noted in late 1946 that the party no longer considered the "UDA as a rival political organization and therefore" did "not object to some of our members joining it . . . "⁵⁹

The NEC's derision was understandable. The SP was growing; it had approximately 4,000 members in January 1947, compared with 1,800 in 1942.⁶⁰ The conservative wing of the Republican party appeared poised to sweep to one victory after another; FDR was dead, Truman was inept. The New Deal died long before its author did, and his successor was certainly not trying to revive it. What an opportunity for the SP to grow, to influence American politics. Where else but to the SP could liberals and leftists go, except perhaps to the UDA or a new third party? The SP's tactic was dual, to work within a new organization called the National Committee for a New Party, and bore within the UDA.⁶¹

Why not UDA? It was thoroughly anti-communist, vaguely social-

ist and at least on the surface, not averse to third party action. The NEC presumed it could not lose in this effort. Even if the UDA evolved into a liberal pressure group within the Democratic party, SP members within the Union could certainly persuade many of the more leftist members either to join the SP or a new third party. The SP organizer for Washington, D. C., William Gausmann, wrote national secretary Fleischman in early 1947 that he believed the SP had little choice but to join the UDA's successor, ADA. "If we don't go in now," he exclaimed, "we'll really be isolated [from the mainstream of American politics] but good. And God knows that if we go back to the 1941-1945 isolation from liberal and progressive labor groups we are through." Gausmann told Fleischman that ADA executive secretary James Loeb (an ex-SP member) had nothing against SP members joining ADA. He also pointed out that ADA's policy of no appeasement of Communism at home or abroad minus the SDF-type corollary of preventive war, was close to the SP position.⁶²

The very day Gausmann wrote this, Fleischman wrote to him urging that he "strongly hail" the ADA's formation "because it will tend to isolate the Commies and Commie-liners in the liberal field." Fleischman pressed Gausmann to "point out" to ADA members specific SP solutions to specific problems, to advocate resolution of the "conflict of views on new party vs. Dem. party [sic]," and to try educating ADA members to the reality that "fighting commies" was not everything. Reactionaries were just as dangerous, if not more.⁶³

Gausmann and Fleischman were very excited about the party's possibilities within the ADA. Gausmann wrote that the ADA members were convinced "anti-communism is not enough," and would "make a good audi-

ence for specific socialist remedies."⁶⁴ Fleischman, organizational and labor secretary William Becker (a leftist) and Thomas conferred on the ADA question, and all agreed "we should try to get into it." They were disappointed that they had been unaware of the organizational conference, but vowed to make up for lost time.⁶⁵

Other SP leaders were a bit more cautious. In a memo to the NEC, Irving Barshop, ever the even-handed, "let's look at both sides" type, presented his perception of the situation. He enumerated six reasons for socialist participation in ADA, the most important of which were that ADA was a significant anti-communist liberal group capable of capturing labor and black support and it could turn into a base for a third party--it was uncommitted to any party at the moment. Barshop noted, no doubt with great satisfaction, that the ADA's formation was "a major setback to the C.P.," as it took "away domination of the liberal fold from them." As positive as his arguments seemed, Barshop was not totally convinced. He noted the ADA leaders were "for free enterprise," hardly a stand likely to gather socialist support. Too many traditional democrats had already joined ADA, including Herbert Lehman, with whom the SP had much trouble in 1944.⁶⁶ When all the chips had fallen, Barshop believed ADA would support the Democratic party.⁶⁷

Meeting in late January 1947, the NEC voted to permit ADA membership. A week later, the NAC dictated guidelines for SP-ADA membership. The action committee advised local SP branches to instruct a trusted member to join the local ADA chapter and report back to the Local, whose secretary was in turn to report to the NAC. Any proposed joint activities required NAC approval. Within the ADA, SP members

were to agitate for a third party, stimulate criticism of old party candidates, and work for specific socialist proposals. The ADA was to be the point of contact to reach the liberal community.⁶⁸ The SP was not the only radical organization to search out liberal anti-communist support among the ADA. The Workers Party, a splinter of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party also instructed its members to seek support from ADA members.⁶⁹

Almost as soon as the SP's governing bodies made up their collective minds to go full steam ahead into ADA, members sent back disturbing reports. On 4 February 1947, Fleischman wrote a nasty note to Gausmann asking why the organ of the Local Washington branch contained an editorial counseling ADA to refrain from all types of political action. Gausmann reported the next day that he wrote the editorial because he believed the ADA, should it decide to engage in electoral activity, would do so "in connection with the Democratic Party."⁷⁰

Fleischman noted another weakness of ADA in a letter to Zane Meckler, his organizer in Los Angeles. "My hunch is that the ADA set up will make it virtually impossible to organize [an American version] of a C.C.F. [Canadian Commonwealth Federation, a successful democratic socialist group] at the present time." Fleischman admitted that since the ADA's organizational convention, a New York committee called to investigate the possibilities of starting a CCF had not met. He doubted now if it was worthwhile even to schedule the meeting.⁷¹

The party hierarchy, perhaps blinded by its hopes of ADA-SP cooperation, went on its merry way, ignoring mounting member protests. In May 1947, the NEC reiterated its earlier decision to permit SP-ADA

membership, providing socialists within the ADA "work for a decent domestic policy and economic program along socialist lines." Reports such as that of Barney Taylor, the ADA southern representative in Memphis may have seduced the National Office. Taylor reported that "confidentially, off the record, sub-rosa, hush-hush, etc., I think ADA might through a natural process develop into the New Party we all want so badly." Taylor then requested that the National Office send him a list of its Southern members and sympathizers.⁷² The party made one concession in the face of growing evidence the ADA would become an arm of the Democratic party. It instructed SP-ADA members to "enlist the support" of any "pro-independent political action people . . . by working with them in ADA."⁷³

The SP tactic within ADA was very much like a tactic the CP often employed--infiltration of a friendly organization to turn it toward the infiltrator's desired goal. Unfortunately for the SP, in this case the tactic failed. Ironically, the failure was due to CP tactics. As the CP-third party movement grew in 1948, as Truman made specific moves to recapture liberal support, ADA moved closer to the Democratic party. And as ADA moved closer, the SP withdrew from it.⁷⁴ The divorce was not acrimonious. The SP was tired of the ADA's liberalism. By September 1947, Gausmann reported to Fleischman that the ADA's domestic policies were too free-enterprise oriented for his taste, and its foreign policy, well, it was "from every conceivable point . . . one of the most sophomoric documents that I have ever seen."⁷⁵

The marriage was doomed from the beginning. By 1944, the UDA had dropped whatever vestiges of socialism it ever had. It feared the

repercussions of the Republican campaign cry of "clear it with Sidney" as the beginning of a new period of red-baiting. ADA therefore despaired of a socialist program ever working in the United States.⁷⁶ But this became apparent only in hindsight. The UDA/ADA's move away from socialism paralleled the amplification of its anti-communist line.⁷⁷ James Loeb may have welcomed socialist support in early 1947, but it was not because he was thinking of rejoining the SP, pushing the ADA in its direction or supporting a third party.⁷⁸ The SP's failure to modify ADA to fit its purpose did not blunt the party's determination to secure a wider voice in American politics. That Henry Wallace and the Communist Party accomplished.

From 1901 to 1921, the SP refused to support any non-socialist political organization. At the 1921 Detroit convention, the party first declared for a labor party, recognizing its weakness after the 1919 communist split. From 1921 until the party's 1952 decision to refrain from any electoral work, the question of SP support for third parties was a lively debate topic. Debate centered on strategic and theoretical questions, and grew acrimonious chiefly around election time.⁷⁹ The major questions in most socialists' minds were whether the SP could retain its socialist orientation in a mass political organization, whether the party could nudge a third party toward a democratic socialist program, and whether any third party could be successful on the American political scene.

These questions were functions of the American political catch-
 22. The SP, its rank and file members and national leaders, wanted to influence the drift of American social and political development. But

that desire was not so strong, either for personal or ideological reasons, that it overrode the socialist belief that democratic socialism was the only viable organic form of social organization which could offer to the American people both material security and individual freedom. Hence, in the third party debate, the SP decision makers sought once again a middle path between the evils of powerlust and the impotence of theological purity.

The question of whether a third party could ever be successful in American politics was particularly hot when a broad-based, semi-socialist group was successful in another nation. The 1945 victory of the British Labour Party, wrote Norman Thomas, taught American socialists that if democratic socialism were to come to this nation, it would spring from "an organization for independent political action" and not tentative alliance with any major party. The SP believed, at least until the Labour government refused to retreat from an imperial foreign policy, that its victory signalled the beginning of the socialization of Europe, a trend they desperately wanted the United States to follow.⁸⁰

The 1940 election ignited an intra-party debate over the possibility of the SP-supported third party in the United States. New Jersey socialist Anton Garden, writing in the discussion journal Hammer and Tongs, sounded the opening bell in January 1940. Garden believed the SP should branch out and try to form a third party for two reasons. Most importantly, he argued, the New Deal "is finished." Even if the liberal Democrats remained in power, which Garden doubted, they would reform no more. Besides, the New Deal hardly touched the problem of unemployment, "or rather of employment." Garden urged the NEC to

"approach . . . a new beginning." It should appoint a committee to study the possibilities of a new party. Garden believed that there were millions of radical-minded Americans throughout the nation, just begging for organization. He supposed this element would "not go for complete socialism" as that term had been "smeared by Stalinist Russia." But this should not worry "real socialists" who would put little emphasis on a name. He envisioned a new party which would combine all sorts of liberals and radicals. The new element would go immediately for a basic socialist program, and would start the United States down the road to "a process of continuous social revolution based on the principles of pure democracy."⁸¹

Garden's proposal set off arguments which party members were to repeat in 1944 and again in 1946. The first reply to Garden's article agreed with the New Jersey socialist's opinions, but said his conclusions were false. The SP, wrote Clarence Rust, should form a progressive coalition within the Democratic party and eschew independent political action altogether.⁸² Most socialists, except those on the extreme left wing, agreed with Garden, but few were willing to go as far as Rust. The SP could well reap a harvest of support from the death of the New Deal, the end of the war, the lack of appreciable difference between the two major parties. But how? Bore within the Democratic party? Try to become a catalyst for a third party, either along the lines of the 1924 Progressive party or Canada's CCF? Or perhaps guarantee the SP's organizational integrity, shunning the pitfalls of third or fourth parties and concentrating on strengthening the SP? If the SP wished to retain its character, it must remain at all costs

institutionally unique. SP members advanced all these proposals in 1940, 1944, and 1946. The great majority of articles in Hammer and Tongs throughout the war were directed toward trying to explain why the party was so weak, or suggesting methods, cited above, for strengthening it.⁸³

The fundamental issue was how much theoretical and organizational integrity the party should sacrifice in return for popular support, how much of its character the party could sacrifice and yet remain an institution. Leftists said none.⁸⁴ Rightists said all, or at least much. And, as usual, most of the party members tried to effect a compromise between the two positions. Jack Sessions, Chicago YPSL, tried such a feat in the April 1940 issue of Hammer and Tongs. He wrote that he was at a loss to understand why argument raged between the advocates of mass work and those of independent socialist action. Were not these two the same in principle, at least on a practical level? The party should emphasize independent socialist action only as it flowed into mass work, mass support--"socialists should do things that other people won't do because they don't believe in socialism." But that did not preclude doing things aimed at converting liberals to socialism. Sessions believed that the party's health was its ability to balance independent socialist work in politics with mass work--propaganda, perhaps even political alliance with non-socialist groups.⁸⁵

Party leaders emphasized this midroad position, this balancing act between the twin evils of the American political catch-22, in their attempts to generate a third party after the war. The increasing strength of the Canadian CCF, the Labour victory of 1945, Roosevelt's

death, Truman's bungling, Wallace's increasingly obvious Communist ties and the growing international climate of constant war-tension all combined to direct the party into its most ambitious effort to catalyze a third party since its coalition with LaFollette's Progressive party in 1924.

Throughout the war, the NEC discussed third party possibilities. In July 1943, Thomas asked the NEC to "approach at once organizations and individuals who may share our desire to further the ends we have set forth"--concrete surrender terms for the Axis, production for consumption, not war, building of a new mass party. The motion carried. Leftists Clement and Symes voted for it, although Thomas later had to mollify both, explaining through Krueger that it was not his desire to see the SP dissolve into a third party, but rather to see it be the solid, leftist core of the new political organization.⁸⁶

The 1944 debate centered on the problem of what the party should do in that year--wait for a spontaneous third party of protest to form, using the SP's slim resources to feed growing popular discontent, or simply plan to run a national campaign. Albert Hamilton, NEC member from the Washington, D. C. area, summed up the majority feeling. He noted that the SP should plan to run a normal national campaign in 1944 "in order not to have to run one in 1948." A large SP vote would be the best proof that Americans were weary of the major parties. Walter Uphoff of Wisconsin agreed, adding that the party should let those interested in a third party come to the SP. The 1944 campaign should be first and foremost for socialism, and the party should not even toy with the idea of liquidation until a new, socialist-oriented

third party was functional.⁸⁷ All the NEC members, including leftists Robin Meyers and William Becker, agreed to the basic idea of a concentrated 1944 campaign to break ground for a third party in 1948.⁸⁸

The NEC later adopted a working paper submitted by Judah Drob, ex-YPSL national secretary. Drob's paper reviewed the history of SP third party support and criticized it as too labor oriented. Trade union leaders were too wedded to the system to be effective third party leaders. A new mass party, one which would have a good chance of success, must be more than a farmer-labor party. It must "sell itself as an advocate of the solution of the problems that face all the people except for the small exploiting class. These solutions were far beyond simple trade union demands and were in essence a program for the whole people."⁸⁹ Drob and the NEC agreed that until such a party appeared on the political horizon, the SP should function as usual, keeping touch "on the local, state, and national levels, with all hints of third party activity." The NEC advised the National Office to hire a person to keep in touch with third party developments.⁹⁰

The national convention of the SP in June 1944 voted overwhelmingly to fund and participate in "Operation Socialism," an attempt--partially successful--to organize one hundred new locals and substantially increase the party's membership. A strong SP would be more attractive as a core for a new party and at the same time provide a cushion should the new party fail to materialize. The convention also defeated Maynard Krueger's attempt to put it on record as dedicating itself totally to the formation of a "democratic socialist party with mass support" like Canada's CCF.⁹¹ As attractive as a new party

might seem, most socialists were content to wait until one was functioning before throwing their support to it. The party made itself clear--it favored a third party as a viable method of achieving power. But socialists would not completely abandon their principles to chase the illusive bird of political influence. The party sought to avoid the dangers of the American political catch-22 by treading softly between its two extremes.

By mid 1945, the political currents working toward the formation of the long-awaited third party seemed swift.⁹² Socialist optimism soared when the National office received, in December 1945, a call for a convention to discuss the possibilities for a third party. The convention decided to plow before planting, and set up the National Educational Committee for a New Party (NECNP), in which SP members played a major role. It appeared as though the party was at last about to realize a twenty-five year dream of being midwife to the birth of a new American mass leftist political organization.⁹³

The party did not rush into the breach blindly. As fruitful as NECNP appeared, the NEC, following the mood set at the 1944 national convention, was not about to liquidate the SP and throw its few chips into NECNP's lap. In April of 1946, as liberal dissatisfaction with Truman mounted, the NEC noted that it would not support any third party unless the alliance promised an "advance of the cause of democratic socialism or to prevent a military or other type of dictatorship." When the new party appeared, if it wished SP support, it would have to bar all totalitarians, especially members of the Communist party. It would have to be content with having SP support only for specified

goals.⁹⁴ Even when a third party appeared a foregone conclusion, the NEC kept its distance. Thomas, like many socialists, felt himself pulled in two directions. He really would rather, he wrote to the NEC, wait until the "serious progressive elements came to the SP." But that was not practical now--"the dangers of a new war, and political and economic confusion, out of which a totalitarian state may arise, are too great to admit . . . long delay in constructive action for effective economic and political democracy."⁹⁵ And yet Thomas supported the April 1946 NEC resolution, which placed strict limitations on socialist third party activity. Why?

The SP's sudden retreat from all-out agitation for a third party at the very time the climate seemed ripe for it was a function of the party's growing anti-communism.⁹⁶ By early 1946, National Secretary Fleischman was warning Maynard Krueger that unless the party launched a "national committee pretty quickly on independent political action, the Commies will have the field sewed up."⁹⁷ The NEC, in late 1946, phrased its instructions to locals on third party action in terms which emphasized the absolute importance of working with "non-communist progressives" and minimized any overwhelming need to rush into political alliances.⁹⁸

Labor secretary Becker reported to a Seattle member that she should not get involved with the Independent Citizens Committee of Arts and Sciences, as it was a CP front and the CP, in Becker's opinion, was trying "to turn the machinery of this committee . . . into a third party after the 1946 elections."⁹⁹ In an open letter to Sidney Hillman two years before, Thomas charged that the CIO-Political Action Commit-

tee "delayed rather than advanced" intelligent independent labor political action because of its CP ties.¹⁰⁰ The SP's positive attitude toward third party political action noticeably soured as the CP raised similar cries in 1946.

The CP leap onto the third party bandwagon insured the SP would jump off; the CP backing of Henry Wallace added insult to injury. Thomas privately bemoaned the fate of his party in late 1947. "We'll be caught between the old parties and the communist dominated Wallace movement. Logically, his campaign will make it necessary for us to run someone . . . where are the money, the organization and the leader?"¹⁰¹

Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace's letter and speech of September 1946, which sharply criticized Truman's foreign policy, signaled the first round of SP anti-Wallace activity not because Thomas supported the President's policies, but because he feared Wallace's appeasement more.¹⁰² Thomas and Fleischman sent an open letter to the New York Times, which the newspaper chose to print as an article, noting that it was "a shock to socialists that he who demanded" war with Hitler to protect Eastern Europe in 1940 should "now be content to leave so much of Europe to the tender mercies of a [Soviet] dictatorship which practices the same sort of tyranny."¹⁰³ The article attacked Wallace's "appeasement" of this Soviet dictatorship and objected to Wallace's term for the Soviet system of government-- "directed Democracy." The SP much preferred the term "totalitarian dictatorship."¹⁰⁴

Thomas was fond of Wallace neither as a person nor a political thinker. As Secretary of Agriculture under Roosevelt, Wallace had

refused to meet with the SP leader to discuss the plight of sharecroppers during the height of the Great Depression. Thomas disagreed not only with Wallace's soft line on the Soviet Union, but with his whole political philosophy. Wallace believed the United States could develop a stable, yet dynamic economy through a return to free enterprise.¹⁰⁵ Wallace took strong stands against the peacetime draft and for disarmament after he resigned from Truman's cabinet in late September 1946; Thomas wondered why he had not taken those positions when he held power.¹⁰⁶ National Secretary Fleischman noted to a Kansas SP member that a major reason, over and above Wallace's CP ties, that the SP could never back him was his advocacy of bureaucratic state-regulated capitalism balanced by anti-trust suits. If nothing else, Fleischman commented, this philosophy demonstrated Wallace's "economic and political immaturity."¹⁰⁷

Thomas and the SP were not out to get Wallace only because they disliked his personality or his ideology (whatever that was). What worried party leaders was the relationship between the Wallace cabinet resignation and the growing CP cries for a third party. The CP would "of course charge that now the Democrats are revealed as anti-Russian as the Republicans," and use this excuse to join others in demanding a third party.¹⁰⁸

The NEC of the Socialist Party was loath to test the third party waters in mid 1946 because of the communist threat. It reversed its optimistic position by the middle of that year and said the SP would not support a third party unless it was uncompromisingly anti-communist. But it saw its efforts become fallow under the heel of "the Communist

Party, under the banner of Wallace and Pepper, attempt to capitalize upon the existing deadlock [between the two major parties] in the interests of Russian imperialism, just as surely as the Republican leadership will scrap every proposal for constructive American participation in international recovery because of its devotion to American imperialism."¹⁰⁹

The party seemed unable to do much to halt Wallace's growing popularity. William Gausmann noted in May 1947 that Wallace was drawing large crowds wherever he spoke. This depressed Gausmann because it signaled a Republican victory in 1948, "regardless of what SOB they nominate." Gausmann concluded that a CP-backed third party would discredit the concept of a leftist third party for years. Wallace and the CP torpedoed the SP hopes of escaping the catch-22 of American politics through third party action.¹¹⁰

By mid 1947, the party cranked up its weak machinery to oppose the growing Wallace boom. The NAC ordered a mass printing of Norman Thomas's "Open letter to Henry Wallace" which had appeared in the July 9 issue of the Call. The letter repeated the objections to Wallace noted above, putting major emphasis on the weaknesses of Wallace's foreign policy.¹¹¹ The NAC instructed SP members to distribute the letter to crowds as they left Wallace meetings.¹¹² At one such meeting in New York City's Madison Square Garden, party members distributed a reported ten thousand copies.¹¹³ After Wallace announced his third party effort in late December 1947, the SP redoubled its efforts to identify him in the public mind with the Communist party.¹¹⁴ Wallace and the CP once again had stolen the SP's thunder--the party ran national candidates in

1948.

The SP's willingness to use the America First Committee to strengthen its fight to keep the United States out of World War II, the party's attempts to shore up its waning strength through alliance with ex-or-non-socialist organizations and its openness to suggestions of third party action, all demonstrated one very significant reality of the SP's existence. Socialists were well aware of their weakness, and willing, within certain boundaries, to make concessions to gain more votes.

The boundaries within which the party sought new vitality were two. As in the fight to keep America out of war, the party believed the struggle for power within the American system had to be waged within the context of economic and political democracy. Otherwise, why bother to fight? Likewise, the American political system's catch-22-- ideological purity and impotence, or ideologically castrating compromise and power--forced the party to be very careful when it sought allies in its attempts to gain power. Given those two sets of boundaries, it was little wonder the SP remained small and relatively powerless. For scholars to charge that the party's continued impotence was in some way due to its leaders' shortsightedness or urge for ideological purity was to miss the major point. The SP remained a small sect, although it tried desperately not to be. The realities of the system condemned all who would change it to ideological impotence or ideological prostitution. Thomas and the Socialist party chose the high road and disappeared. Other leftists and liberals chose the low road and prospered. Unwittingly, they acquiesced to increased government bureaucracy and

waste, a poor substitute for the SP's brand of democratic socialism and the Vietnams and the Watergates.

NOTES

Chapter IV

1. "Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of . . . catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle.

'That's some catch, that catch-22,' he observed.

Yossarian saw it clearly with all its spinning reasonableness. There was an elliptical precision about its perfect pairs of parts that was graceful and shocking like good modern art . . . " Joseph Heller, Catch-22 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955, 1961), 47.

2. See Morris Hillquit, History of Socialism in the United States (New York: Dover Publishers, 1910, 1971), passim; Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 107-96.

3. See Frederick I. Olsen, "The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), passim; Norma Fain Pratt, "Morris Hillquit (1869-1933): A Political Biography of An American Jewish Socialist," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1976), passim.

4. Venkatamarani, "Norman Thomas," 402-36.

5. For the SP's problems with the Trotskyites, see McGreen, "Norman Thomas," 311-94; Swanberg, Norman Thomas, 217-19.

6. Daniel Hoan to Robert Repas, 12 March 1945, SP Duke, Roll 52; cf., Hy Fish to Harry Fleischman, 2 May 1944, ibid., Roll 49; Fish reported to Fleischman that ex-labor secretary Arthur McDowell was running for Congress on the Democratic ticket.

7. Thomas, speech, "Don't Throw Your Vote Away," 6 August 1944, ibid., Roll 50.

8. MacAlister Coleman to Thomas, 29 April 1942, NTP, Box 22.

9. Thomas to Morris Milgram, 2 January 1940, SP Duke, Roll 37.

10. Thomas, News Release, 5 March 1945, 1, ibid., Roll 52.

11. See Chapter II.
12. Minutes of NAC meeting, 2 January 1940, SP Duke, Roll 43.
13. National Office of Keep America Out of War Congress memo to Local organizations, 27 November 1940, NTP, Box 150.
14. Executive committee, Local New York City, "Socialists and America First," 1940; Thomas, "Strictly Confidential" memo to NEC, 6 December 1940, both in SP Duke, Roll 43.
15. Executive committee, Local New York City, "Socialists and America First," 1940, ibid.
16. Thomas, memo to NEC, nd [late 1940], NTP, Box 155.
17. The SP originally denounced the White Committee in August of 1940. See the Socialist Campaigner, 15 January 1941, 1, SP Duke, Roll 130; Call, 23 November 1940, 1. The KAOWC followed the SP's lead, denouncing the White Committee in late November 1940; see National Office, KAOWC, memo to local organizations, 27 November 1940, NTP, Box 150.
18. Ibid.; Thomas, memo to NEC, nd [late 1940], NTP, Box 155; cf., Robert Parker's report to NEC, 18 January 1940, SP Duke, Roll 43.
19. Thomas to Ken Cuthbertson, 27 January 1941, NTP, Box 19.
20. Paul Porter to Robert Parker, 6 January 1940, SP Duke, Roll 37; Thomas, memo to NEC, nd [late 1940?], NTP, Box 150.
21. Robert Parker to NEC, 18 January 1941, SP Duke, Roll 43.
22. Thomas to Wheeler, 5 March 1941, NTP, Box 19.
23. Robert Wood to Thomas, 2 May 1941; Thomas to Wood, 12 May 1941, NTP, Box 20; the ten day lapse between Wood's letter and the Thomas reply is unusual. Thomas usually answered mail faster. Perhaps it means Thomas was seriously considering joining the AFC. Or perhaps it merely shows an understandable hesitation to insult important allies.
24. Thomas to Robert Parker, 20 April 1941, SP Duke, Roll 44.
25. For debate on the St. Louis invitation, see the party correspondence of April 1941, SP Duke, Roll 44, especially Thomas to Parker, 20 April 1941; R. D. Stuart to Thomas, Thomas to Stuart, 28 and 30 April 1941; NAC minutes, 29 April 1941, all in ibid.
26. Interestingly, the Communist Party was apparently infiltrating the AFC at about the same time. See Maurice M. Isserman, "Peat Bog Soldiers: The American Communist Party During the Second World

War," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1979), 161; the SP was very serious about avoiding peace groups with obvious fascist or communist ties. It condemned Verne Marshall's No Foreign War Committee as fascist and the Emergency Peace Mobilization as communist. See NAC minutes, 6 January 1941, SP Duke, Roll 43; Thomas to editor, NYT, 6 January 1941; Socialist Campaigner, 15 January 1941, 1, SP Duke, Roll 130 for the Marshall Committee; see Chauncey Curtis to Arthur McDowell, 1 September 1940, ibid., Roll 41, for the Emergency Peace Mobilization.

27. NEC minutes, 2-4 May 1941, 3, ibid., Roll 44; Socialist Campaigner, 14 May 1941, ibid., Roll 130.

28. For leftist opposition to Thomas's plans, see minutes of the Anti-War Committee, 18 December 1940, ibid., Roll 43; Jack Sessions et al., "Fight Against Fascism," Hammer and Tongs, October 1941, 1-5, ibid., Roll 128; Virgil Vogel to NEC, nd [March 1941], ibid., Roll 44; Stayan Morton to Ben Fischer, 24 March 1941, ibid.; for rightist opposition, see John Lester Lewine, "Some Ever Present Problems Before Us," Hammer and Tongs, October 1941, 6, ibid., Roll 128.

29. Grace Milgram to Thomas, 21 May 1941, NTP, Box 20; John Lester Lewine to Irving Barshop, 21 May 1941, SP Duke, Roll 44; cf., I. S. Joseph to Thomas, 24 May 1941, NTP, Box 20; Nathan Miller to Robert Parker, 3 July 1941, SP Duke, Roll 45.

30. Thomas, "The Case Against Lindbergh," Call, 17 May 1941; Thomas to Robert Alexander, 22 September 1941, NTP, Box 21; Thomas to Frank McCallister, 22 May 1941, ibid., Box 20; cf., Oscar Ameringer, "Crime of Crimes -- He's a Man of Convictions," American Guardian, 9 May 1941, 1, for a much less critical view of Lindbergh.

31. For the public reaction to Thomas's appearance at the May AFC meeting, see NYT, 24 May 1941, 6; Newsweek, 17 (2 June 1941), 16; Time, 37 (2 June 1941), 15; New Republic, 104 (2 June 1941), 744.

32. William Becker to Edward Richer, 13 September 1947, SP Duke, Roll 57.

33. See Thomas's answers to party criticism in correspondence of 12 September 1941, ibid., Roll 45 and NTP, Box 21; cf., NYT, 13 September 1941, 2; NEC statement, Press Release, 23 September 1941, SP Duke, Roll 45; also in Call, 4 October 1941, 3, 7.

34. NEC statement, "Democracy, Lindbergh and America First," Call, 4 October 1941, 3, 7.

35. NAC minutes, 25 August 1945, SP Duke, Roll 52.

36. Thomas, speech, "Suicide or Socialism," 31 May 1946, 2-3, ibid., Roll 54.

37. Kipnis, American Socialist Movement, 214-42.
38. Pratt, "Reading Socialist Experience," 432-34; Call, 10 December 1943, 1.
39. Darlington Hoopes to William Becker, 9 May 1945, SP Duke, Roll 52.
40. Clement to Becker, 7 June 1945, Becker to Clement, 8 June 1945, ibid.
41. Harry Fleischman, Norman Thomas: A Biography, 1884-1968, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), introduction.
42. For the philosophy of impossibilism, see Kipnis, American Socialist Movement, 108-13.
43. Clement to Thomas, 2 August 1946, SP Duke, Roll 55.
44. Thomas to Clement, 1 August 1946, ibid.
45. Thomas to Clement, 9 August 1946, ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. See, for example, Socialist Party Bulletin, Milwaukee County SP, March 1947, 1, ibid., Roll 133.
48. Examples of the hatred between the SP and the SDF are numerous; see, for example, editorial in Call, 21 June 1941, 4, which labeled the SDF "a little group of frustrated and embittered men who[se] . . . sole reason for existence had been to function as a specialized anti-Socialist bureau for the Democratic Party."
49. "Parts of Tentative Agreement between . . . the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Federation up to February 1939," SP Duke, Roll 36; minutes of NAC meeting, 30 October 1945, 1-2, ibid., Roll 53.
50. See above, Chapter III; for SDF attitudes, see Eugene Victor, "Negros Plan New Pressure to End Industry Jim Crow," New Leader, 23 May 1942, 1; Dr. Warren Brown, "Industry Begins Hiring Negroes, But U.S. Still Lacks Power to Enforce Anti-Racism Orders," ibid., 8 August 1942, 4; Larry Tajiri, "Racial Hysteria For Profit," ibid., 20 May 1944, 8; M. J. Caldwell, "Domination by Big Powers Will not Give U.S. Collective Security," ibid., 8 July 1944, 7; for articles on the Smith Act, see ibid., 19 July 1941, 8; 20 September 1941, 8; 4 October 1941, 2; 20 December 1941, 8; 23 September 1943, 7; 27 January 1944, 7; 27 May 1944, 15; the SDF was much less absolute about civil liberties than the SP. Many SDF members believed that those who, if in power, would deny other civil liberties, did not deserve them when out of power. See

Ferdinand Lundberg, "Democracies' Hari-Kari Seen in Civil Rights to Nazis and Reds," ibid., 28 September 1940, 5, and part two of the same article in 5 October 1940, 5.

51. See Simon Smith, state secretary, New Jersey SP, to NEC, 26 January 1939, SP Duke, Roll 36; minutes of NEC meeting, 14-16 April 1939, ibid.; the committee on unity reported to the NEC that certain important (not named) members of the SDF national organization found the SP's position "altogether unacceptable even as a basis for further discussion."

52. Algernon Lee, "That Protest Vote: The Futility of Voting Minority Parties This Year," New Leader, 28 October 1944, 5; cf., Lee, "What is Social Democracy," Social Democrat, July 1944, 1, SP Duke, Roll 135; William Bohn, "The Home Front: Norman's Bleeding Heart," New Leader, 11 July 1942, 3; Bohn, "The Home Front: Pacifists on a Limb," ibid., 18 July 1942, 3.

53. See minutes of NEC meeting, 3-6 February 1939, SP Duke, Roll 36; Local and Branch Bulletin, number 3 of 1939 series, 2, ibid., Roll 129; Arthur McDowell to James D. Graham, 11 July 1939, ibid., Roll 26; see any issue of New Leader between September 1939 and December 1941 for the SDF's war stand, opposite of the SP's.

54. Clement to Fleischman, 21 November 1945, SP Duke, Roll 53; see ibid., Roll 48, correspondence for late 1943 for the successful negotiations between Local Berks County (Reading, Pennsylvania) and the NO of the SP. See ibid., Rolls 53, 55, 56 for protracted negotiations between the two national organizations between 1945 and 1947.

55. Thomas to James Loeb, 12 May 1941, NTP, Box 20.

56. Minutes of NEC meeting 19-21 December 1941, 5, SP Duke, Roll 46; Thomas to Frank Zeidler, 19 June 1941; "Resolution to the NEC by Winston Dancis," 12 November 1941; Thomas to Robert Parker, 21 November 1941, all in ibid., Roll 45; "Statements For and Against SP Membership in the UDA," 3 December 1941, ibid., Roll 46; Thomas to Ralph Harlow, 16 September 1941, NTP, Box 21.

57. Pierce, "Liberals in the Cold War," 126.

58. "Minutes of Meeting of Governing Committee, Postwar World Council," 12 May 1942, 1, NTP, Box 159; cf., anti-UDA articles in Call, 29 May 1942, 3; 4 August 1944, 1; 8 September 1944, 5; 15 September 1944, 7.

59. Minutes of NEC meeting, 8-10 November 1946, 7, SP Duke, Roll 56.

60. See handwritten membership figures, dated 15 January 1947, ibid., Roll 56; for 1942 figures, see William Becker to Morris

Stampa, 29 August 1947, ibid., Roll 57.

61. For SP's attempts to bore within the UDA, see correspondence between national secretary Fleischman and local Washington, D. C. organizer William Gausmann between January and February 1947, especially Fleischman to Gausmann, 7 January 1947, ibid., Roll 56.

62. Gausmann to Fleischman, 7 January 1947, ibid.; cf., Gausmann, "Anti-Communist Liberals Form New Organization," Call, 13 January 1947, 3; Thomas, "The World About Us: Arms and the General," ibid., 8.

63. Fleischman to Gausmann, 7 January 1947, SP Duke, Roll 56.

64. Gausmann to Fleischman, 6 January 1947, ibid., italics in the original; cf., Fleischman to David Lewis, secretary of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF), 13 January 1947, ibid.

65. Fleischman to Gausmann, 8 January 1947, ibid.

66. Lehman had signed a bill while Governor of New York which effectively denied minority parties access to the New York ballot. For the party's reaction, see correspondence between Thomas, Fleischman and Barshop and Lehman, SP Duke, Rolls 49-51.

67. Barshop memo to NEC, 21 January 1947, ibid., Roll 56.

68. Minutes of NEC meeting, 24-26 January 1947, 5, ibid.; minutes of NAC meeting, 4 February 1947, 3, ibid.; see also Fleischman to Zane Meckler, 4 February 1947, ibid.

69. Albert Goldman to Max Schactmann, 25 February 1947; Bob Ferguson to [Workers' Party] Plenum Committee, 31 July 1949, both in Max Schactmann Papers, Tamiment Institute, New York University, Boxes 2 and 3.

70. Fleischman to Gausmann, 4 February 1947; Gausmann to Fleischman, 5 February 1947, SP Duke, Roll 56.

71. Fleischman to Zane Meckler, 5 February 1947, ibid.; for other criticisms along the same lines, that ADA could be a toy of the Democrats and would undercut any third party attempts, see, "ADA Effects New Party Work," The Jersey Letter, 16 February 1947, 1, 2, ibid., Roll 131; Guy W. Meyer to William Becker, 30 April 1947, ibid., Roll 57; Martin Bernstein to NEC, 7 May 1947, ibid.; Konrad Bose to "Dear Comrades," 8 June 1947, ibid.; Bose noted the Minnesota ADA was essentially a tool by which Hubert Humphrey hoped to gain a Senate seat in 1948.

72. Minutes of NEC meeting, 9-11 May 1947, 4, ibid.; Taylor to Becker, 22 May 1947, ibid.

73. NEC, "Political Policy Handbook," May 1947, 4, ibid.; cf., Becker to Carl Elliot, 26 July 1947, ibid.; minutes of NEC meeting, 12-14 December 1947, ibid., Roll 58. Ironically, the NEC selected Leon Schull, recent ADA leader, as its "coordinator" of agitation for independent political action at the December 1947 ADA convention. See Becker to Gausmann, 31 December 1947, ibid.

74. By late 1948, Thomas was writing that the ADA had "real value," but it "or large sections of it, are pretty strong militarists and it certainly carefully avoids socialism. Hence we have got to keep going . . ." See Thomas to Natalie R. Davis, 23 December 1948, ibid., Roll 61; cf., Gausmann to William Becker, nd, [1948?], ibid., Roll 58; Gausmann warned Becker the ADA was going to "sleep with Truman;" Leonard A. Koblentz to Becker, 4 April 1948, ibid.; Becker, "Report on Campaign (so far)," 18 August 1948, 1, ibid., Roll 59.

75. Gausmann to Fleischman, 12 September 1947, ibid., Roll 57.

76. Pierce, "Liberals in the Cold War," 106, 125.

77. Ibid., 126.

78. Gausmann to Fleischman, 11 May 1946, SP Duke, Roll 54.

79. Weinstein, Decline, 272-89; cf., Anton Garden, "Wanted: A New Socialist Perspective," Hammer and Tongs, January 1940, 18-22, SP Duke, Roll 128.

80. Thomas, "What Labor's Victory Means to America," Call, 6 August 1945, 4; Phillip Heller and Nancy Gains, "Call Contest Winners," ibid., 1; cf., SP's initial reaction to Attlee's victory in Call, 30 July 1945, 1.

81. Anton Garden, "Wanted: A New Socialist Perspective," Hammer and Tongs, January 1940, 18-22, SP Duke, Roll 128.

82. Clarence Rust, "Into the Democratic Party," ibid., February 1940, 20, SP Duke, Roll 128; cf., Alfred Baker Lewis to Thomas, 6 October 1947, ibid., Roll 57.

83. See, for example, Howard Penley, "House Without Plans," February 1940, 14-18; Fleischman, "No Short-Cuts," ibid., 4-6; Fleischman, "What is Our Future?" November 1942, 1-3; William Becker, "How Can We Build For Socialism," December 1942, 3-6; W.G.G. [William Gausmann], "The Job for Socialist Leadership," ibid., 12-13; Judah Drob, "Perspectives for Socialists," February 1943, 18-22; Julian J. Diamond, "Toward a Revolutionary Socialist Party," September 1945, 5-7; Robin Meyers, "What Kind of Party," January 1946, 5, 7, all in Hammer and Tongs, SP Duke, Roll 128.

84. Estelle Meyerson to Fleischman, 5 April 1945, ibid., Roll

52; Erma Arstein to "Dr. Comrades," 5 April 1945, ibid.

85. Jack Sessions, "Independent or Mass Work, Hammer and Tongs, April 1940, 5, ibid., Roll 128.

86. Minutes of NEC meeting, 23-25 July 1943, 11; Travers Clement to NAC, attached, minutes of NAC meeting, 19 August 1943; Thomas to Maynard Krueger, 9 August 1943; Clement to Krueger, 28 August 1943, all in SP Duke, Roll 47; cf., Call, 9 April 1944, 1; 2 June 1944, 1; 1 December 1944, 8.

87. Minutes of NEC meeting, 18-20 February 1944, 4, 5, SP Duke, Roll 48.

88. Minutes of NEC Meeting, 19-21 November 1943, 7-10; "Draft Statement on Labor Party," nd [1943], all in ibid.

89. Judah Drob, "Problems of a New Party Setup," Hammer and Tongs, April 1944, 3, ibid., Roll 128.

90. Ibid.; William Becker, "Report to the National Executive Committee--November 16, 1944--On Third Party Possibilities," and attached "Recommendations to NEC--November 16, 1944--On Electoral Action, Including Third Party Possibilities," in ibid., Roll 51; cf., minutes of NEC meeting 2-4 March 1945, 14; 22-23 June 1945, 4, ibid., Roll 52.

91. Minutes of 24th SP national convention, 2-4 June 1944, 12-13, ibid., Roll 49.

92. On SP reactions to the Labour Party and the Canadian Commonwealth Federation, see Martin Diamond to Fleischman, 27 July 1945; Fleischman to SP members, 31 July 1945, both in ibid., Roll 52.

93. On NECNP, see Fleischman to SP members, 4 December 1945, ibid., Roll 53; SP members and sympathizers on the NECNP were Daniel Bell, Mark Brown, Fleischman, Brigider General (U.S.A., Ret.) Holdridge, Maynard Krueger, Harry Laidler, H. L. Mitchell, John McCartney, and Walter Uphoff. The most important non-SP members were Albert Sprague Coolidge (SDF), Lewis Corey, John Dewey, Louis Fischer (ADA), Emil Mazy (UAW), A. Philip Randolph, Frank Crosswaith (ADA), James Lipsig (ADA) and John DosPassos. Note that most were ex-SP members.

94. "Resolution on Electoral and Other Alliances," included in minutes of NEC Meeting, 19-20 April 1946, SP Duke, Roll 54.

95. Thomas, "How Can We Build a Socialist Party?" nd [April 1946], ibid.

96. See below, Chapter IV.

97. Fleischman to Maynard Krueger, 25 March 1946, SP Duke,

Roll 54.

98. Minutes of NEC meeting, 8-10 November 1946, ibid., Roll 56.

99. William Becker to Anne Fisher, 3 July 1946, ibid., Roll 55.

100. Thomas to Hillman, 26 September 1944, NPT, Box 27 and SP Duke, Roll 50.

101. Thomas diary, 26 December 1947, NTP, Box 176.

102. For SP reaction to the Wallace Speech and letter, see "Wallace . . . Isolation . . . or Imperialism? Neither," Call, 23 September 1946, 1; Thomas, "The World About Us: Wallace's Negatives," ibid., 8; Thomas, "Disarmament Now . . . To Avoid World War III," ibid., 30 September 1946, 8.

103. "Socialist Leaders Criticize Wallace," NYT, 22 September 1946, 2; the Times hatchet job on the Thomas/Fleischman letter bothered many socialists as it appeared to put the party in a very bad light. The quotes seemed to suggest either that Wallace should also agitate for war with Russia or that the SP was wrong in its pre-1941 anti-war activity. See David Felix to NEC, 25 September 1946, Fleischman to Felix, 30 September 1946; SP Duke, Roll 56; Thomas to editor, NYT, 26 September 1946, 24; Thomas's 26 September letter asked for an apology (given) for the chopping of the earlier SP statement and restated the SP position more clearly.

104. "Socialist Leaders Criticize Wallace," NYT, 22 September 1946, 2; in a later letter to the editor, Thomas defined Wallace's appeasement as "the effort of a strong power to satisfy its rival at the expense of the weak." See Thomas to editor, NYT, 26 September 1946, 24.

105. Thomas to Bette Marmar, nd [March 1944], NTP, Box 27.

106. See Thomas, "Open Letter to Henry Wallace," 31 December 1947, 2-3, SP Duke, Roll 58. Evidently, the letter the NO distributed earlier was the same as this later version. The earlier version was not in the SP Duke Collection.

107. Fleischman to Bruce Stewart, 21 July 1947, ibid., Roll 57.

108. Gausmann to Fleischman, 20 September 1946, 2, ibid., Roll 55.

109. NEC News Release, 11 November 1946, 2, ibid., Roll 56.

110. Gausmann to William Becker, 30 May 1947, ibid., Roll 57.

111. Call, 9 July 1947, 1.

112. Minutes of NAC meeting, 22 July 1947, 2; Fleischman to Leon Schull, et al., 9 September 1947, both in SP Duke, Roll 57; Fleischman's letter included a list of all the east coast Wallace meetings for September and October 1947, and urged the addressees to distribute the Call's "Open Letter" at those meetings. It should be noted in passing that some socialists were not as anti-Wallace as the leadership. See John Lewis to editor, Call, 26 December 1947 in SP Duke, Roll 58.

113. News Release, 11 September 1947, ibid., Roll 57.

114. See Frank Zeidler to Fleischman and Walter Uphoff, 30 December 1947; Maynard Krueger to NEC, nd [early 1948], both in ibid., Roll 58.

CHAPTER V

Discipline and Theory: The Elastic SP

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Discipline was always a problem for the socialist party. Policy questions, consequential or mundane, fomented heated debate. Major political parties could use the promise of power as cement; the SP could not. Theoretical accord was weak adhesive, but the SP had little else. Throughout its existence, the party debated the best method of insuring a unified organization while retaining intraparty democracy. Disunity would insure impotence, but to lose democracy would strip the party of its creative ability to react to new conditions. Theory should intensify discipline and discipline enhance theory. These were the organizational boundaries within which the party sought to function.

There were two primary positions on party discipline: absolute democracy and "democratic centralism." Rightists usually favored the first, leftists, the second--members were to be free to discuss a given problem until the party decided its position democratically. Then discussion and dissession were to cease and all were to pull together to support the party. Democratic centralism appeared to be a combination of the strongest benefits of both democracy and tight central control. But in practice, it was not. As the official policy of the Communist International, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

and the Communist Party of the United States, democratic centralism in practice emphasized centralism at the expense of democracy.

Thomas rejected democratic centralism early. "In the American scene and at this stage of our historical development," he wrote Amicus Most in 1933, "it is emphatically bad theory and bad tactics for the Socialist Party to emulate the Communists in the severity of discipline."¹ Thomas's middle position on discipline between absolute democracy and democratic centralism was designed to enable the party to contain diverse shades of radical opinion. He wished the party to include as many American leftists as possible, while still retaining a modicum of unity.²

Voices from the left and right continually clashed on the question of discipline. Travers Clement, the leading advocate of democratic centralism, thought that it was "possible . . . to build a party that has much of the united striking force now associated with the Bolshevik and even fascist form of organization and yet be democratic, with all basic decisions . . . decided from below." Just how Clement would achieve this balance he did not say.³ Clement, Lillian Symes, Robin Meyers and Virgil Vogel, leftists all, remained convinced that democratic centralism could bring a dialectical unity between democracy and control, which was in fact the goal of the SP. But to most, this belief seemed to fly in the face of the evidence of Stalinist Russia.

In 1945, Robert Parker, ex-National Secretary, presented the NEC with a proposal for a constitutional amendment on discipline. Parker designed the amendment to afford local organizations the means to purge offensive members. The member could appeal all the way up to

a national convention, to prevent abuse of the local's power. Parker's proposal sparked an interesting debate, which illustrated the boundaries within which the SP organization had to function--enough discipline to promise unity, enough democracy to guarantee elasticity.⁴ Leftist Virgil Vogel opened the debate. He wrote that if the party protected "the rights of minority factions" fully, made disciplinary action uniform throughout the party, and applied it equally to leaders and members, then "party discipline is necessary and democratic." Such discipline would prevent members from destroying the rights of the majority by public disagreement. Vogel thought any member who was planning a speech should clear it with the NEC.⁵

Right-wing spokesman Darlington Hoopes disagreed with Parker and Vogel. Hoopes's was an SDF-like position. He said the party must strive, above all, to "take in and keep people." But it could not if it allowed "trouble makers to keep the party in turmoil." This Parker's amendment would do. It allowed "any crackpot" to prefer charges against anyone, even the party leadership! Hoopes suggested the party continue its usual policy of taking no official stand on discipline, letting each local set its own standards. This, in Hoopes opinion, would guarantee a large, democratic SP for years to come.⁶

Parker's amendment was a midroad position between the Vogel and Hoopes extremes. Parker did not submit it to create "harsh discipline," but to institute "within democratic procedure . . . a method . . . to permit possible disciplining" of any person guilty of "arbitrary action" detrimental to the best interests of the party and socialism.⁷

The 1946 national convention tabled the amendment. SP members did not want to take a firm stand on the problem; they were in general agreement with the Hoopes position--leave well enough along.⁸ But to the convention, National Secretary Fleischman reported that he and other national leaders believed that "the totalitarianism loose in the world cannot be combatted by a heterogeneous group with a program so vague that it cannot be translated into immediate action." The convention might desire the non-discipline of the Hoopes position, but the leadership would not let the organization slide that far to the right. The leadership, wrote Fleischman, did "not want the discipline of the barracks," but they concluded that the party needed "the discipline of common agreement and willingness to subordinate differences for the realization of the common good. Only a well organized party capable of making democracy a weapon in the hands of the masses," instead of an excuse for anarchy, could be of use in the postwar world.⁹ If the rank and file were not willing to deal with the problem, the leadership was.

It had done so in the past. Problems with discipline occurred whenever the party took a stand on any important issue. The more important the issue, the more likely were individual members to demand either total discipline or total democracy. And the more important the issue, the more likely the leadership was to allow significant individual deviation for unity's sake. This process of give and take on major issues showed the SP leadership was willing to make significant concessions to members to hold them within the party. It showed a leadership aware of the danger of factionalization. On the question of discipline, the party leadership sought a position consistent with its knowledge

that the means determined the ends.

Party leadership daily dealt with discipline problems without constitutional guides. No wonder Fleischman pushed for the Parker amendment. In the absence of member-approved guidelines, the NEC followed some simple rules. The committee believed SP members should be loyal to the ideal of democratic socialism, support socialist candidates and other party functions, oppose all forms of totalitarianism, including Communism, follow the lead of the National Office on policy matters until a national convention or referendum could decide the matter, and generally follow the party line in public speeches.¹⁰

Throughout the war, the NEC discharged most disciplinary problems under this formula. It upheld Local Milwaukee's expulsion of Meta Berger (Victor's spouse) for her active support of CP-front organizations. It advised various locals to expel members for refusing to sign SP nominating petitions or vocally backing a major party candidate. It upheld the New Jersey state Executive Committee's decision to revoke Local Camden's charter after the local distributed a war position different from the SP's and refused to recant. It investigated a group called the Citizens USA Committee, found it to be "fascist," and refused to sanction SP member Harry Paxton Howard's speech in front of this organization.

In small matters such as these, the NEC was strict, even undemocratic. In more significant cases the NEC was not so imperial. It demonstrated it could be elastic in the face of entrenched opposition.

This was chiefly true in the period 1939-1941, as the party

debated its position on American participation in the European War. Within one month of Hitler's invasion of Poland, Thomas received a complaint that Alfred Baker Lewis was overstepping the bounds of party discipline when he urged Roosevelt to lift the arms embargo. Mary Felton complained that Thomas never should have told Lewis to voice his opinion freely without fear of discipline from the National Office.¹² Thomas replied that he assumed Lewis was "stretching the point of tolerance . . . exceedingly far," but noted that Lewis was a valuable (and rich) party member and to lose him would "weaken our none too strong party."¹³ This was the attitude of the party until Pearl Harbor, although it lost many members such as Lewis, who disagreed so much with the official war stand that he could not remain within the party. In February 1941, the NEC formalized the leadership's practice of relaxed discipline in the war stand debate. The governing committee unanimously voted to suspend the usual unspoken rules of discipline in this important matter, and to allow lively intraparty discussion.

The Committee did place some limits on the debate. It forbade utterance of any anti-party line in remarks made to publications "engaged in campaigns against the party." It also cautioned national officials that they were required to agree publicly with the party's official stance.¹⁵ The NEC policy allowed much freedom to discuss the war stand, but the freedom did not extend to allowing socialists to join the William Allen White Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Nor would the NEC allow locals to express opinions on new issues until the National Action Committee published guidelines.¹⁶ The NEC sought no "heresy hunting or disciplinary trials"; it wanted to

allow members enough freedom to discuss important issues within the constraint of the needs of organization. At the same time, the NEC desired to retain enough of a basic disciplinary ideal to keep the party-community feeling alive. The NEC sought to avoid the pitfalls of Soviet-type centralization and SDF-like federalism. And in the evolution of SP theory, a similar movement occurred throughout the 1940s.

SP political theory, which was the substructure of the party's whole scheme of immediate demands, its political campaigns--in fact, all its activities--changed drastically from 1939 to 1948. When the party emerged from its factional struggles in 1936 it was not a unified sect, but still "suffered" from the "hangover" of political infighting. In the late 1930s the party slowly emerged from what Lillian Symes called "an excess of infantile leftism," which included a brief flirtation with Trotsky, the gadfly of revolution. The party's strength was that in the 1940s it was not, nor "never had been a static entity. In its fluidity and responsiveness to change, its ability to develop from one thing to another," lay "its superiority and its promise in comparison with all other left-wing groups."¹⁷

This fluidity of dogma, unusual in a leftist political organization, was the result of a continuing intraparty process of theoretical debate, through the Call and the discussion organ, Hammer and Tongs. The limits of the debate matched the limits of party discipline: on the left, bolshevism, and on the right, the mediocre semi-socialism of the SDF and related liberal groups such as UDA/ADA.

By 1948, the SP was no longer a party of radicals dedicated to the liberation of the proletariat through its own revolutionary action.

That goal was not inclusive enough, especially in the United States. Thomas wrote in his diary in 1940 that socialism had to be "a creative enterprise" which transcended the traditional limits of radical political action. The party's concept of the working class "both now and in a future society must be broadly understood to include all those whose labor helps to create the tangible and intangible wealth of the world."¹⁸ Only through this process of broadening socialism's scope did Thomas see any chance for the party to gather strength and produce a viable alternative to capitalism or totalitarianism.¹⁹

This expanded version of the SP's organizational ends matured from the dual lessons of the history of world radicalism and a growing awareness of American realities. Thomas and SP leaders accepted, perhaps unconsciously, the Leninist prescription that the working class would never free itself through its own actions; it was too conservative. This idea, coupled with the obvious rise of the American middle class crystalized in socialist theory under the banner of democratic socialism as liberation for workers of "hand and brain."²⁰

The party was no longer self-consciously Marxist by the end of the war. "Karl Marx did not learn the ultimate truth about economics and government any more than Henry Ford had developed the perfect automobile in 1920," wrote Ohio SP member Griscom Morgan in 1940.²¹ Thomas noted one year earlier that he was becoming more and more opposed to "the efforts to solve current problems primarily by deductions from great programs stated in great books, especially when the books don't state programs but only principles and a point of view." He was, he wrote, becoming "more and more of a pluralist."²²

While the party continued to ask its members to recognize class struggle as a major social force, SP leaders downplayed its original, exclusivist, form.²³ Labor Secretary Arthur McDowell wrote a fearful prospective member in 1940, that the party recognized class struggle as a fact of life under capitalism, but did not advocate it as the means of revolutionary change. Class interests seemed the most powerful single factor in politics, McDowell wrote, and the party must seek to use it peacefully to forward its program.²⁴

By 1945, most socialists accepted a most American political precept, that no one philosophy or political theory had a monopoly on truth. Thomas wrote that his point of view was "certainly" not "orthodox Marxism (whatever that is), or r-r-revolutionary in the accepted (and erroneous) sense."²⁵ He often gave more weight to the ideas of American radical thinkers Henry George and Walter Rauschenbusch than to Karl Marx.²⁶

The party's consistent alteration of theory away from traditional Marxian socialism toward American realities demonstrated the party's attempts to fit into American political life. To eschew Marxist dogma, for a self-avowed socialist of the 1930s and 1940s, was tantamount to acceptance of that most American of philosophies, pragmatism. The truth was to be found in the solution to a specific problem, not in any absolute theory.

SP theory was a compromise between the desire to restructure radically the American economic and social system and a knowledge of the pitfalls of using non-democratic means to realize the goal of a stateless, classless society. "Due to the rise of bureaucratic collec-

tivism," both fascist and communist, wrote Samuel Lerner in 1942, the SP "today is more concerned with the problem of democracy than it has ever been before. . . . it would be a mistake to assume that this signified merely a minor revelation in radical thought . . . this re-evaluation of democracy strikes at the very fundamentals of socialist theory."²⁷

The re-evaluation of which Lerner spoke was a child of the bolshevik revolution. It was an intellectual process extremely important to radical thought throughout the world. It was the realization that the question "does the end justify the means," to which Leninist answered a resounding positive, was not the significant question most had believed. The means determined the end. The successful revolution which lived by the sword must at some point become the sword, and later die by that sword. The bolshevik terror in Russia, Leninist and Stalinist, its Kronstadts, its purges and forced collectivizations, constrained many radicals to realize that morality must travel with them on the road to power. Lenin's twisted dream proved that only a democratic revolutionary movement could hope to give a democratic post revolutionary society.²⁸

Early in the 1930s, the Socialist Party of America recognized that political democracy was not enough to prevent a society's degeneration into totalitarianism.²⁹ If a few individuals controlled the nation's means of production and distribution of goods essential to life, their power was as dangerous to liberty as a hereditary or bureaucratic aristocracy. If a revolution did not ground its goal of liberation in democracy, political and economic, it would travel the Soviet

or German road. This the SP desired America not to do. All SP theory proceeded from this assumption. Socialists saw the nations of the world poised on the brink of either democratic liberation or totalitarian collectivist slavery. The party was determined to do what it could to avoid bondage and build for liberty. On important issues, party leaders designed party stands in the shadow of recent Russian-German horrors.

The SP never retreated from its goal of a socialized economic structure for the United States, but the party did not view socialization as a panacea. It demanded "public ownership and operation in major sectors of the economy because private enterprise can operate only on the basis of private profit" which always restricted consumption and production.³⁰ Public control of major industries would not automatically insure peace and plenty, but it could create a climate conducive to social health and well being. And that was much more than "free enterprise" could even promise.³¹ But what exactly did the phrases "public ownership," "public control," and "socialization" mean? Was the SP advocating Fabian socialism, government ownership of the means of production? Most emphatically not, yet the party was unable to escape this stigma, its worst failure.

State ownership of the major means of production was not socialism. It was "collectivism under state control." It would not mean production and distribution for use. State ownership was a system that merely substituted the tyranny of bureaucracy for the tyranny of profit.³² The Soviet experience, the rise of fascism, and the centralization of economic control in the American government during two world

wars and a great depression confirmed that a central government could own or control a large part of a state's productive machinery without creating a socialist system. Collectivism was not enough; it must be organized and operated democratically, or it would be just one more oppressive system.³³ Popular, decentralized control of industry alone among all economic theories promised at least a chance of freedom with plenty for all.

This was the sort of public control the Socialist Party advocated. Party theorists judged that committees of workers, managers, engineers, consumers--all who had an interest in a given industry--should control production and distribution. Not one centralized committee for each industry, but a series of regional committees, democratically elected by each group involved, making decisions only for the committee's own region. Sort of an all-inclusive syndicalism, perhaps even a totally democratic corporatism.³⁴ Above all, socialization must be voluntary, with compensation. Any hint of coercion--the state forcing its will on a minority--would insure socialization's failure.³⁵

"We Socialists have no intension of permitting any sort of state to be our God," Thomas growled in 1944. The state must be only "our powerful and useful servant. This is why we care so much for civil liberty."³⁶ Socialists insisted that the Bill of Rights was sacred and wished to increase the number of rights it included. SP members believed that it should contain provisions guaranteeing "that all men may change jobs when they choose; . . . that consumers shall be free to buy what they wish; . . . that labor shall have the right to strike, even against the government; . . . that all people shall be free to

associate and organize for economic, political or cultural ends." This was democratic socialism.³⁷ In fact, noted party leader Maynard Krueger, "there is more bureaucracy [involved] in regulating a private profit system than there would be in socializing it."³⁸

By the beginning of the Second World War, SP leaders worried more about the growth of tyrannical, bureaucratic state power in the United States than about the possible return of laissez faire economics. Thomas and his co-workers believed the Depression experience taught Americans the futility of trying to structure a rational economic system around competition. But the New Deal had one major unfortunate side-effect--it showed the beneficent face of centralized state power. Thomas and his followers realized that German fascism and Russian communism showed an uglier, more typical face of state power. Did the American people understand this? The SP leaders thought not. Hence the party's war stand--it emphasized that capitalist America would have to descend into state-run corporatism to fight the same system in Germany and Japan. "What we Socialists now have to worry about is the growth of state power, even more than the power of private capitalism," wrote Thomas in 1942. "Such state power, unless under democratic control, will bring new tyranny for old."³⁹

Socialists concluded that the developing American system of state welfare capitalism also provided no hope of social, economic, or cultural liberation. It did promise growing bureaucratization and state control. The SP supported government "make-work" projects for humanitarian reasons. But party leaders never imagined these projects could cure unemployment, and their cost, since the government "debt certifi-

cates gravitate into the hands of the owning class," constituted "a tremendous burden on productive labor."

Thomas and the party were "wholly opposed to the dangerous notion that any government" could "painlessly spend us into a sound prosperity . . . by increasing . . . the public debt," while leaving "corporations in the hands of the owning class." Keynesian pump-priming was not the royal road to prosperity. Its debt burden would crush the lower and middle classes while insuring profits for the rich. Thomas repeatedly warned that Roosevelt would try to solve the postwar unemployment problem by "orgies of government spending at the price of a vast increase in interest bearing national debt."⁴⁰

The SP shunned collectivization slowly realized through government centralization; it was dangerous. But socialists advocated rational economic planning as an antidote for the ill American economy. Plan for abundance, socialists argued, instead of for scarcity. Public planning should replace private, profit-oriented planning. Party leaders braved a growing public suspicion that any planning invited totalitarian control. They managed to mix the apparently paradoxical notions of freedom and planning into one system, the cooperative commonwealth.

But by the early 1940s, many leftists were coming to believe that planning was a sure road to a society of coerced conformity. Ex-free spirit, ex-Leninist, ex-Trotskyist, Max Eastman concluded that free enterprise was the only firm guarantee of political freedom. "If the state goes into business," he argued in 1945, "the Communists will . . . take control as it is for this eventuality they are organized." Eastman believed democratic socialism necessitated an increase in state

power, which, even if achieved democratically, would invite "Communist participation, which added to a powerful state equals Stalinism." Political freedom could only exist where economic power remained diffused. Economic planning would centralize economic power and hence lead to dictatorship."⁴¹

Between the end of World War II and the early 1950s, many radicals of the Great Depression era leapt from the far left to the far right on the strength of Eastman's thesis.⁴² Its most famous support came from Frederick von Hayek's book, The Road to Serfdom (1944). Hayek argued, as did Eastman, that any concentration of economic power in the hands of men who had no personal motive for exercising it judiciously, no profit motive, would result in statist totalitarianism. It would destroy personal and political freedom.⁴³ Socialist theorists may have agreed with this analysis, but not the conclusion. How did they rationalize the necessity for planning with the need for decentralization to guard individual freedom?

The SP answer to Eastman and other critics was a clear statement of the party's belief that only a middle course between totalitarian collectivism and anarchic capitalism, could present a hope of avoiding tyranny. Travers Clement, answering Eastman's New Leader article (a reprint of Eastman's famous Reader's Digest anti-planning manifesto), charged that both he and Hayek confused bureaucratization for socialism, a common enough mistake among the masses, but not one Eastman should have made. Clement pointed out that any centralized economic control would imperil human liberty. But centralized in private hands, it was the most dangerous. Laissez faire capitalism

insured dictatorship, as it insured depressions, the seedbeds of totalitarianism, both left and right.⁴⁴

Fascism's rise in the 1930s demonstrated that socialism was not automatically the successor of failing capitalism. And even though fascism and its red twin, bolshevism, used the concept of planning, Thomas urged democratic socialists not to abandon it as a means of gaining a just, peaceful and plentiful society for all.⁴⁵

Thomas rejected "altogether, the notion that social planning means dictatorship. . . . It is entirely possible to set democratic controls which will permit engineers to work for us instead of for the glory of the national state." He admitted that the problem of state power was complex, but he refused to drop his faith that a thoroughly democratized state "owned by the people" could function effectively both as an economic planner and a guarantor of individual liberty. In many ways, Thomas's faith was a modernized version of Herbert Croly's. Like the philosopher of the Progressive era, Thomas believed democratic input and control necessary for effective planning. Totalitarian planning failed because "effective internal criticism and self-correction" could not function. Democratic planning, Thomas believed, would require neither public submission to "arbitrary and whimsical powers" nor "rationing of goods or conscription of men." It would require "the will to conquer poverty," and divorce the production of goods from "the amassing of private profit." The will to realize the promise of American life.⁴⁶ By 1946, Thomas was not as optimistic about democratic planning, but he still argued it would at least present a chance for a better society, something neither capitalism nor communism could

offer.⁴⁷

During the war, the party moved slowly away from its Depression emphasis on a completely socialized economy, but never from its insistence that rational planning, decentralized and democratic, might resolve the contradictions of capitalist productive and distributive modes while avoiding the pitfalls of totalitarian collectivism. "We are not after common ownership of wealth," wrote SP theorist and wit MacAlester Coleman in 1946. "We are after common ownership of the means of producing wealth. Thus a textile plant would be owned collectively and its products owned individually."⁴⁸

By 1945, the party adopted the theory of a "mixed economy," so named by SP sympathizer and ex-communist Lewis Corey, Antioch College economist. Thomas spoke of this idea often, saying that the SP believed there was "room for private enterprise of many sorts in town and country provided it is not monopolistic" and was taxed progressively to provide its just contribution to the social wealth.⁴⁹

The party embrace of Corey's ideal of a mixed economy represented a retreat from its prior demand for total socialization of the means of production. But it did not represent a total retreat from the idea of democratic collectivism or planning. The idea of a mixed economy fit well into the boundaries of SP theory, as it emphasized compromise between the best parts of socialism and free enterprise.

SP theorists were all too aware of the ironic answer to the ends-means question, and that the answer severely limited their policy alternatives. Thomas wrote in 1943 that he was "inclined to think that there may be a question more fundamental than [the question of] the

road to power. The question is, power for what?"⁵⁰ And, he might have added, power how? "We who advance democratic socialism have to depend on persuasion," he wrote an overzealous comrade in 1945. "We who believe in fair play in government have to try to manifest that spirit in discussion."⁵¹ Power, Thomas later noted, was "a good servant of ideals. It is a terrible master when in itself it becomes an ideal."⁵²

To many socialists, the party had to continue to fight for one simple reason: if it failed they could see "no other liberal influence to shield us either from communism or fascism."⁵³ Joseph Freeland, SP member from Kentucky, wrote another Kentucky member that the SP was the only organized group that offered a chance "for at least some effective political activity for adherents of genuine revolutionary and democratic socialism, as distinguished from old-line reformist social democracy . . . and totalitarian Leninism and all its varieties from Stalinism to Trotskyism."⁵⁴ The party, wrote leftist theorist Jim Cork in 1945, had faced and defeated the "inescapable central problem of all radicalism." How could a party "integrate the desired ethical values into the movement in order to make it . . . one in which the ends will not be vitiated by the employment of questionable means." Cork believed the SP's brand of democratic socialism offered such a rare mix.⁵⁵

From 1939 to 1948, the SP and its members faced a complex world where two political extremes, Leninism and fascism, dominated. This proved to socialists that there were political activities more important than grasping for power. How one obtained power determined how beneficently one could use it. Domestically, SP members watched,

no doubt incredulous, as the old guard of the party committed gleeful suicide, sinking slowly into the morass of the Democratic party.

Watching the SDF self-destruct, the Nazis and Communists wield power with no regard to its human consequences, the SP lived the mistakes of all. Those mistakes closed many theoretical doors for the party. Democracy became the party watchword, with the important caution that as SDF-like emphasis on political democracy was as futile as infantile leftists' calls for immediate social regeneration through violence.⁵⁶ Only a correct mix of political and economic theory, with a special warning about the growth of state power over the life of the individual, could promise anything better than the ludicrous, outrageous, illogical and pathetic system of American capitalism.

It was not surprising that socialists hated capitalism and fascism. One did not have to be even a liberal to hate Hitler, and socialists majored in finding fault in capitalism. But the SP's fear and loathing of the Communists was not as understandable. It must be dissected, because this anti-communism prepared a bridge by which many SP members could re-enter the mainstream of American political and social life in the cold war era. Why socialists hated Leninism and Stalinism was significant, as it suggested basic reasons for the American public's adverse reaction to Soviet postwar behavior.

NOTES

Chapter V

1. Thomas to Amicus Most, 5 October 1933, quoted in Venkatamarani, "Norman Thomas," 301.

2. See John Dennis McGreen, "Norman Thomas and the Search for an All-Inclusive Socialist Party," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University, 1976), 173-234.

3. Travers Clement to William Becker, 9 June 1945, SP Duke, Roll 52; cf., Lillian Symes to Thomas, 12 December 1943, ibid., Roll 48; Symes complained to Thomas that the NEC always seemed willing to compromise with the right, but never with the left. She objected to this uneven discipline.

4. See Parker's amendment, included in Pierson Ostrow, editor of Hammer and Tongs, to "Dear Comrades," April 1945, ibid., Roll 52.

5. See Virgil Vogel, "Equal Discipline," Hammer and Tongs, January 1946, 3-4, ibid., Roll 128.

6. Darlington Hoopes, "Local Autonomy," Hammer and Tongs, 2, ibid.

7. Robert Parker, "National Standards," ibid.

8. Minutes of the 25th national convention, 31 May-2 June 1946, 13, ibid., Roll 54.

9. Harry Fleischman, "Report of the National Secretary," in "Proceedings of the 25th National Convention, 31 May-2 June 1946," ibid.

10. List from the NEC's "Statement on Discipline," adopted at the 7-9 February 1941 NEC meeting, ibid., Roll 43; Socialist Campaigner, 5 February 1941, ibid., Roll 130, NTP, Box 150.

11. On Meta Berger, see Clement and McDowell to Meta Berger, 20 April 1940; Berger to Wisconsin State Executive Committee, 2 May

1940, SP Duke, Roll 38; on SP petitions and support for major party candidates, see minutes of NEC meeting, 20-21 July 1940; Clement to Leonard Woodcock, 19 August 1940, ibid., Roll 40; minutes of NAC meeting, 8 July 1940, "Statement by NAC on Wisconsin Situation," ibid., Roll 45; Yone Stafford to Fleischman, 3 August 1942; Fleischman to Stafford, 5 August 1942, Leo Leopold to Howard Penley, 24 August 1942, ibid., Roll 46; on the Camden incident, see William Becker to Camden County Branch, 13 January 1942; Harry Clevenger to NEC, 18 January 1942; minutes of NAC meeting, 22 January 1942; A. S. Hall to NAC, 26 February 1942; 12 March 1942; 21 March 1942; minutes of NAC meeting, 27 March 1942; minutes of NEC meeting, 10-12 April 1942, 1; Hall to NAC, 21 May 1942, all in ibid., Roll 46. On the Harry Paxton Howard incident, see Lillian Muniz to Fleischman, 28 June 1944; Fleischman to Howard, 28 June 1944; Muniz to NAC, 11 August 1944, all in ibid., Roll 50.

12. Mary Felton to Thomas, 10 October 1939, NTP, Box 16.

13. Thomas to Felton, 12 October 1939, ibid.

14. Minutes of NEC meeting, 7-9 February 1941, SP Duke, Roll 43.

15. NEC, "Statement on Discipline," in ibid., and NTP, Box 150.

16. Minutes of NEC meeting, 20-21 July 1940, SP Duke, Roll 40.

17. Lillian Symes, "Character of the Socialist Party," Hammer and Tongs, January 1940, 10-11, ibid., Roll 128. Italics in the original.

18. Thomas diary, 13, 14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176.

19. Thomas speech, "Building for Democracy and Socialism? Not for Fascism," Papers of the League for Industrial Democracy, Tamiment Institute, New York University, Box 9; for the same ideas from the rank and file, see H. Otto Dahlke to editor, Call, 23 April 1941, SP Duke, Roll 44; Charlotte Jones to Emanuel Murauchik, 1 January 1947, ibid., Roll 56.

20. Thomas diary, 12, 14 June 1940, NTP, Box 176; "Socialism and Democracy," Hammer and Tongs, May 1940, 7, SP Duke, Roll 128.

21. Griscom Morgan, "A Socialist Economy," ibid., June 1940, SP Duke, Roll 128.

22. Thomas to Nina Bull, 17 March 1939, NTP, Box 16; cf., Thomas diary, 13, 14 June 1940 and 3 January 1942, ibid., Box 176.

23. Mark Brown of the Pennsylvania SP introduced a motion which passed at the 24th national convention, 1944, to include the words "recognizing the class struggle" in the membership criteria; see minutes of the 24th national convention, 2-4 June 1944, 6, SP Duke, Roll 49.

24. A. G. McDowell to Edward Lasser, 4 June 1940, ibid., Roll 39.

25. Thomas diary, 3 January 1942, NTP, Box 176.

26. Thomas to Dr. Sharp, 26 March 1941, ibid., Box 19; Thomas to H. F. Bartholomew, 29 August 1941, ibid., Box 20; Thomas speech, "What Would a Socialist World Look Like?" nd [1944], SP Duke, Roll 51.

27. Samuel Lerner, "Socialism and Democracy," Call, 14 February 1942, 6.

28. See especially Emma Goldman, Living My Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931) 726-927; Richard Crossman, ed., The God That Failed (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), passim; and any of a number of memoirs of ex-communists, for whom the paradoxical solution of the ends/means question was the reason for their leaving the party.

29. See Chapter II.

30. Maynard Krueger, "Program Notes," Hammer and Tongs, March 1940, 1, SP Duke, Roll 128.

31. MacAlister Coleman, "Socialism is More Than Bread," Call, 26 August 1946, 2.

32. Lillian Symes, "Fraternally Yours: War Socialism," ibid., 15 May 1942, 2; Thomas speech, "The How and Why of Democratic Socialism," 1940, SP Duke, Roll 43.

33. William Becker, "Gov't Ownership is not Enough," Call, 23 July 1943, 5.

34. See Robin Meyers successful motion #113, minutes of the 24th national convention, 2-4 June 1944, 14-15; cf., ibid., 8, where Robert Repas of Wisconsin tried unsuccessfully to get the convention to support state ownership. The convention minutes recorded the major argument against Repas's motion as "wholesale collectivism [was] not desirable; need more flexible solution." Cf., Aldo Columbo, "A Plan for Democratic Socialism in Industry," Call, 6 October 1944, 4; Thomas, "The Socialist Alternative to Capitalism," ibid., 6.

35. August Gold, "Socialist Convention . . . Calls for Cooperatives," Call, 16 June 1944, 6; William Becker, "Practical Socialism Means Compensation," ibid., 7 November 1947, 1.

36. Thomas speech, "What Would a Socialist Society Look Like?" nd [1944], SP Duke, Roll 51; cf., Fleischman to Harold Stasson, 23 October 1947, ibid., Roll 57.

37. William Becker speech, "Will America Go Socialist?" 31 May 1946, 1, ibid., Roll 54.

38. Maynard Krueger speech, "Will It Be Boom or Bust?" June 1946, ibid.

39. Thomas to Robert Miller, 10 March 1942, NTP, Box 22; cf., Thomas to Irving Phillips, 30 April 1942, ibid.; Travers Clement and Aaron Levenstein, "An Economic Program for Wartime," nd [1943], 4, SP Duke, Roll 48; Thomas, "State Capitalism's Drive to World War III," Call, 27 October 1944, 4.

40. Press Release, 2 November 1944, 2, SP Duke, Roll 51; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Winning Real Victory In the Battle for Peace and Freedom," Call, 3 July 1943, 1, 8; Press Release, 7 July 1944, SP Duke, Roll 49; Thomas speech, "Is Roosevelt Indispensable?" September 1944, ibid., Roll 50.

41. Max Eastman, "The Notion of Democratic Socialism: Is Free Enterprise the Only Guarantee of Political Freedom?" New Leader, 27 January 1945, 5; cf., ibid., 3 and 10 February, 1945, 6.

42. See, for example, William O'Neill, Max Eastman: The Last Romantic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

43. Frederick von Hayek, The Road to Serfdom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), passim.

44. Travers Clement, "Looking Backwards: Eastman vs. Socialism," New Leader, 5 August 1945, 9; cf., Gertrude Himmelfard, "Socialism vs. Bureaucracy," Call, 17 November 1944, 4; Robert Delson, "Must Planning be Planned Chaos?" ibid., 28 February 1942, 2; Press Release, "Democracy is not Doomed," 30 July 1945, SP Duke, Roll 52.

45. Thomas speech, "Building for Democracy and Socialism? Not Fascism," 17 July 1939, Papers of the LID., Box 9.

46. Thomas speech, "A Program for Total Democracy," 27 October 1940, SP Duke, Roll 42.

47. Thomas, "The World About Us: President's Veto," Call, 17 June 1946, 8.

48. MacAlister Coleman, "What Socialism Is and Isn't," Call, 16 September 1946, 2.

49. Thomas speech, "What Would a Socialist Society Look

Like," 1944, 3, SP Duke, Roll 54; for summary of Lewis Corey's theory, see "Summary of the Conference of American Progressives," 6-7 April 1946, 1, 2, ibid.; for the growth of the idea of a viable free economy as a mix of private and public enterprise, see Richard H. Pells, Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 60, 357, 393n.

50. Thomas to Krueger, 24 August 1943, SP Duke, Roll 47.

51. Thomas to Leslie Charlow, 15 May 1945, NTP, Box 28.

52. Thomas, "The World About Us: Where's Labor Going?" Call, 2 September 1946, 8.

53. Brig. General (U.S.A. Retired) H. C. Holdridge to Fleischman, 2 December 1945, SP Duke, Roll 53.

54. Joseph Freeland to Herman O'Neil, 21 August 1946, ibid., Roll 55; italics in the original.

55. Jim Cork, "A Tentative Report," Call, 24 December 1945, 6.

56. See Melvin Cantor, The Divided Left: American Radicalism, 1900-1975 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 27, who indicates that the SP suffered the same problem; see also David Delson, The American as Anarchist (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 3-14, for an excellent discussion of the tension in the history of American radicalism between anti-statism and the institutionalism which has characterized American reforms.

CHAPTER VI

Paranoia Bordering On Resignation:

The SP Faces The Cold War, 1939-48

CHAPTER IV

PARANOIA BORDERING ON RESIGNATION:

THE SP FACES THE COLD WAR, 1939-48

For most Americans, both leaders and followers, a transfer of animus from Nazism to Stalinism was a factor in the American descent into the cold war from the peace of 1945. Soviet-style "socialism" was never acceptable to most Americans for a number of reasons. The Soviet attack on institutions Americans considered almost sacrosanct--private property, the freedoms of speech and religion the most important--guaranteed American suspicion. But as long as the Soviet nation posed no threat to the United States, it was a nuisance at worst. Just like Germany had been and for the same reason. It was a nation of maniacs perhaps, but harmless, at least to the American way of life.

To the eternal sorrow of the American nation, Hitler was not a harmless maniac. His twisted dream killed thousands of American youths, and crippled many more lives. All because the western democracies refused to meet expansive force with containing action. It was a lesson written in American blood. When the Soviet leader, Stalin, appeared to be mimicking Hitler's prewar expansionist policies in the early postwar period, Americans were quick to react in a way consistent with their recently learned lesson. Containment of aggressive maniacs

was preferable to appeasement. And socialists were no different from their fellow Americans, except perhaps that the American radicals absorbed the lesson sooner than most.¹

There is no doubt that by 1940, the great majority of SP members and sympathizers believed Bolshevism to be the ideological heir and brother to fascism. This equation may have "substituted emotion for intellect" and severely "affected the American perception of reality" as two prominent historians recently charged, but it was nonetheless a potent and telling metaphor.² The socialist arguments for the comparison seemed sound. Symes maintained, and Thomas agreed, that an economy of "state ownership without democratic control" was fascist. The Soviet Union was "National Bolshevism," a "party state which employed methods indistinguishable from those of the fascist party state." Symes said that to call the Soviet Union a workers' state would be like terming the France of Napoleon I a democratic people's republic.³ Thomas went so far as to blame Lenin, Trotsky, and "above all Stalin" for pioneering "that machiavellian ruthlessness in which Hitler had become so adept."⁴ Phillip Howell, an instructor in economics at the University of Pennsylvania, wrote in the Young Socialist Review that the only facet of the Soviet economy which remotely resembled Marx's models was its planning organizations. As for the rest, the bureaucratic centralism, the excessive military spending, the gross inequities of income distribution and lack of popular economic control made the Soviet Union largely "fascist."⁵

Socialist disappointment with the Soviet experiment was intense. It fostered over reaction, especially to the members of the

American Communist Party. Socialists worried more in the late 1930s and early 1940s about the growing communist influence in the American labor movement than they did about their own rapidly decreasing power.⁶ The idea that the CP might have sympathizers within the SP was more horrible than any possible rightist activity. SP functionaries threatened "to whack the bastards" if any communists tried to infiltrate the 1940 SP convention.⁷ Nazis at least admitted they were racist and anti-democratic. But communists hid their evil intent behind sugary slogans of liberation, equality and democracy. This, to most socialists, made communists more reprehensible.⁸

This trend in socialist thought was clear by early 1942. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor convinced most that the party must give its grudging support to the American war effort. Since most socialists equated communism's amoral philosophy with nazism, it was not surprising that the SP protested little as the United States drifted into cold war confrontation with the Soviet Union after 1945. The fascist threat was greater until its defeat in 1945. The Soviet and German systems may have appeared the same to many socialists during the war, but the same type of fear socialists felt for Hitler did not transfer to Stalin until the Soviet dictator made it clear that he too had grand imperial designs which threatened the peace of the world. The Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939 hinted at this, but it was not until Stalin's absorption of Poland in 1945 that the Socialist Party was certain his ambitions were as dangerous as Hitler's.⁹

Like most Americans, the socialists suspected Stalin's motives somewhat less during the war. If the party agreed to support the United

States war effort, however critically, they also had to support Stalin's. Which they did, but only critically. Thomas wrote the Nation early in 1942 that his political organization supported the Soviet people's struggle against the Hitlerite hordes, but that personally he still believed the war to be a means of answering the question of which blood-thirsty tyrant would rule Europe. With the industrial and manpower aid of the United States, Thomas presumed that Stalin would defeat Hitler and emerge to rule Germany and China.¹⁰ The Socialist leader fully expected Stalin to "draw his own western boundaries as he sees fit . . . regardless of the Atlantic Charter."¹¹ The tragedy of Stalinist expansion, besides the cost in human life and liberty, was that Europe would become "a continent cursed by hate and hunger, a flash-point for a third world war, the United States versus the Soviet Union."¹²

If SP members could still have believed the Soviet Union was at least moving toward socialism, their vocal opposition to Stalinist expansion might have been less intense. But American socialists recognized well the lessons of the Russian revolution. The "primary, and now frankly avowed purpose of Stalinism," wrote Lillian Symes, "is not the liquidation of capitalism but the extermination of the socialist movement. The record is too clear to permit any misunderstanding of this fact, and it is written in letters of blood."¹³ Socialists feared English and American postwar repression of native socialist movements. But at least American socialists could hope that Anglo-American public opinion could prevent or weaken the capitalist reaction. There was no such hope for the Soviet masses. Stalin would destroy all democrats,

be they socialist or capitalist; in that destruction lay the seeds of the next world war, imperialism versus imperialism.¹⁴

Stalin's actions throughout the conflict made two things very clear: that the Soviet Union was "merely another imperialist power engaged in the old empire game of Realpolitik," and that the Soviet dictator was using his allies' good graces (and Lend-Lease) to expand his dominance as fast as he could. Stalin's recognition of the Italian fascist Badoglio demonstrated his Realpolitik; he hoped it would release American troops for a second front. His Teheran policy of accepting Roosevelt's Four Policeman strategy of great power world domination proved he would use any means to further his power.¹⁵ These lessons hardly surprised socialists, but the fact that most Americans, especially the first family, seemed blind to them did. "Is there no way of getting into the heads of our First Family," wrote Call editor Samuel Friedman, "that Stalinists are not misguided minors who need a little case work, but bloody, ruthless totalitarians whose smiles are as dangerous as their frowns?"¹⁶

It was just too easy for Americans to fall into the twin traps of "Soviet exceptionalism," the line of American pro-Soviet propaganda that flourished during the war as a function of the win-the-war-at-all-costs-ideal. "Soviet exceptionalism" was a disease of American leftists and liberals in the 1930s who believed that the objective conditions of Russian life and history required Stalin's draconian measures. Stalinist terror was "part of the price of building socialism" in a nation where violence was "the only way anything has ever been done."¹⁷ If Soviet conditions necessitated terror for socialization, American

conditions did not. So, American communists would be more democratic than their Russian cousins. Certainly under the leadership of Earl Browder, the CPUSA appeared so to be, especially from 1934 through 1945. This view totally ignored the fact that Soviet communism demanded of its international allies absolute fealty to the Russian means of "socialization." If terror were the way of life in Russia, so would it be in the United States.¹⁸

During the Second World War, the United States government augmented this concept, encouraging pro-Soviet propaganda. As Woodrow Wilson used the first Russian Revolution in March 1917 to try to convince Americans that World War I was a war of democracy versus militarism, Roosevelt allowed publicists to use the Soviet experience of the 1930s to prove that Stalin was just a grandfatherly gentleman, a democrat at heart. This line required more twisting of fact than Wilson's. The most famous example of this pro-Soviet drive was the Warner Brothers' movie production of former special ambassador Joseph Davies' book Mission to Moscow. The movie portrayed Stalin as a gentle, humble, pipe-smoking peasant who wished for no more for his fellow Russians than peace and security. The movie portrayed the purge trials as legitimate legal trials of spies, Trotskyists and fifth columnists.

Non-communist radicals reacted with contempt to this fiction. The Call termed it "an abominable concoction of utter falsehood, damnable distortion, willful misrepresentation, and grotesque but dangerous nonsense. . . ." Meyer Shapiro, SP member, writing in Partisan Review, pointed out that the film taught that opponents of any government were by definition fifth columnists and that a state could only

survive if such vermin were ruthlessly exterminated. No wonder the civil liberty-oriented socialists were gravely afraid for the postwar world.¹⁹ It was too bad that more administration figures and leftist fellow-travelers could not have had the experience of Carl Cohran of Hendersonville, Kentucky. Cohran wrote to SP national treasurer Ann Ray that he "jorn the C.I.O. . . . to se if [I] could tame a communist, [but] it cant be done [sic]."²⁰

Yet in some ways the SP behaved much like the CP. Communists believed socialists were the Soviet Union's worst enemy; socialist reformism took the all important sting out of capitalist exploitation. And socialists often considered liberals, especially those who supported the communist "line" to be both America's and socialism's worst enemies. Perhaps both groups were correct. Certainly fellow-travelers provided red baiters of the 1950s with succulent bait.

In hindsight, it is simple to diagnose the liberal disease of the 1930s and 1940s. Lib-labs, left-liberals, fellow-travelers, or as socialists called them, "totalitarian liberals," transformed the image of what the Soviet Union was supposed to be into what the United States could be. For fellow-travelers, the Soviet Union was not only a nation, an experiment, but also a state of mind.²¹

What drew liberals to the CP and the Soviet Union was, ironically, a good dose of all-American practicality. The socialist concept of a cooperative commonwealth was just that, a concept, untried, untested. Soviet Russia was fact, tried and true. But more than that, power fascinated American liberals. A liberal sought vindication in the Soviet experience because of a "deep-going desire to invest one's

emotions in something strong and active. . . . [even] if that strength is presented under the slogans of Sovietism." Liberals were willing to "lose themselves completely in it."²²

The liberal desire to "make a real difference" spawned two dangerous tendencies, an obsession "with the struggle for power which justifies anything to win," and a desire to work within one of the two major American political parties. SP members viewed the twin principles as sure roads to socio-political stagnation. Thomas saw clearly that the liberals' devotion to action, to power, made them "devotees to a double standard." If an action suited their purpose it was good. If a group agreed with their view it could do no wrong. Thomas commented acidly that during the war, liberals were vocal advocates of civil liberties (except for Japanese-Americans), and of free speech (for all with whom they agreed). The SP leader noted the all-too-frequent liberal use of the epithet "fascist" to denote all who attacked their stance. It was hardly surprising that SP members feared and distrusted liberals; they were people who, if in power, might let America's precious drop of democracy evaporate under the heat of action, power, and "getting something done."²³

Liberals paid little attention to Thomas and the SP. The SP had no power, and it seemed likely it never would. Liberals downplayed Thomas's warnings about Stalin's imperial designs. All Stalin wanted, reported Ralph Bates in the Nation, was full and honest collaboration with the Allies, during and after the war.²⁴ Only after Roosevelt's death and the war's end did the "totalitarian" liberals realize the danger of their pro-Soviet position, that rightists would

use the CP issue to tar all leftists with the same brush. Then and only then did anti-communist liberal organizations such as the Americans for Democratic Action begin to grow.²⁵ During the war, liberals of the Nation/New Republic stripe had much more influence on the American public than the SP. Perhaps this explained the bitter tones the socialists employed when attacking both the CP and its supporters throughout the war, especially in connection with the CP policy reversals.

In May 1943, Stalin officially dissolved the Comintern. Left Liberals and even some main-stream capitalists applauded this move: Newsweek said Comintern's death was part of a "natural evolution" for Soviet foreign policy away from world revolution, toward cooperation with capitalist nations to build socialism in one nation. Freda Kirchwey wrote in the Nation that Stalin's move was a laudable act of "political warfare" an act "above criticism," as it removed the raison d'être for Hitler's anti-comintern alliances. The New Republic editor wrote that Stalin's move symbolized the Russian leader's realization that Hitler's destruction was more important than world revolution.²⁶

Lillian Symes properly concluded that the Comintern's death was a "joke." Regardless of Stalin's hypocrisy, the CPUSA would continue to be a "monolithic, highly disciplined agency of Soviet power." The National Action Committee of the SP bemoaned the event, predicting that the American CP was now one step closer to Stalin; it would receive its orders directly from the Soviet Foreign Office. And besides, Stalin's move was good propaganda and anything which bespoke well of Soviet communism hurt American socialism. Thomas hoped the

move would strengthen the chances of postwar allied cooperation, but he doubted it. An editorial in a YPSL publication probably summed up socialist feeling about the Comintern's timely death. "The thieves of Russia . . . have disgorged a portion of their booty and have once again revealed themselves to be the totalitarian imperialists they are." Too bad Thomas would not use such language. But an even greater shame was the fact that Newsweek's opinion reached so many and the socialist opinion reached so few.²⁷

Within one year after the Comintern's death, the American Communist Party staged "a full-dress lefthanded hara-kiri" and declared itself no longer a political party, but now an educational group, the Communist Political Association (CPA). Thomas, perhaps reflecting ruefully on the many socialists who urged such a tactic on the SP, predicted the Communist move. "Once the Communist Party sought power by any means to advance socialism. Now it merely seeks power, by any means." Dislocation of the electoral function and entry into the Democratic Party was just such a move to grasp power. National Secretary Fleischman summed up the SP attitude neatly. "It is hoped," he wrote in a press release, "that the suicide is permanent." The Call's editor warned the paper's readers that while the communist name was modified, its "habits remain. The avowed aims may have been altered but the practices continue." The CPA appellation was a whitewash which could not "hide the odor of malignancy, of deceit, of hypocrisy, of character assassination, of down right lying . . . of provocation to assault and of agent provocateurism." Time magazine was more humorous about the communist move. But then it could be, as Henry Luce no doubt never

considered Earl Browder a threat to his position. In an article titled "Down With Us!," Time reported that "on second thought, the U.S. Communists discovered that they could do without themselves . . . the new party line of suicide would have been assured of unqualified popular approval . . . if it weren't for two facts: (1) very few cared . . . (2) fewer still believed the Communists' word. . . . "28

The CP's re-emergence as a leftist sectarian movement in 1945 probably surprised no group less than the SP.²⁹ Many Socialists interpreted the famous Duclos letter, which castigated the Browder "Teheran" line as reformist and collaborationist, as Stalin's way "of warning American and British rulers that he is prepared to let loose his agents" to foment attacks on the anti-soviet policies of the two capitalist allies. Perhaps if Stalin could reach an agreement with the Americans and British, he would call off his dogs. He would "have no qualms about giving up the American Communist Party in return for America sanctioning his land grabs." Other commentators scorned the "dizzy detours of the new 'line.'" "Hark, from the tombs!," commented SP humorist MacAlister Coleman, when he learned that Stalin had "resurrected" sixty-five year old William Z. Foster to lead his new American CP. "Foster will stir the nation," Coleman predicted, "as profoundly as a W.C.T.U. announcement of its stand against liquor."³⁰

Humor aside, socialists were extremely worried about communism, domestic and foreign; as worried as Republicans, if not more. By 1944, it was obvious to most socialist observers that Stalin was going to have his way in Poland and this augured ill for the postwar world. Stalin's attempts to dominate Poland constituted "one of the most fla-

grant evidences of this predominance of power politics over justice." This move and others, like the French and British moves to retain their colonies, guaranteed a new war within one generation. Socialists decried the Soviet moves in Eastern Europe more than French, British or American imperialism, especially after the Soviets failed to help the Warsaw rebels when they revolted against their Nazi masters in August 1944. Lillian Symes termed the Russian failure an "incredibly brutal betrayal." Later she revised this, calling it "a weak understatement." Stalin's refusal to aid Warsaw was a "brazen example of cynical and triumphant treachery."³¹

The "stench of peace" was blowing in from the east, and on its heels came little hope for a peaceful postwar world. Stalin had replaced Hitler. He acted as Hitler would have, at least so most socialists thought. The SP's attitudes were almost solidified, although not so much as to preclude a softening in the party's stance on Poland if they believed Stalin capable of compromise. In June 1945 such a softening occurred in response to Harry Hopkins's last trip to Moscow, from which he returned with Stalin's promise to include some non-communists in the new Polish government. The softening of the SP line amounted to an agreement with the Social Democratic Federation to "hold off" commenting on Poland until the two groups could be sure of Stalin's intentions. It was not long until the socialists were sure of the dictator's intentions, and they issued scathing press releases attacking the Soviet imperialism.³² If the Moscow purges and the Nazi-Soviet Pact signalled the final socialist break with the romance of the international communist movement, then Stalin's treatment of Poland, 1944-45

was the final proof that he, like Hitler, had to be stopped.

Thomas wrote in 1945 that world history since 1939 justified "the assertion that Stalin's foreign policy" constituted "a new imperialism, far cleverer . . . than the old model either of the Czars or the British Tories." Nevertheless, Stalin's foreign policy, a combination of revolutionary zeal and expansionist urges, was imperialistic, as it subordinated "everything to Russian security and power."³³ Thomas's position was firmly astride what would soon become the two major views of the emerging cold war. He imputed dual motives to Soviet moves, revolutionary and imperial. Most observers then and later, including George Kennan and Henry Wallace, believed either the revolutionary or the imperial motives.³⁴ Thomas and the SP were among the few who tried to synthesize the two position.

It was the socialist detachment which allowed their objectivity. Thomas believed his attitude toward the Soviet Union was "by no means indiscriminately critical" because it was "certainly not born of belief in British or American perfection." The SP leader still found "things to admire in the Soviet Union," particularly its non-racist society and social-educational services. He did denounce many more aspects of Stalinist Russia than he had in the 1930s, especially the inequality of national wealth distribution, the slavery of the work force, and Soviet expansionism. He disagreed with Henry Wallace's contention that the Soviet Union was democratic, just not in the same manner as the United States. Thomas wondered if the term democracy was becoming as obscure as the term socialism.³⁵

Like the party's position on the war in 1940, its critical sup-

port for the war after Pearl Harbor, its position on postwar and peace plans, like all its positions, the party feeling about the Soviet Union and international communism in 1945 was a balance between the two extremes of uncritical support for Soviet Russia, and warlike hatred. Socialists had not been fellow-travelers since (at the latest) the early 1930s. But neither were they extremist red-baiters such as right-wingers Martin Dies or J. Parnell Roberts, both heads of the infamous House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Thomas believed the Dies Committee (as HUAC was called before and during the war) should be discontinued as "an actual menace to the Americanism it professes to serve."³⁶ Socialists sought a balanced opinion on Soviet Russia. The party wanted the United States government to avoid appeasing Stalin, but not to risk armed confrontation. The party sought to expose communists or fellow-travelers in government service, but also to protect the suspects' civil rights. As American confrontations with the Soviet Union grew more serious, the SP aligned itself more with the U.S. government, until, by 1948, the SP was in a position to accept American democratic capitalism as the "lesser evil" in its struggle with the Soviet Union. Socialist support was critical of course. But any support of a capitalist, imperialist government in peacetime represented a drastic shift in socialist thought and was indicative of the growing hegemony of capitalist idealism in the United States. The Soviet Union and its lackey, the CPUSA, destroyed the SP as a vital political force in the United States because the "specter of international communism" forced socialists to choose between two evils; by 1948 the middle road no longer seemed tenable. The imposed choice

removed much of the reason for an independent socialist movement in America. Five years before John Foster Dulles became Secretary of State, the SP labeled neutrality a moral anathma.

Socialists believed Stalin's tyranny necessitated a choice. By 1946, even the idea that the Soviet Union was to be praised for exorcizing racism collapsed. Thomas believed Russia to be "the land of slave labor." It was "no longer possible to affirm" any facet of the Soviet experience, Thomas wrote in early 1947. Not since "the systematic destruction of the little Baltic nationalities," which was "on a par with anything that Hitler did."³⁷

Thomas's non-communism had become anti-communism. So preoccupied with Stalinism was he that he maintained in a letter to the New York Times that his major reason for his pre-Pearl Harbor agitation against American war participation was that an allied victory would facilitate "a substitution of Stalin for Hitler as a dictator in search of world power." Stalin was another Hitler and another Napoleon all in one; he would pave "the road for the imperialist period [like that] of the degenerated French Revolution. Stalin and his marshalls will never stop or relax in their preparations for a new struggle for world conquest."³⁸

So it was necessary for the SP to denounce and fight communism with all its strength in the postwar period as it had been to fight fascism from 1922 on. Thomas and SP leaders were quick to acknowledge the lessons of the late 1930s. Appeasement was no guarantee of peace. In fact, with Stalin as with Hitler, it guaranteed future wars. Stalin was "grimly intent" on world conquest. The danger was even more insid-

ious than that of fascism; communists "pre-empted the designation of leftists" while making as much mockery of the ideals of political and industrial democracy as Hitler. Hitler was open about his repressive goals. Stalin disguised his in the red flag of liberation. Between democracy and communism, there must always be conflict.³⁹ By 1948, Thomas rationalized the conflict by saying that since the Soviet Union was state capitalist, the fight against communism was but another facet of the struggle against capitalism.⁴⁰

Throughout the war, the SP fought valiantly against the Roosevelt administration's necessitarianism.⁴¹ But the party, like the nation as a whole, had absorbed much of the ethic by osmosis. The war seemed to have a "corrupting impact . . . on all it touched."⁴² As much as socialists decried the communist thesis that the end justified the means, Thomas and his followers, and most Americans, began to accept a similar rationale in the postwar power struggle between communism and democratic capitalism.⁴³ For most Americans, the acceptance of the ends/means or necessitarian view of foreign policy signaled support for right-wing terrorist regimes abroad so long as those regimes were anti-communist. For socialists and most non-communist radicals, a gradual acceptance of necessitarianism signalled a grudging acceptance of democratic capitalism as the lesser of two evils. At least the United States had political democracy, which was better than no democracy at all.⁴⁴

Acceptance of the lesser evil thesis by socialists sprouted from their "critical support" for capitalist democracy against fascism, combined with the simple identification of Stalin with Hitler. If

American capitalism was better than fascism, if it deserved defense against fascism, then it deserved defense against red fascism, communism.⁴⁵

After the war, the SP took critical support one step further, perhaps because Thomas and his followers genuinely feared Stalinism more than fascism. Democracy, as embodied in the United States, was the last and strongest bulwark against Stalinist expansion. "The one hope of the world is in American leadership for something better," Thomas wrote in 1946.⁴⁶ Close to two full years later, the SP leader recorded in his diary that "American victory [over communism] offers the only hope of a more tolerable circle of hell . . . I come close now to saying better no world than a communist world."⁴⁷ If nothing else, Thomas's conversion to cold warrior demonstrated the amazing strength of the cold war mentality.

With increased socialist support for the American system, came an increased emphasis on government action, at home and abroad, to solve problems which exacerbated democracy's weakness. The SP abandoned neither its critique of capitalism nor its long-range goal of socialism. But it did subordinate its goal to the immediate needs of anti-communism. Certainly only democratic socialism could guarantee peace and plenty, but since it did not seem practical in 1948 to agitate solely for this end, "it is our responsibility to attempt to devise and secure the [American government] adoption of stopgap measures to avert the danger of . . . continued expansion of Soviet totalitarianism" and another war.⁴⁸ The SP's reaction to world events from 1941 through 1948 evolved within those boundaries: the desired goal (defeat of

Hitler-Stalin to insure world peace) and the necessity of utilizing means which at least would present a chance of realizing that goal. Socialists were true to their conviction, gleaned from watching the mistakes of the Bolsheviks and right-wing social democrats, that careful balance had to exist between goals and methods. This position fully explained the party's postwar foreign policy goal of peace without appeasement of Stalinist expansion; a peace of negotiation, without resort to armed force. This opened the way for socialists to support enthusiastically some facets of the Truman-Marshall-Acheson-Kennan foreign policy, while roundly condemning others.

Socialists discovered more to condemn than to condone during the war. Party spokesmen, especially Thomas, worried that the second great war would do nothing to solve the problems which were at its core: racism, imperialism and international sphere-of-influence politics. On this basis Thomas condemned the Cairo and Tehran meetings. He wondered if FDR were operating "on the single principle of appeasing Churchill and Stalin." To insure a postwar return to the prewar status quo would require an injudicious use of American power to uphold the crumbling British and French empires. Stalin's cooperation would be necessary in that case, as the United States had neither the power nor the potential to guard European colonialism in the third world while protecting Eastern Europe from Soviet expansionism. Thomas therefore charged Roosevelt with following a foreign policy of allowing Stalin to "write his own ticket in Eastern Europe" in exchange for the Soviet dictator's promise not to threaten western interests in the third world. This would "perpetuate indefinitely" the sphere-of-influence

international politics which had already spawned two major wars.⁴⁹

By the time of the Yalta conference, most socialists little doubted that Roosevelt was pursuing an incorrect and dangerous foreign policy. Especially toward the Soviet Union. Before Roosevelt left for the conference, Thomas wrote him asking that the United States offer its allies a positive program centered around "progressive disarmament and . . . universal abolition of military conscription." Instead, it soon appeared that the President went to the Crimea with little or no policy. He ended up adopting the programs of Europe's two great imperialist powers, Britain and Russia. The outcome of Yalta, Thomas wrote in July 1945, made it necessary for Eastern Europe to "make the best terms it could with its Russian master."⁵⁰

For the much praised "Declaration of Liberated Europe," the communique of the Big Three at Yalta, the SP had neither use nor respect. How could "free" elections occur in Poland when the "GPU [the Soviet secret police] is working overtime liquidating whatever is left of the democratic labor and socialist movement?" Did Roosevelt and Churchill really believe Stalin would allow free elections in Poland? About as possible, said SP leaders Fleischman and Krueger, as Stalin permitting free elections in the Soviet Union. The Declaration was "the cheese in [Stalin's] mousetrap. And the peoples of the world are expected to be the mice." Roosevelt's acquiescence to Stalin's demands at Yalta was the final proof that the Atlantic Charter was never policy, just propaganda. At least Woodrow Wilson really believed in his Fourteen Points.⁵¹

Perhaps the most terrifying and mystifying aspect of the Yalta

agreement was that it "made clear that war and a war economy" were "destined to become a permanent part of the American scene." Yalta strengthened the hand of those who believed in sphere-of-influence world politics, peace by the sword. It was another example of policy makers trying to gain a just goal through unjust means. It could not work, anymore than a violent revolution could spawn a peaceful society, or an individual could find and hold friends through threats of retaliation. The American policy at Yalta guaranteed new wars. It did not defuse possible imperial power struggles; it did not deal at all with the reality of Soviet expansionism. The conference and its outcome were "mutual appeasements . . . at the expense of the weak," and were "no more a basis for peace than was Munich."⁵²

The SP's use of terms such as "appeasement" and "Munich" allied them with a select company of critics of the New Deal foreign policy. Thomas's criticisms joined him to right-wing luminaries such as Wayne Vandenberg and James Forrestal. The SP anticipated what was later to become an article of McCarthyist faith, that Yalta was an unconscious American capitulation to Stalin. One socialist columnist charged that Roosevelt and Stalin had struck "a secret agreement . . . by which Moscow is to have Manchuria and perhaps Korea" in return for Russian help in the Pacific war.⁵³

Socialists were quick to sense, and in many ways applaud, the Truman administration's tougher view of the Soviet Union in late 1945. Thomas believed it was positive that Secretary of State James Byrnes was "being belatedly educated at great expense" to Soviet duplicity at the September 1945 London Conference. But at the same time, socialists

were justifiably worried that the new Administration's response to Stalin's imperialism would be "equally erroneous counter-imperialism." That Byrnes and Truman seemed aware that Molotov played the same role in London that Hitler played in Munich was a positive development, but the President and his Secretary of State should remember (but probably would not) that Russian imperialism "gets its moral vindication from the imperialist policy of others. The foreign policy of the Big Two is based on fear of each other." An astute analysis of the developing cold war.⁵⁴

It was within these boundaries, the twin fears of Stalinism and American militarism, that the SP criticized the Truman Administration's foreign policy. After the Moscow Conference in December 1945, the NEC of the Socialist Party charged that Truman and Byrnes had allowed "power politics" to win "a total victory over liberty and justice." Byrnes returned from the conference carrying nothing but a "smothered" American conscience which allowed "Stalin's new imperialism [to be] triumphant." But the party applauded the Acheson-Lilienthal report on international control of atomic energy and the resulting Baruch Plan as positive steps toward the socialist goal of peace with neither preventive war nor appeasement.⁵⁵

The difference between Byrnes's "appeasement" at Moscow and Baruch's level-headed proposals of June 1946 summed up the problem socialists saw in Truman's foreign policy. It "wavered uneasily between appeasement of Russia and big-stick imperialism by waving the atomic bomb around threateningly." At least Truman's policies marked a change for "the better in concern for human rights since Yalta and

Potsdam."⁵⁶

Socialists attacked Truman's vacillation often. It was dangerous. At first, the President seemed to invite Soviet expansion "by continuing . . . the Yalta policy of appeasing Stalin." Later, he got tough with the Russians, but developed a different sort of vacillation, between a dangerously simplistic military-oriented course of preventive warfare, symbolized by the Truman Doctrine, and a much more positive program of economic aid, the Marshall Plan. But for every positive program, Truman and his advisors developed as many negative ones.⁵⁷

The SP's rejection of the Truman Doctrine, mingled with its enthusiasm for the Marshall Plan, demonstrated clearly what the anti-communist leftists wanted the United States to do in postwar world affairs: to destroy Stalin's expansionism by any means except armed force. "Our Socialist position, vis-a-vis the so-called bipartisan policy," Thomas reported to the NEC in mid-1947, "is exceedingly difficult. We are obliged to say that Russian Communist imperialism is as bad or worse than Truman understands, but that the Truman Doctrine and growing American militarism . . . is not the answer."⁵⁸ The socialist objection to the Truman Doctrine was a function of the ends/means controversy. One could not guarantee peace through a competitive armament race. Any form of militarization of competing societies guaranteed future war. And in the atomic age, such lack of vision was monumental folly. Perhaps even genocidal folly.

If atomic war were no answer, then neither was appeasement. It seemed "painfully evident" to Thomas "that if we love justice and peace, we cannot escape a struggle on something like a global basis

against the advance of Communist totalitarianism." But this struggle had to exclude war. Thomas "dreadfully feared" a "blundering into a war which neither Truman nor Stalin . . . might intend. . . . A third world war could be the ultimate evil."⁵⁹

Socialists understood the need of helping Greece and Turkey survive Communist aggression. But not through military aid. Thomas thought the United States government should extend help only if "it can be done in terms that give us reasonable hope of strengthening genuine democracy" in both nations. Washington socialist William Gausmann believed the party should "insist that Congress back the idea" of help to Greece, "but insist upon economic arrangements which will actually get the dough to the public." The United States could not stop Soviet imperialism either with its own brand or by supporting right-wing dictators as surrogate anti-communist warriors. Besides the danger of war, the Truman Doctrine was dangerous as a first step toward a permanently militarized American society. Socialists supported Truman's goals one hundred percent. But they believed his means of achieving his major goal, the containment of communist expansion, were detrimental to its realization.⁶⁰

Using this proposition that the means determine the end, it was relatively easy to trace the SP's stand on the major foreign policy issues of the early postwar era. Thomas, Fleischman, Krueger and other SP leaders whole-heartedly supported the European Recovery Plan (Marshall Plan). Direct American economic aid to the floundering democracies of the continent would "furnish the beginnings . . . of genuine European economic planning," the beginnings of democratic

socialism, which would preclude any substantial growth of the Russian heresy. The National Action Committee of the SP voted unanimously to support the Marshall Plan, much to the glee of Gausmann, who had urged SP support "without a lot of crappy criticisms designed to please God knows who."⁶¹

Socialist support of the Marshall Plan was so strong precisely because it promised departure from Yalta's appeasement and the Truman Doctrine's militarism. As such, the NEC believed it was "one of the most significant and constructive acts in the history of Marshall's foreign policy." The plan would provide, socialists hoped, "the material prerequisites for . . . democratic socialism on the continent, assuring an economy of abundance as well as freedom." Socialists believed only this balance of economic and political freedom could ever halt Soviet adventurism by means short of war. Socialists did have one fear for the Marshall Plan, that it was merely the cutting edge of American capitalism's imperial spread throughout the world. Even that fear, often voiced, subtracted little from the Party's support for the plan.⁶²

Perhaps the most significant point of the SP's support of the Marshall Plan was that it clearly underlined the party's shift from its prewar stance of non-support for the United States government to relatively uncritical support (at least as compared to its 1939 views) of the American government in its fight against communist totalitarian expansion. When this writer queried an ex-SP member to see if he agreed with the theory that the party support of the Marshall Plan signalled the beginning of its tacit support for American foreign policy,

he replied: "I don't think the Party's support of the Marshall Plan was tacit support for the US against the USSR. It was open support."⁶³ The cold war was on, and there was no doubt on which side the SP sat.

Neither the Marshall Plan nor any other Truman administration action conformed totally to what the SP sought, peace without appeasement.⁶⁴ Socialists believed that atomic weapons should strengthen the argument for peace so much as to make it undebatable, but it did not appear to be happening that way. The United States should therefore become a neutral "third force" standing firmly for democracy and peace between the twin aggressive imperialisms of western Europe and the Soviet Union. Perhaps the most bitter lesson socialists thought they had learned from the events of the second world war was that further war would aid the spread of communism. The third force idea seemed the only viable alternative, and the Marshall Plan was a good start toward turning the power of the United States toward a reconciliation of its goal with proper means.⁶⁵

As this neutral third force, the most valuable contribution America could make toward peace was its work for universal disarmament. Socialists believed that the Baruch Plan was one small step in this direction, and supported it with few reservations.⁶⁶ Socialists claimed they realized that disarmament was not "an absolute barrier to war," but it could be at least "conspicuous will-to-peace."⁶⁷ The only time SP leaders were willing to compromise with the Soviet Union was over the question of disarmament. In late 1946, when Soviet foreign minister Molotov proposed negotiations for a general reduction of armaments, Thomas was ecstatic. Molotov's offer seemed to show that the

nay-sayers, who doubted the Soviets would ever disarm, had misjudged Stalin. As evil as he was, he was also smart enough to see that atomic war offered no solutions.⁶⁸ Thomas repeated his disarmament plea every time Molotov seemed to be urging the same thing at the United Nations. The SP leader chided Truman in 1948 for refusing to take advantage of a renewed Soviet offer as "a hope for mitigating the Cold War and taking it out of the field of military competition." Truman should seize the day, if for no other reason than to engineer a propaganda coup which would show the world which superpower was really the true lover-of-peace.⁶⁹

Thomas placed so much emphasis on disarmament that some SP leaders began to rebel. "Not that I'm not 100% for it," complained William Gausmann in 1947, "but goddamn it is not enough and won't get any attention." Gausmann wanted Thomas to place more emphasis on other more realizable parts of the SP foreign policy platform, such as internationalization of key waterways.⁷⁰

In the party's support for the Baruch and Marshall Plans, as opposed to its idealistic or utopian support for universal disarmament, there was a tension between what realistically socialists could expect and what they actually wanted. It was between these two extremes that the SP operated in the early postwar period, just as it had for the preceding decade, especially during the war. The major difference between the SP of 1948 and the SP of 1939 was that by 1948, Socialist fear and hatred of Stalin and the Soviet system was bitter enough to drive them into the uncaring arms of the United States government, there to seek protection from a very real Soviet threat. So real was

the threat, at least to Americans in 1948, and the socialists were no exception, that the party which advocated armed uprising against the American government under certain circumstances in 1936, could demand in 1946 that "the US stand ready to assist any people in the conduct of free elections."⁷¹ The democratic American government was no longer the enemy. Instead, it was the protector.

There was certainly no question in the minds of American socialists as to who was responsible for the cold war, or that there was a cold war. The SP rejected competition as an internal economic ethic, but obviously accepted it on the international level, using the same arguments as its internal advocates: that American excellence could force the Soviet Union out of "the market" for the world's affections. Thomas early rejected what was to become the revisionist historians' main argument, that Stalin was reacting defensively to an American expansionist world plan. In an open letter to Scott Nearing, who begged the SP leader to "try to see ourselves as others see us," Thomas wrote "It cannot be argued that Stalin is aiding Russian security by his actions. He is on the contrary stirring up fear and hatred where it did not previously exist. The notion that the strong are justified in robbing the weak in order to protect their own security has no ethical value." Nothing the United States government had done since VE day, not its atomic monopoly, its large military budget, or its continued conscription program, justified Stalin's expansionist policies. Stalin was guilty as charged, by the United States government and the free peoples of the earth.⁷² By 1948, the SP had developed a cold war mentality. Thomas and his followers believed Stalin had a "settled pur-

pose . . . to impose . . . slavery on mankind," and that he would never negotiate or compromise. Socialists were cold warriors, almost as fully as the major political parties.⁷³

No better proof can one find for this contention than the change in the SP's view of the problem of internal communists and their civil rights between 1939 and 1948. In late 1939, Thomas was leading a fight against communist influence on the executive board of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). He reproached communists such as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn for hypocrisy. She and other CP members supported civil liberties for "wholly temporary, partial and pragmatic" reasons. Thomas urged his fellow ACLU board members to beware of the dangers of "a kind of tolerance of intolerance." Thomas was not by any stretch of the imagination advocating restriction of American communist civil liberties. He was urging action on the ironic situation of giving those who believed civil liberties to be a petty bourgeois luxury a voice in protecting those liberties for the rest of the American people.⁷⁴

When faced with the possibility of a government-sponsored anti-communist drive in 1940, Thomas reacted negatively. The New York State legislature debated in that year whether to fire communist public school teachers. Thomas supported the opinion of Leonore Kelter, SP member of the American Federation of Teachers, who wrote that "the Socialist Party maintains that membership in a recognized political party should be no bar to a worker in any field or profession." To make any job dependent on political beliefs would be "a danger to the efficiency and integrity of all our institutions."⁷⁵ Thomas agreed

with those who maintained the state had more right to control the content of education in public schools than in institutions of higher learning, but he put himself squarely on the side of those who concluded that a teacher had a right to his or her own political beliefs.⁷⁶

But by 1948, Thomas had changed his mind. In a memorandum to the ACLU governing board, the SP leader advocated that the ACLU not get involved in defending communist teachers under fire from the New York City school board. "My motion merely says that we shall not support the right of communists and fascists as such to teach in the Public School system." One can find no better barometer of Thomas's hardening anti-communism than in this incident and the question of toleration of communists in organized labor. In 1941, Thomas advised toleration. In 1947, he advocated that organized labor "keep communists out."⁷⁷ Again in a memo to the ACLU, Thomas summarized his position: "The defense of civil liberties for communists based on the sneaking belief that communists are what they aren't is no service at all to the principles of civil liberty."⁷⁸ Thomas believed that civil liberty protection "should not be extended to proved members of organizations which not only try to conceal their membership, but (a) habitually use violence . . . or (b) clearly . . . give their highest allegiance and loyalty to a dictatorially controlled organization like the communist party."⁷⁹

What worried Thomas and his comrades so much was the amount of communist, or Soviet, influence in the government of the United States. Thomas charged during the 1944 campaign that the "influence" of the "international communist movement" in the "civil service at Washington . . . is far greater than the professional liberals will admit." Not

only was communist influence dangerous because Stalin "had the absolute obedience of the international communist movement" but at least during the war, communists fought "every sign of militant and progressive trade unionism."⁸⁰ By 1946, Thomas considered the increasing communist presence in Washington "potentially serious." He expressed "a good deal of confidence in J. Edgar Hoover." He even believed that "there is conceivably work for the Committee on Un-American Activities," although Martin Dies's conduct as the Committee's chairman was "an awful mess."⁸¹

If indeed the CPUSA exercised influence in the American government and if the party was an unthinking tool of Stalinist expansion (two rather large "if's", but accepted uncritically by most Americans), then it was not too surprising to read that "we socialists have recognized the right of the government to protect itself against the disloyalty of employees who give their highest allegiance to a foreign dictatorship." That the foreign dictatorship may never demand its American followers betray their government was "irrelevant." The possibility of betrayal was enough; "the test for [government] employment should not be opinion . . . but trustworthiness."⁸² This from the leader of a party pledged one short decade before to take direct action against the American government if it should appear to be degenerating into fascism. Indeed the war was a visceral experience that severely affected all it touched.

The party received more than it bargained for. While it savagely denounced, but no doubt privately rejoiced over, the growing anti-communist mood of Americans, it sought to protect the civil liberties

of non-communists, political, religious and ethnic minorities. Its effectiveness in this fight, never high, was lower when the party decided to exclude communists from the ranks of those worth protecting. The party's distinction between opinions (any were acceptable) and loyalty (only to democracy and/or the United States) was too fine for most. The party had to spend much effort trying to protect itself and sympathizers from those wolves it had aided in loosing.

"Everytime any Americans use undemocratic practices to 'fight' communism, they merely help breed it," a party press release reminded those who might hear in 1948. Socialists were worried that the increasingly repressive mentality, especially prevalent among Republicans, would turn into a purge for "reactionary capitalism and nationalism . . . a smokescreen for reactionary legislation." Especially the House Un-American Activities Committee. It seemed more interested in "suppressing some of the facts, highlighting others and distorting the general picture for purely personal political considerations." MacAlister Coleman commented that HUAC had "given the real [CP] cardholders, as well as the fellow-travelers, a justifiable excuse for refusing to answer the question which takes the form of 'when did you stop beating your wife?'" One can sense self-preservation at work here, but more importantly, a new feeling of sullied impotence. No longer could the SP members proudly proclaim their civil libertarianism. Another absolute had fallen to "objective circumstances," that is, to necessitarianism.⁸⁵

Attorney General Tom Clark's subversive organizations list inspired new heights of paranoia among party members. It was too pow-

erful; organizations so listed had no legal recourse; it was "an ominous departure from . . . the traditional policy" of maximizing personal freedom at the possible expense of security.⁸⁴ Nor was the party thrilled by various attempts to outlaw the Communist Party. That was hitting too close to home. According to the NEC, the way to deal with the CP was not unconstitutional legislation, but a concentrated campaign of publicity of the CP's unethical, amoral methods. A truly progressive means to a democratic end.⁸⁵

Fear of communism, Soviet and domestic, pushed the Socialist Party of America to the right from the early 1930s on. Domestically, the growing fear necessitated an SP retreat from the militancy its younger members embraced in the depression years. No longer could a socialist in good faith advocate violent revolution, "democratic centralism," vanguardism or the important concept of a dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin proved such concepts self-defeating, undeniably so, if one sought a more equitable society after the revolution. The end cannot justify the means, because the means determine the end's final form. It was a realization which castrated revolutionary ardor.

More significantly, the growth of amoral Soviet power drove Socialists behind the comfortable bastion of capitalist democracy. American democracy, for all its faults, was superior to Soviet oligarchy. If Norman Thomas and his socialist followers, extraordinarily perceptive critics of the American system, felt this way, it is little wonder that most Americans fell prey to the oversimplifications of cold war rhetoric.

In this case, as in others, the SP membership might be labeled a vanguardist microcosm. Socialists exhibited all the tell-tale signs of the cold war mentality, especially the idea that the Soviets would not compromise, long before such attitudes filtered down to the less politically minded American "man on the street." Socialists were among the first to perceive supposed parallels between the Soviet and Nazi systems. Socialists were among the first to draw a similar parallel between United States foreign policy mistakes before the war and the dangers of the same mistakes vis-a-vis Stalin in the postwar era. Socialists demonstrated a surprising prophetic power in sensing what were to be the troubling domestic and foreign problems of the postwar era, and they also were among the first to fall prey to the shibboleths which served to solidify Soviet-American animosity by the late 1940s. Like the bulk of the American people, the socialists were more and more drawn into foreign affairs. They still stressed domestic reform, but in the cold war era, they were more interested in their nation's foreign policy.

It is not simple to judge what effect, if any, the SP's increasingly bitter anti-communist rhetoric had on the growth of hysterical anti-communism and anti-liberalism which flowered in the United States in the early 1950s. In a rhetorical sense, socialists were in the vanguard of the anti-communist crusade. Charges upon which Joseph McCarthy was to wing his way to superstardom were commonplace in the SP press from the late 1930s on. Socialists greatly feared communist penetration of the institutions of government and organized labor. Socialists wondered aloud whether the New Deal democrats were unconsciously

helping the Soviet Union. This idea grew during the war, especially in relation to Roosevelt's dealings with Stalin at Teheran and Yalta.

The rhetoric of the socialists later surfaced as McCarthyist rhetoric. But there is nothing to connect the two. The view of the American left fulfilling the role of national conscience is useful. One can censor the SP for its complicity, no matter how truly effective it was, with the growth of hysterical anti-communism in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The SP's anti-communist rhetoric appears to have had no demonstrable effect on the right wing extremists of the 1950s. But it removed the party from a position from which it could more effectively fight the McCarthyist repression.

NOTES

Chapter VI

1. For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see introduction.
2. Adler and Patterson, "Red Fascism," 1,060-61.
3. Symes, Communism, 6; cf., 8, 9, 31-32.
4. Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 7 September 1940, 5; cf., Thomas, "Socialism and the 1940 Campaign," Socialist Review, 7 (November-December 1939), 1-3.
5. Philip Howell, "Is Russia Socialist?" Young Socialist Review, March 1940, 5-6, SP Duke, Roll 133; see also V. F. Calverton to Judah Drob, 28 February 1939, ibid., Roll 36; Thomas to Elizabeth Goldstein, 8 March 1939, NTP, Box 16; "Local and Branch Bulletin," 31 March 1939, 2, SP Duke, Roll 129; NYT, 1 May 1939, 19; 18 June 1939, 7; Thomas speech, "Building for Democracy and Socialism? Not Fascism," 17 June 1939, Papers of the LID, Box 19; Thomas to Paul Allen, 23 October 1939, NTP, Box 16.
6. See Symes, Communism, 38; minutes of NAC meeting, 19 May 1941, SP Duke, Roll 44.
7. Gerry Allard to Travers Clement, 27 March 1940, ibid., Roll 38.
8. Thomas diary, 26 December 1947, NTP, Box 176.
9. Thomas, "Your World and Mine," Call, 11 March 1939.
10. Thomas to editor, Nation, 17 January 1942, NTP, Box 22; Thomas speech, "We Are Losing the Peace," 23 October 1944, 2, SP Duke, Roll 50; Thomas speech, "America, the Allies and the Peace," 17 October 1944, 2, ibid.; Andre Martin, "The End of Tyrants," Call, 14 May 1945, 2.
11. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: The Facts on Russia," ibid., 21 May 1943, 1.

12. Thomas, "Basic Peace Program Must Spurn Imperialism, Plan Cooperative Machinery," ibid., 19 February 1943, 1.

13. Lillian Symes, "Fraternally Yours: Is Stalin a Rival or an Enemy?" ibid., 16 April 1943, 3.

14. Louis Clair, "Counter-Revolutionary Perils in Postwar Europe," ibid., 14 May 1943, 2; Paul Hemley, "The Meaning of That Mystic Thing Called Teheran," ibid., 18 August 1944, 3, 6; Thomas, "The Phoney Internationalism of Dumbarton Oaks," ibid., 20 October 1944, 6.

15. SP Press Release, "Stalin Recognition of Badoglio Power Politics . . . , " 18 March 1944, SP Duke, Roll 48; Sam [Romer?] to Dora Torch, 17 April 1944, ibid., Roll 49; Harry Paxton Howard, "Expansion . . . , " Call, 25 August 1944, 1; Philip Heller, "The Mystery of Teheran . . . , " ibid., 25 December 1944, 6; William Becker to Harry L. Weiner, 22 May 1945, SP Duke, Roll 52; Harry Paxton Howard, "Stalin and Japan . . . , " Call, 4 June 1945, 1.

16. Editorial in Call, 29 May 1942, 8.

17. Sinclair and Lyons, Terror in Russia?, 7-8, 11.

18. Theodore Draper, American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period (New York: Viking Press, 1960), passim.

19. For reviews of Mission to Moscow, see Call, 14 May 1943, 1; 28 May 1943, 1; Meyer Shapiro, "Film Review," Partisan Review, 10 (May-June 1943), 277; cf., "The New Submission to Moscow," Challenge, June 1943, 4, SP Duke, Roll 133.

20. Carl Cohran to Ann Ray, 9 February 1944, ibid., Roll 48; for more examples of the growing SP anti-communism, see James Lipsig to Arthur McDowell, 12 March 1939, ibid., Roll 38; Thomas in NYT, 19 February 1939; Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Stalinist Hypocrisy," Call, 25 February 1939, 1; Victor Serge, "The Mystery Behind Russian Policy," ibid., 1 September 1944, 8.

21. Pell, Visions, 66, 304.

22. Editorial in Call, 11 June 1945, 9; cf., 17 June 1946, 5.

23. Thomas, "A Plan for Peace," ibid., 4 November 1946, 8; Thomas speech, "The Election From a Liberal Standpoint," 22 October 1944, 1, SP Duke, Roll 50; for other criticisms of American liberals, see Call, 21 August 1942, 8; 20 November 1942, 1; 1 January 1943, 1; 27 October 1942, 2; 23 April 1945, 5; cf., MacAlister Coleman, "Looking at the Facts: With the Liberals," Call, 18 February 1946, 1; Coleman stated that liberals start most meetings with a prayer, which is strange, as most are agnostic. Perhaps it was "because they are not quite sure where they are going and it pays to be safe." See also

Pell, Visions, 147.

24. Ralph Bates, "Need We Fear Russia?" Nation, 154 (17 January 1942), 60-62.

25. Pierce, "Liberals in the Cold War," 167.

26. Newsweek, 21 (31 May 1943), 48-50; Freda Kirchwey, "End of Comintern," Nation, 156 (29 May 1943), 762; cf., ibid., 779; ibid., (12 June 1943), 834-37; New Republic, 108 (31 May 1943), 718; Max Lerner, "After the Comintern," ibid., (7 June 1943), 753.

27. Lillian Symes, "Fraternally Yours: The Joke About the Dissolution of the 'Communist International,'" Call, 4 June 1943, 3; Karl Martel, "Lauds Comintern for 'Life After Death,'" ibid., 18 June 1943, 4; NAC, "Never a Force for Socialism," ibid., 4 June 1943, 3; Thomas, "Real Fraternal International of Workers . . . Still to be Won," ibid., 3; Thomas, "A Statement on the Dissolution of the Third International," nd, NTP, Box 151; "The Purpose Lives," Midwest Young Socialist, June 1943, 1, SP Duke, Roll 132.

28. Thomas, "President's Labor Draft Proposals Another Big Stride Toward Fascism," Call, 21 January 1944, 1; SP Press Release, 23 May 1944, SP Duke, Roll 48; editorial, "No, the Communists Haven't Changed," Call, 7 July 1944, 8; "Down With Us!" Time, 43 (17 January 1944), 13.

29. For the Duclos letter, see New York Daily Worker, 24 May 1945, 1.

30. Arnold Miller, "Big Three Rivalries Bring Stalinist Order . . .," Call, 28 May 1945, 1; MacAlister Coleman, "Looking at the Facts," ibid., 18 June 1945, 2; also in SP Duke, Roll 52.

31. "Peace With Justice," Labor Comment, March 1944, 4, ibid., Roll 131; Lillian Symes, "Gross Betrayal in Poland," Call, 25 August 1944, 3; Symes, "Last Chapter in Poland," ibid., 3 September 1944, 3; cf., Philip Heller, "Poland Becomes First Victim of Allied Military Victory," ibid., 15 December 1944, 2; "Newsletter to all SP GI's," April-May 1945, 1, SP Duke, Roll 52; for more on Poland, see Call, 4 February 1944, 1; 1 September 1944, 1; 15 June 1945, 5; 19 February 1945, 1; 28 May 1945, 2.

32. "Report to the NEC and Socialist Locals on the Meetings with the Committee of the SDF on Joint Action," June 1945, 1, SP Duke, Roll 52; cf., William Becker to Harry Fleischman, 2 June 1945, ibid.

33. Thomas, Russia, 37.

34. See Daniel Yergin, The Shattered Peace (Boston: Houghlin Mifflin, 1979), passim for a description of both views of the Cold War;

for further proof that Thomas tried to take a unitary view, combining both sides, see Thomas, "Does Russia Menace Peace?" Call, 6 August 1947, 5; Thomas speech, "Reply to Henry Wallace," October 1948, 7, 8, SP Duke, Roll 60; Thomas to Frederick Osbourne, 8 July 1948, ibid., Roll 59.

35. Thomas, Russia, 3, 4, 7, 9-10, 17-37.

36. Thomas, Press Release, 3 February 1943, SP Duke, Roll 47.

37. Thomas to editor, NYT, 17 April 1946, ibid., Roll 54; Thomas to Irving Flamm, 5 March 1947, NTP, Box 31; cf., Thomas to Aliene Whitehead, 13 August 1947, SP Duke, Roll 57; in this letter, Thomas refutes his own position, saying Russians were not racist. Perhaps this was because the small, but lively Colorado SP of which Whitehead was state secretary, was very leftist.

38. Thomas to editor, NYT, 17 April 1946, SP Duke, Roll 54; Raphael Abramovitch to Thomas, 15 August 1945, NTP, Box 29; cf., Thomas speech, "Suicide or Socialism," 31 May 1946, 1-2, SP Duke, Roll 54.

39. Thomas to Trevor Teele, 4 February 1948, ibid., Roll 58; NYT 1 June 1946, 5; Thomas, "The World About Us: The Miner's Strike," Call, 25 November 1946, 8; Thomas speech, "What Should be America's Policy Toward Russia?" 15 September 1948, 1, SP Duke, Roll 60; Bruno Fischer, "Red Chips," Call, 28 November 1948, 5; Thomas speech, nt, 24 September 1948, 1, SP Duke, Roll 60.

40. Thomas to Trevor Teele, 4 February 1948, ibid., Roll 58.

41. See Chapter IV.

42. Pierce, "Liberals in the Cold War," 418.

43. See especially Thomas, "Does Russia Menace Peace?" Call, 6 August 1947, 5; Harry Fleischman to editor, Life, 25 August 1948, SP Duke, Roll 59.

44. Not all non-communist leftists accepted this. See, for example, Max Schatmann to "Dave," 5 May 1948, Max Schatmann Papers, Box 3.

45. Thomas, "Your World and Mine: Why the War of Ideas is Important," Call, 27 November 1943, 4, 7; Thomas speech, "Some Questions on Winning the Four Freedoms," 17 July 1944, SP Duke, Roll 49; William Becker to Harry L. Weiner, 22 May 1945, ibid., Roll 52.

46. Thomas, "The World About Us: Freedom for GM," Call, 21 January 1946, 8; italics in the original; cf., Thomas, "America Needs a New Party," Call, 4 March 1946, 1; Thomas to Aliene Whitehead, 13 August 1947, SP Duke, Roll 57; "Statement on Democratic Socialism,"

nd [1947?], ibid., Roll 48; "Foreign Policy Resolution," 8 May 1948, ibid.; Thomas speech, "The Rights of Man," 23 May 1948, ibid., Roll 59.

47. Thomas diary, 26 December 1947, NTP, Box 176.

48. For examples of the SP's growing emphasis on government action, see "What Congress Can Do About Food," Call, 31 October 1947, 1; Ora Mongoire to editor, Call, 11 June 1945, 4; for SP subordination of socialist goals to cold war, see Thomas, "The World About Us: OPA and Hunger," ibid., 29 April 1946, 8; memo, William Guasman to NEC, nd [late 1947?], 3, SP Duke, Roll 58; "Foreign Policy Resolution, Adopted 8 May 1948," ibid.

49. Thomas, "The World's Bitter Disappointment," Call, 17 December 1943, 1, 5; Press Release, 7 July 1944, SP Duke, Roll 49; Thomas speech, "Winning of the Peace," 17 September 1944, 3, ibid., Roll 50; "Socialists Launch Drive," Call, 3 December 1943, 1.

50. Thomas to Roosevelt, 21 January 1945, NTP, Box 28; Thomas, "The World About Us: No Peace Guarantee," Call, 2 July 1945, 8.

51. "Brave New World," Challenge, February 1945, 4, SP Duke, Roll 133; Harry Fleischman and Maynard Krueger, "Socialists Charge Yalta Conference Speeds Next War," 16 February 1945, 1, ibid., Roll 52.

52. Editorial in Call, 26 February 1945, 5; "NEC Resolution on Peace and Conscription," ibid., 12 March 1945, 4.

53. Adler and Patterson, "Red Fascism," 1,057-58, for Vandenberg and Forrestall; Harry Paxton Howard, "Stalin and the Japanese Peace Offer," Call, 4 June 1945, 1; for Potsdam, see especially Thomas, "The British Labor Victory . . .," ibid., 13 August 1945, 4.

54. Thomas, "The World About Us: Letter to Bill," Call, 1 October 1948, 8; Andre Martin, "Another No Peace Conference," ibid., 2.

55. NEC, "Moscow Agreement is New Munich," Call, 31 December 1945, 1; for SP support of the Acheson-Lilienthal Report and the Baruch Plan, see Thomas to Albert Einstein, 26 June 1946, SP Duke, Roll 55; "Plan Local Action on Atomic Energy," Call, 1 April 1946, 7; "Resolution on Atomic Energy," 25th national convention, 31 May-2 June 1946, SP Duke, Roll 56; Call, 22 July 1946, 2a; Harry Fleischman, "Progressives and Politics," typescript of an article, August 1946, 1 SP Duke, Roll 55; Thomas, "The World About Us: Stalin and Peace," Call, 30 September 1946, 8.

56. NEC, "Resolution on Foreign Policy," Call, 21 May 1947, 4; "Foreign Policy Resolution," 1948 convention, 8 May 1948, SP Duke, Roll 58.

57. News Release, 19 March 1948, ibid.; Fleischman speech,

"An Answer to Truman and Wallace," 8 April 1948, 5-6, ibid.

58. Thomas, "Report to the NEC," 22 July 1947, NTP, Box 151.

59. Thomas, "As I See It," Call, 12 March 1947, 5; Thomas diary, 26 December 1947, NTP, Box 176.

60. Thomas, "As I See It," Call, 12 March 1947, 5; William Gausmann to Fleischman, 4 March 1947, SP Duke, Roll 56; "Truman's Proposal . . . , " Call, 19 March 1947, 1; "Socialist Spokesman . . . , " ibid., 9 April 1947, 1; News Release, 15 March 1947, SP Duke, Roll 56; Thomas speech, "What Should Be America's Foreign Policy," 23 October 1948, 3, ibid., Roll 60; Fleischman, "National Secretary's Report," 26th national convention, 7-9 May 1948, 1, ibid., Roll 58; NAC, "SP on Greek Aid," Call, 19 March 1947, 1; Thomas, "As I See It," ibid., 26 March 1947, 5; ibid., 19 March 1947, 5; "Radio Address by Maynard Krueger," 2 April 1947, 4-5, SP Duke, Roll 57; Thomas, "As I See It," Call, 2 April 1947, 5; Thomas speech, "The High Cost of Congress," 19 August 1947, SP Duke, Roll 57.

61. Harry Fleischman to Guy Mollet, 16 June 1947, ibid.; William Gausmann to Fleischman, 3 July 1947, ibid.; minutes of NAC meeting, 9 July 1947, 22 July 1947, ibid.; Paul Porter to Thomas, 30 June 1947, NTP, Box 30.

62. NEC Resolution, "Marshall Plan for Europe," Call, 13 August 1947, 7; Ben Horowitz speech, nd [1947], SP Duke, Roll 58; Thomas speech, "What Should Be America's Foreign Policy?" 23 October 1948, ibid., Roll 60; cf., Thomas, "As I See It," Call, 30 July 1947, 5; Thomas, "Marshall Plan Worthy of Support," ibid., 1 October 1947, 2; Thomas speech, "Why I Support the Marshall Plan," 1 December 1947, SP Duke, Roll 57.

63. Judah Drob to author, 25 May 1981.

64. See especially, "Proposed Resolution for NEC on North Atlantic Pact," December 1948, 1, SP Duke, Roll 61; Thomas speech, "The Special Session of Congress," 11 April 1948, 5-6, ibid., Roll 60.

65. Thomas speech, "What Should Be America's Foreign Policy?" 23 October 1948, ibid., Roll 60; Thomas diary, Easter Sunday 1948, NTP, Box 176; see also press clipping, "Median Policy to Peace," San Diego Union, nd [early 1947?], SP Duke, Roll 58.

66. For SP support, see "Foreign Policy Resolution," 26th national convention, 7-9 May 1948, 4-6, ibid., Roll 58; Thomas speech, "Why a Socialist Campaign in 1948?" 13 August 1948, 5-6, ibid., Roll 59; Thomas speech, "What Should Be America's Policy Toward Russia?" 15 September 1948, 3-4, ibid., Roll 60.

67. Thomas, "The World About Us," Call, 5 February 1943, 1.

68. Thomas, "A Plan For Peace," Call, 4 November 1946, 8; Thomas, "The World About Us," ibid., 2 December 1946, 8; ibid., 9 December 1946, 8; Thomas to Vida Scudder, 13 June 1947, SP Duke, Roll 57.

69. Thomas speech, "The Rights of Man," 23 August 1948, ibid., Roll 59; Thomas, "As I See It," Call, 19 March 1947, 5; Thomas, "The World About Us," ibid., 9 September 1948, 8.

70. William Gausmann to Fleischman, 17 March 1947, SP Duke, Roll 56.

71. SP Local Washington D.C., "Resolution on Foreign Policy," May 1946, 5., ibid., Roll 54.

72. Scott Nearing to Editor, Call, 15 April 1946, 6; Thomas, "The World About Us: Russia and America," ibid., 22 April 1946, 8; cf., Thomas speech, "What Should Be America's Policy Toward Russia?" 15 September 1948, 2, SP Duke, Roll 60; Thomas speech, "What Should Be America's Foreign Policy?" 23 October 1948, 1, ibid.; Thomas speech, "Reply to Henry Wallace," October 1948, ibid.

73. Speech, "SP Script for WNEW," 21 October 1948, ibid.

74. Thomas to Osmond K. Fraenkel, 19 December 1939, NTP, Box 128; cf., Thomas to executive committee, ACLU, 6 March 1939; Thomas to Walter Frank, 25 October 1939; Osmond K. Fraenkel to Thomas, 15 December 1939; Thomas to Richard S. Childs, 19 December 1939, in which Thomas lists the alleged Communist sympathizers on the ACLU Board; R. W. Riis to Richard Childs, 20 December 1939; Thomas to Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, et al., 19 January 1940, all in NTP, Box 128; cf., Thomas, "Resolution Adopted by the Board of Directors and National Committee of the A.C.L.U. . . . February 1940," ibid., Box 153.

75. Leonore Kelter, draft of AFT pamphlet, nd [late 1940], 2, ibid., Box 18.

76. Thomas, "Memorandum in Regard to Action Against New York State Teachers on Grounds of Political Affiliations," 25 March 1941, ibid., Box 153.

77. Thomas memorandum to ACLU, 18 November 1948, ibid., Box 128; cf., Thomas to Rodger Baldwin, 28 February 1949, ibid.; Thomas in United States News, 10 (25 April 1941), 24; Thomas, "As I See It," Call, 2 April 1947, 5; Thomas, News Release, 8 July 1947, SP Duke, Roll 57.

78. Thomas, "Memorandum to Directors of the A.C.L.U.," 15 November 1948, NTP, Box 153.

79. Thomas to ACLU, 20 October 1947, NTP, Box 126.

80. Thomas speech, "We Are Losing the Peace," 23 October 1944, 2, SP Duke, Roll 54; "Reaction - No Change," Call, 1 January 1945, 5; cf., Symes, Communism, 19.

81. Thomas, "Memorandum on Father Keller's Appeal," 13 March 1946, NTP, Box 29.

82. Thomas, "As I See It," Call, 4 June 1947, 5; Thomas to Rodger Baldwin, 12 September 1947, NTP, Box 128; Thomas, "As I See It," Call, 12 December 1947, 1; cf., Bruce Bliven, Five Million Words Later, 226-27.

83. SP News Release, 4 May 1948, SP Duke, Roll 58; Thomas to ACLU, 20 October 1947, NTP, Box 126; Thomas, "The World About Us," Call, 6 January 1947, 8; Aaron Levenstein, "Travesty of the Hollywood Investigation," ibid., 7 November 1947, 6; Thomas, "As I See It," ibid., 14 November 1947, 5; MacAlister Coleman, "Pen and Scalpel," ibid., 21 November 1947, 5.

84. William Gausmann, "Truman Orders Communist Purge . . . , " Call, 2 April 1947, 8; William Becker to Attorney General Thomas Clark, 4 June 1947, SP Duke, Roll 57; Thomas et al., "Report of Committee on Loyalty on Proposed Restatement of ACLU Policy," 13 January 1949, NTP, Box 128; ACLU, ADA, CIO, "Memorandum on Loyalty Check-up of Federal Employees," 16 June 1949, ibid.

85. MacAlister Coleman, "Pen and Scalpel," Call, 19 March 1947, 5; Thomas to Fleischman, 26 March 1947, SP Duke, Roll 56; NEC, "Resolution on the Anti-Communist Drive," Call, 21 May 1947, 5; Thomas to Senator Alexander Wiley, 2 June 1948, SP Duke, Roll 59; SP News Release, "Thomas Attacks Communist Arrests," 22 July 1948, ibid.; Rodger Baldwin et al. to Tom Clark, 21 July 1948, NTP, Box 153.

86. See Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It (New York: Vintage Books, 1948) chapter VI, "Wendell Phillips: The Patrician As Agitator," 137-63, especially 153, for the view that the American left must act as the conscience of the nation, if nothing else.

CONCLUSION

American socialism was a phenomenon of twentieth century industrial society. It was a response to a young, immature social order, one which seemed to provide the material means, if handled correctly, to the ends of peace, plenty and stability. The failure of socialism to take root in American soil was partially the fault of the radicals, too much factional fighting, not enough compromise among various sects. American political realities were also partially to blame, the power monopoly of the two major parties being the most important of those realities. Yet a process over which Americans, socialists or not, had no control was the primary villain responsible for socialism's political failure.

The United States of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a young nation just beginning a new social experiment, industrial democracy in the blending of political and cultural democracy (in theory at least) with a growing vital privately owned industrial economic base. The new society presented its builders with any of a number of alternatives upon which it could expand and mature. These theories all had names: laissez faire, monopoly capitalism, state capitalism, syndicalism, anarchism, socialism, marxian socialism, welfare capitalism, progressive capitalism to name but a few. And the beauty of early twentieth-century American society was that none of these routes had yet proven dangerous or untenable. The political,

social and cultural history of the United States in the twentieth century was and is a story of how a society which considers itself exceptional reacted to a maturing social order in which time and experience proved many of the possible routes to be false, dangerous and repressive.

Each segment of American society repeatedly had to make decisions on how best to pursue its dream, whatever that was. As the society matured, grew more wise to its own workings, the number of viable choices visibly diminished. The odyssey of the American Socialist Party in this century is a tale of how one small, easily identified segment of American society reacted to this maturation, how it dealt with a situation of rapidly diminishing alternatives. As the various alternatives disappeared, so did the imperative for many institutions, like the socialist party.

After the First World War, the SP faced significant decisions on which route to take toward its goal of a democratic socialist American republic. Some decisions it made for itself, grounded on what its leaders perceived to be the realities of American life. One such decision was to unite with various reformist groups in 1924 to support the presidential bid of Robert LaFollette. But other forces and events made important decisions for the party, decisions that socialists could bemoan, hate or admire, but not ignore. The degeneration of the Russian Revolution made one such decision for the socialists. It effectively closed a major revolutionary road to those who wished the post-revolutionary society to be equitable. Lenin's lesson was that imposed vanguardist revolution was a fancy term for re-imposed tyranny.¹ The

Russian Revolution had an enormous impact on many facets of American society. Its lessons were in part responsible for diverse phenomena from the Red Scare of 1919 to many of Wilson's Fourteen Points. For non-communist radicals, the Bolshevik perversion of the pre-World War I revolutionary ethic slammed shut a very important door, that of violent revolutionary action by a determined minority; Blanquism. This lesson few perceived quickly. Anarchists were the first; their creed embraced the idea that revolution had to be popular to be truly liberating.

Democratic socialists realized the lesson next, but not on a visceral level, until at least the middle of the Depression decade. Anarchists sought order to absolute liberty; democratic socialists viewed human kind not so positively. The American Socialist Party combined two mainstream American thought-patterns into its radical philosophy: that freedom was necessary for intellectual, social and economic development, but that absolute freedom was incompatible with human nature. The Socialist Party combined American protestantism with the revolutionary whig ideals of the founding fathers to make a theory which sought to balance human desires for liberty with their need for stability. The American SP's theology of the cooperative commonwealth was best described as liberal institutionalism. Liberal for the party's emphasis on freedom and democracy, an emphasis the example of Lenin and Stalin had forced on the party. Institutionist because the SP was a political party and had to be different than all others to be institutionalized in the American mind. Also, party theorists recognized that popular control of the commanding heights of the American

productive apparatus required strong, democratic institutions. Institutions decentralized to avoid the tyranny of centralized bureaucracy. SP theory was in many ways a return to the Founding Fathers' attempts to balance liberty with order. The Russian Revolution forced the return. It proved that an elite would not voluntarily bestow liberty to the masses.

The party's emphasis on liberty, freedom and democracy and its slow retreat throughout the 1930s from any hint of vanguardism dictated working within the American political system. Regardless of different theories, American democracy and the American political system are brothers. In the mid 1930s, many younger, radical, SP members toyed with versions of Leninism; they termed American democracy petty bourgeois, merely a method of insuring capitalist control. The bloody depredations of Stalinist rule, literally in the purges and figuratively in the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, stung these leftists enough to jerk them back into agreement with the relationship between democracy and the American political system.²

But with acceptance of the symbiosis of democracy and politics came the dilemma: to gain power, one must compromise to construct coalitions. Refusal to compromise one's beliefs or programs precluded coalition-building and power. Power through compromise was ineffectual; refusal to compromise was a sure road to impotence, social and political. The American political system blocked another route to SP attempts to gain some influence over the development of American society; to compromise with liberals and enter a major political party would do little good, but to refuse all compromise would do less. The SP was

faced on two sides with untenable choices. Leninist vanguardism promised tyranny, and cooperation through the American political system promised no substantive change.

Instead of choosing power over theory, or theory over power, the SP of the World War II era tried to escape this paradox through a dialectic process. Socialists hoped to forge a synthesis from the American political thesis of coalition and its antithesis of ideological purity. Norman Thomas and his supporters sought coalition with those the party could support with little compromise of theory. But Thomas refused, throughout his life, to take the low road to power by "boring from within" either of the major parties. He and most socialists were willing to compromise enough to seek rapprochement with various groups, left and right, but only under the banner of socialism.³

SP attempts at coalition on its own terms failed. The party never obtained power. Most commentators assumed Thomas refused to compromise with liberal democratic organizations such as the SDF or the UDA/ADA because of his desire for ideological purity and/or his egocentric personality. Certainly Thomas was a man of great pride and ego who would have found it difficult to renounce ideals and programs for which he had worked since 1918. And yet in that same year he did that very thing, renouncing his family and educational heritage of universalistic presbyterian social gospel. That which he felt strongly enough, he would embrace, regardless of the consequences. In the 1940s, his attempts to compromise with diverse groups such as the American First Committee and the Americans For Democratic Action likewise showed at least a willingness to bend with prevailing political

winds.

The nature of power was the major reason Thomas and most socialists refused to make the doctrinal sacrifices the system required to grasp its reins. The significant question, Thomas noted, was not how to gain power, but how to use it. Power was a corrupting commodity; only society could control it. This was the lesson of Russia and Germany in the 1930s.

The German lesson was as significant as that of its Russian competitor. It provided the second boundary within which socialists believed they had to operate. Hitler's rise to power in Germany was democratic. The lesson again was clear. Political democracy was not enough when private individuals held enough economic power in a nation to control the direction of its political life. Someone had to control economic power. If social control of the commanding heights of a nation's productive industry were possible, then a combination of political and economic democracy could provide what Thomas's SP was seeking: security and liberty co-mingled. The same goal the Founding Fathers sought.

The twin lessons of Stalin and Hitler formed the boundaries of socialist thought in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Those boundaries explained the party's stand against American participation in the Second World War; these boundaries explained the party's "critical support" for the Allies during the war and its unrelenting anti-Soviet cold war stand after the war.

Thomas persuaded his fellow socialists to oppose American participation in the European war because participation would accelerate a

process Thomas already feared was approaching completion: the descent of the American system into fascism. True, the American ruling class had over the years extended the right to vote to most citizens. But alone that small power was not enough. The wealthy and powerful could and did use their power to solidify their already large amounts of influence. Even in times of peace, the danger was too large to ignore; the American upper classes could use their economic and political power to forge a fascist (totalitarian corporatist) system on the United States. The danger lay precisely in the fact that Americans might well agree to a system which above all promised order. The American voters' fascination with Franklin Roosevelt proved they were not too sophisticated to fall prey to personalismo.

American war participation would increase the danger of domestic fascism; it would take economic decisions out of the hands of the owning classes and put it solely in government hands. In fact, the government would have to control production if it expected American industry to produce the materials needed to defeat the armies of powers where the government controlled production completely. Thomas and his followers believed that the United States would have to descend to Hitler's level if it wished to defeat him.

The party's role was to educate the American people to this danger, but only to educate. If the American government ran the risk of emulating Hitler, the SP and its leaders were well aware that they could fall into the same trap as the Bolsheviks. "It is impossible to win victories for democracy using the weapons of totalitarianism. It is freedom we seek to win and it is the method of freedom we must use."⁴

The lessons of Russia and Germany were significant boundaries to socialist thought and action in the late 1930s and early 1940s. But not absolute boundaries. Thomas and his fellow SP members prided themselves on the party's democratic organization; it favored doctrinal evolution. If party theory stagnated, the SP would become nothing more than an impotent factional sect, more interested in theory than reality. Like the Communist Party or the Socialist Workers' Party (Trotskyist). The Socialist Party always sought to work for its ideals in the realm of the real world.

And when that objective world altered drastically, so did SP theory. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, very few SP members advocated total non-support for the American war effort. The party split evenly on the phraseology of its stand; between the words "critical support" and "political non-support." Both phrases were essentially the same; both indicated that Socialists would raise no physical objection or impediment to the war effort, but that they would retain their right to criticize the way the government ran the war. And criticize they did.⁵

"Critical support" or "political non-support" also signalled a subtle, but significant shift in SP theory, a shift toward accepting the United States as the lesser of two or three evils. Perhaps Americans had only political democracy, but that alone was worth protection, at least when it fell under the gun of a fascist or communist threat. This shift signaled the decline of the SP. It removed the party's claim to a unique character that an institution requires. The party continued to agitate for economic and political democracy, but as the

perceived threat to political democracy grew from fascism and later Stalinism, the party moved closer to a position of support for the United States political system, and closer to political oblivion.

It was Stalin's wartime and early postwar actions that convinced already skeptical SP members that his brand of tyranny was just like Hitler's. Added to the understandable inertia of war-time perceptions of lesser evils, the Russian expansion forced the SP onto a road to tacit (some would say open) support for American capitalist democracy in its power struggle with the Soviet Union.

The shift toward support for a battered status quo of political democracy was best illustrated by the changing SP definition of the term "third force." In the middle 1930s, the party defined the term as the working class, engaged in third party electoral activity against the perceived hegemony of the major capitalist political organizations. By 1948, the term "third force" was most often used to describe the role socialists wanted the United States government to play in the world, the role of tyranny's foe, democracy's friend, war's nemesis and peace's home. And why should the SP continue to exist if it supported the established political system? This shift in SP theory was significant, but not without its antecedents. Even before the Second World War, Thomas had urged that the United States become a "beacon of light" of democracy, economic and political, of civil liberties, of peace and plenty, for all to see. This theory was the basis of the SP's cold war attitudes, and found its clearest vocalization in the party's support for the Marshall plan.

The idea that America should be a beacon of hope for peace,

freedom and plenty, was the final SP rejection of the Russian experience, which many radicals had believed to be that same beacon in the 1920s and early 1930s. But more than that, it suggested the almost organic link between the American SP and its ideological ancestors, which stretched back to the nation's earliest days. "America as beacon" was a restatement of the Puritan "City of God on a Hill," albeit a bit secularized. It also was a component of manifest destiny and mission with the imperialistic possibilities of those two ideas noticeably absent. It was a restatement of that most American of ideas, American exceptionalism. America could be a beacon because it had a newer, more dynamic, egalitarian and pliant society than any other nation in the world. The most depressing facet of this attitude to socialists must have been that if it were possible to achieve the cooperative commonwealth, it should be possible first in the United States. And it did not seem likely to happen soon.

More immediately, the SP attitudes, goals and methods resembled those of the reformers of the progressive era which gave birth to the SP in 1901. Victor Reuther wrote in his memoirs that the most impressive lesson Norman Thomas taught the Reuther brothers was "that one cannot separate politics and economics from morality."⁶ This intense consciousness of morality characterized the SP in theory and action. It was a product of three forces, forces which influenced all facets of American life, political and intellectual, from the 1890s on: first was the heritage of the Social Gospel, so strong in Thomas's early personal development. He was, and in most respects remained, a Presbyterian minister, schooled in the thought of Walter Rauschenbusch

and Henry George. Second was the period in which the party was the strongest, the progressive era. Again, Thomas was the epitome of a progressive type: white, middle-class, well educated (at Wilson's Princeton). He, like other native SP leaders, Debs, Coleman, Clement, Symes, grew to political maturity under Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Younger leaders, Fleischman, Drob, Parker, McDowell, Krueger and others did not share this heritage, but they absorbed it to an extent from their elders, as the Reuther memoir demonstrates.

It was the third force, the lesson of the Russian Revolution, that drove home to the younger leaders the necessity of the progressive faiths of morality, democracy and education. In the early 1930s, these younger and more radical SP members tended to reject ballot-box democracy and conventional morality as so much bourgeois posturing. Education was a legitimate radical activity they agreed, but they were less than patient with the thick-headed American working-class and its tenacious belief in the myths of American capitalism. The 1934 Detroit Declaration of Principles, Thomas's ticket to party leadership, was indicative: it advocated an armed socialist uprising in the event the government either drifted toward fascism or merely degenerated further into incompetency.

The specter of a revolution gone wild in the Soviet Union convinced the younger SP leaders to hold fast to the progressive faith. The Leninist-Stalinist total disregard for the bourgeois addiction to political democracy and civil liberties crushed millions of lives in Russia during the 1930s. The lesson was clear: Thomas was correct. The revolution must resemble the proposed new society it sought to

create. If one wished a society of liberty, free creativity, cooperation and peace, then one must structure the motive force of change around just those precepts. This lesson served to re-incorporate many American radicals into a position of tacit support for many significant American institutions: political democracy, free education, civil liberties, and the transcendent goal of social, political and economic equality. This process of reincorporation began in the late 1930s, and accelerated during World War II. The postwar American power struggle with Stalin's cadres around the world wrote the final chapter in the American socialist political odyssey. By 1948, mainstream socialists, still radical and still critical of much of American life, were closer to Wilsonian progressivism than to any sort of Marxist or Leninist vanguardism.

Ironically, socialists stood as a type of vanguard, a sort of cadre, although in a strictly educational sense. They existed voluntarily outside the American economic system, intensely interested in its functions, but unwilling to participate in its amoral feast. Socialists alienated from the American economy produced a very perceptive and telling analysis of the nation's faults and weaknesses. SP members believed the United States would face violent internal conflict if the white majority did not step aside and allow racial and ethnic minorities to partake of the political and economic fruits of the system. Socialists bemoaned Henry Luce's vision of the American Century as injurious to the true interests of the American people and the oppressed masses of the underdeveloped world. Socialists foresaw nothing but bloodshed and tears from the American propensity to uphold the

French and British imperial structures in Asia and Africa. Socialists prophesied the nuclear arms race and its less obvious consequences: Arms appropriations which significantly cut into help for the dispossessed; cold war tensions which would sour entire generations and make peace and reconciliation improbable. Some of Thomas's predictions proved false. The United States did not degenerate into fascism during the war. FDR was not an egotist grasping for total power. Yet Thomas and his fellow socialists were correct in many of their opinions of what problems the nation would face in the postwar era.

Without doubt the Socialist Party of the 1940s was an esoteric sect. It had no power and only a small influence, traceable totally to Norman Thomas's charismatic leadership. Yet the study of this small group, its ideals, hopes, dreams, theories, struggles and its few small victories is important. It reveals much about the American experience in the twentieth century. Socialists were a microcosm of a society reacting to the shift of realities of a maturing socio-economic system from one of unlimited developmental alternatives to one of very few. The steady disappearance of viable alternative routes to a better society forced the SP into a position of tacit support for the status quo, which was apparently better than most of the remaining choices.

The SP experience in the 1940s was important also because socialists thrived on realistic political and economic analysis more than any other political group in this country. Their moral-political emphasis produced telling criticisms of the roads down which American leaders chose to lead the nation. Socialists were in the vanguard of critics of American foreign and domestic policy; they stood as a van-

guardist microcosm of American public opinion. They absorbed and then vocalized the pain of an entire generation years before most of their countrymen even realized the causes of festering social wounds. For this they should be not only studied, but congratulated. Or perhaps pitied.

The Socialists' experience of the late 1930s and 1940s also provides a unique clue to the vexing historical question of why no viable socialist movement ever took root in the United States. The SP did not grow as did its European counterparts in this period precisely because its progressive heritage trapped it into a set of increasingly narrow parameters. As progressives, socialists valued action above theory. The meat of socialist work was always agitation and education. Socialists would not destroy their party for some ephemeral hope of influencing a major political party. Yet they could not in all good conscience hope for a better world through the amoral path of Marxism-Leninism. The SP reacted as it did to the major events of the world and the nation between 1939 and 1948 within these increasingly narrow boundaries. It is not too much to say that the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of the United States and the foibles of the American two-party system doomed the American Socialist Party, and forced it into a situation that destroyed its institutional imperative. When the party's leaders started to support the American government against the perceived Soviet threat, they removed the reason for the party's existence--to oppose democratic capitalism and replace it with democratic socialism. Yet it is to their credit that they did what little they could for so long.

NOTES

Conclusion

1. See Chapter VI.
2. See Chapter I; for the Detroit Declaration of Principles, see Warren, Alternative Visions, Appendix I.
3. See Chapter III.
4. Jack Sessions et al., "Fight Against Fascism," Hammer and Tongs, October 1941, 3, SP Duke, Roll 128.
5. See Chapter II.
6. Victor G. Reuther, The Brothers Reuther and the Story of the U.A.W.: A Memoir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), 69.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

MANUSCRIPTS

The three most important sources for this study are The Socialist Party Collection, Duke University; the Norman Thomas Collection, New York Public Library; and the Socialist Call, 1938-1948. Included in the Duke Collection are copies of numerous small socialist newspapers, usually published only for two or three issues. These small newspapers were invaluable as a barometer to the feelings of the party rank and file. The first roll of the microfilm edition of the Duke Collection has a complete index of these newspapers and all correspondence. The major weakness of the Duke Collection is its strictly chronological arrangement. These papers should be at least re-indexed, if not re-processed by subject for easier research.

Other manuscript sources which were of great help include the Tamiment Collection of Radical Pamphlet literature, Tamiment Library, New York University; also at Tamiment and on microfilm are the Algernon Lee Papers, and the James Oneal Papers. At Tamiment, but not currently on microfilm, are the Harry Wellington Laidler Papers, 1884-1970; the Max Schachtman Papers, 1947-1972; the Records of the League for Industrial Democracy, 1939-1947. Also very helpful at the New York Public Library were the Rose Pesotta Papers and the V. F. Calverton Papers.

NEWSPAPERS

Below is a list of the major newspapers and contemporary magazines consulted for this study. Those with asterisks are to be found in the Duke Collection microfilms. All are on microfilm with the exception of the American Guardian, to be found at the Oklahoma State Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

American Guardian, Oklahoma City, 30 December 1938-14 December 1941

Daily Record, Chicago, 24 October 1938-2 March 1940

Daily Worker, New York City, 16 August 1939-31 August 1939, 8 June 1941-31 December 1941

Labor Action, New York City, 1 May 1940-8 July 1946

New Leader, New York City, 1939-1947

New Milwaukee Leader, August 1939-January 1942

New York Times, 1938-1946

*Social Democrat, New York City, July 1944-December 1946

*Socialist, Washington, D. C., March 1939-April 1947

Socialist Call, Chicago and New York City, 1938-1948

Worker's Age, New York City, 1937-1939

PERIODICALS

*American Socialist Quarterly, 1936-1939

Commonweal, 22 December 1944, 20 April 1945

*Hammer and Tongs, 1940-1946

International Socialist Review, 1938-1946

New Masses, 1938-1945

Newsweek, 1940-1946

Modern Monthly, Quarterly, 1935-1940

Nation, 1937-1946

New Republic, 1947-1945

Partisan Review, 1947-1945

*Socialist Review, 1937-1940

Time, 1938-1946

*Young Socialist Review, 1940-1947

SECONDARY SOURCES, DISSERTATIONS AND MEMOIRS

The sheer volume of the secondary and dissertation literature on American socialism gives a false impression that the movement was more politically significant than it ever was. This is primarily because the bulk of the literature is narrative in form and aimed at minute dissection of the problem of why socialism never gained a significant foothold in American political life. This question, important without doubt, has for years overshadowed more significant questions, such as the movement's socio-economic composition, its self-image, the reasons for its often prescient vision of American life, and its value as a measure of the impact of a maturing social order on its members.

Only one major piece of secondary literature, Frank Warren, An Alternative Vision: The Socialist Party in the 1930's (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), accepts the SP at face value. Warren attempts to place blame for the movement's failure to be sure, but seeks no villains. Instead he emphasizes the validity of the socialist criticism of Roosevelt's New Deal and socialists' fears for the future of American economic and cultural civilization.

Another departure from the traditional literature is Betty

Yorburg, Utopia and Reality: A Collective Portrait of American Socialists (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). She concentrates on the reasons for socialist impotence, but only because her subjects are understandably preoccupied with the question. Yorburg's book is valuable as a reconstruction of memories of ex-SP members. But neither she nor Warren, the two most useful interpretive secondary sources, manage to liberate themselves from the acrimonious debate that characterized scholarly interpretations of American leftist political groups since such groups appeared.

Warren and Yorburg and the other major writers on American socialism, discussed below, fail to try to understand and accept the real SP for what it was, a minor pressure group with little concrete hope of affecting society politically or socially. This SP acted as a mirror, reflecting on a small scale the reality of a maturing new order. Modernization, industrialization, class stratification and all concomitant phenomena, when new, presented different and perplexing social, political and economic alternatives. Those European, American and Asian societies which initially converted to the new economic base of industrial development successively explored many of those new alternatives. Some nations tried the nineteenth century liberal route of using private property as the bulwark against government power. They quickly faced the contradiction that excessive private property (power) was as repressive as any government. From this alternative came others: state control, worker control, state ownership, worker ownership, industrial corporatism, syndicalism, fascism, communism. Each of these alternatives, in theory workable answers to perplexing

new problems, in fact spawned unique problems of their own. In each, theory fell before reality. Every failure emasculated a series of alternatives, forcing those who sought the perhaps unreasonable goals of freedom, peace and plenty to look elsewhere for options, other theories which seemed to offer at least a chance to gain material prosperity balanced with human liberty.

This process is what scholars of American socialism have ignored. The American SP reflected, in microcosm, their society's reactions to a world in which the new, exciting alternatives of industrial expansion suddenly, bewilderingly, were transformed into terrifying caricatures of those cherished goals. The American SP's reactions to the metamorphosis of alternatives from hope-giving to hope-killing is important; socialists were a small group, identifiable, and easy to document. As alternatives vanished, or proved more dangerous than the status quo, American socialists revised their cherished theories and lost their *raison d'être*. In those revisions, scholars should be able accurately to chart the human effect of a world-wide political and economic revolution as it evolved from revolution to maturity.

There are three main answers to the question of why no socialist movement took root in American institutional development: factional infighting within the party, the "idealism" of the movement was at odds with the "realities" of American politics, and inability of the SP to graft itself onto the tangled web of American myths, prejudices, beliefs and institutions.

Of these three, factionalization is the most popular among scholars. Intraparty debate sapped it of the strength needed to effect

a leftist coalition strong enough to take power, either forcefully or through the ballot box. Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), an excellent narrative of the party's formative period, clearly believes that factionalization and a retreat from marxist radicalism sealed the party's fate by 1912. James Weinstein disagrees with Kipnis's opinion that the SP declined after 1912. He states that "the failure of American socialism has been internal," in the Decline of American Socialism, 1912-1925 (New York: Knopf, 1967). "Savage fratricide" is the term Daniel Bell uses in "The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons, eds., Socialism and American Life, Volume I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952). It "ripped the party to shreds." Yorborg, Utopia and Reality, found many ex-SP members agreed with this assessment. But the position is untenable from two perspectives. First, as Manakkal Sabhesan Venkataramani points out in his excellent dissertation, "Norman Thomas and the Socialist Party, 1932-1936," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oregon, 1955), it is "not easy to determine" whether the factional fights of the 1930s, which "undoubtedly enfeebled the party" actually lost it significant popular support at the ballot box. Vote totals do not offer such clear-cut proof. Secondly, Warren, Alternative Vision, notes that the theory ignores a basic chicken-egg problem: was factional fighting the cause, or merely the consequence of the movement's weakness? Like similar questions, this one is unanswerable and one cannot turn it into an absolute answer, as some have tried.

Other sources which substantially agree with the factional infighting argument are: Bernard K. Johnpoll, Pacifist Progress: Norman Thomas and the Decline of American Socialism (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970); J. Paul Henderson, "Darlington Hoopes: A Political Biography," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1976); William C. Pratt, "The Reading Socialist Experience: A Study of Working Class Politics," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Emory University, 1969); John Scott Wilson, "Norman Thomas, Critic of New America," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1965).

The second major argument, the "realist" critique, suggests the SP failed in the words of Daniel Bell, the position's foremost spokesperson, because of its "inability to resolve a basic dilemma of ethics and politics." The party "could not relate itself to the specific problems of social action in the here-and-now, give-and-take political world. It was trapped by the unhappy problem of living in but not of the world." Socialists did not understand, and could not effectively work within, the system they sought to destroy. Yorburg, Utopia and Reality, notes that "many" ex-socialists believed this to be the case. They faulted the party for its strong ethical code which precluded the use of underhanded means to fight for popular support. Johnpoll, Pacifist's Progress, especially chides Thomas for his "inability to recognize that politics was . . . the art of the possible." It is not surprising that Bell and Johnpoll feel this way; they, like Yorburg's interviewees, were SP members in the 1930s and 1940s.

The "realist" critique is a product of cold war tensions and

the critics' apologies for their personal inability to sustain radical fervor during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Warren, Alternative Vision, is on target when he notes that the "realist" critique tells scholars more about the critics than any weakness within the SP. Bell and Johnpoll were SP members in the era with which this essay is primarily concerned, the late 1930s and early 1940s. Bell especially applauded the SP's increasing anti-communism; he was an active reporter for both the Call and the Social Democratic Federation's New Leader. While he and Johnpoll absorbed the lesson of the Soviet Revolution, that the means determine the ends, they refused to apply that lesson to internal American politics. Instead they joined the liberal Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s "vital center," and ignored, perhaps actually applauded, the government repression of radicals in the 1950s. Hardly objective analysts.

There are several codicils to the "realist" critique, all of which proceed from its basic point. Yorburg, Utopia and Reality, David Shannon, The Socialist Party of America (New York: MacMillan, 1955), Venkatamarani, "Norman Thomas," Henderson, "Darlington Hoopes," and Wilson, "Thomas, Critic of New America," all point to the SP's failure to try to work within the two party system as a major reason it never significantly affected American political and economic development. This criticism ignores the American political catch-22, which dictates that compromise to gain power undermines effective reform.

Similarly, some critics chide the SP for refusing to understand and profit from the popularity of Roosevelt's New Deal. Even Thomas listed this as one of his major miscalculations. Henderson,

"Darlington Hoopes," and Venkatamarani, "Norman Thomas," agree. But again, what profit would socialists have gained from such a position? The SDF's similiar move gained them no influence, no strength. To join the New Deal coalition demanded at some point alliance with the Democratic party. And that road guaranteed just the same impotence as the road of strict sectarianism.

Johnpoll, Pacifists Progress, Bell, "Marxian Socialism," Yorburg, Utopia and Reality, and Wilson, "Thomas: Critic of New America," all blame the SP leadership for the above weaknesses. Certainly Thomas's national reputation and charisma give him added strength within socialist organization, but nevertheless, had the rank-and-file overwhelmingly disagreed with his "go it alone" attitude, it would have revolted. That it never did means that the membership is as much to blame as the leaders, if the above criticisms are valid. But these criticisms are not valid; they ignore the American political catch-22 and its consequences. The "realist" critique tells scholars more about the critics than about their subject.

The last of the major answers to the question of socialist impotence in American politics, that it failed to graft itself to the tree of American experiences and myths is the most valid of the three. It recognizes the necessity of political theory appealing to the emotions of the voters. Certainly socialists and communists paid homage to certain parts of American mythology, especially to Jeffersonian rhetoric, but because of theoretical commitments, neither could make use of other cherished myths like equality of opportunity, hard work, and other Horatio Alger-type myths. Neither party could comfortably incor-

porate the myths so organically into its rhetoric that the two became one. This failure, certainly understandable, consigned marxian parties to a peripheral role in American politics.

Shannon, Socialist Party of America, John Diggins, The American Left in the Twentieth Century (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovenovitch, 1973), Yorborg, Utopia and Reality, Warren, Alternative Visions, Harry Fleischman, Norman Thomas: A Biography, 1884-1964 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), Henderson, "Darlington Hoopes," Venkatamarani, "Norman Thomas," and Wilson, "Thomas: Critic of New America," all take this position. Also, Fleischman, Norman Thomas, Shannon, Socialist Party of America, and Yorborg, Utopia and Reality, emphasize the American lack of class consciousness as the reason marxists could not organically attach their rhetoric to American mythology. But then Kipnis, American Socialist Movement, believes too much American myths and institutions corrupted marxist dogma and this destroyed the SP's chance for power before it really became well established.

Of the three major explanations for socialist failure, the last is the most convincing. Scholars should not ignore it, but they should include in their assessments as well the conception voiced in this essay, that the SP was a victim of rapidly disappearing alternatives. Only when a group sees many different possible means of achieving power can it pick and choose those which best conform to the realities and mythologies of the society in which they operate.

Of the general literature on the American SP, Shannon's work, The Socialist Party of America is still the best. John Diggins, American Left in the Twentieth Century, and Melvin Cantor, The Divided Left:

American Radicalism 1900-1975 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), are acceptable, although neither pays much more than lipservice to the SP after the First World War. Cantor does touch on the problem of means and ends, but he confuses the SP's seeking a middle course between sets of discredited means with the SDF's overemphasis on democratic means at the expense of the goal of socialism. Scholars must supplant Shannon's work, a survey, with the more intensive analyses of Kipnis, American Socialist Movement, and Morris Hillquit, History of Socialism in the United States (New York: Dover Publications, 1971 [1910]), for the roots, formation and early years of the party. Also invaluable are Weinstein, Decline of Socialism, for the early post-World War I period and the early 1920's, and Warren, Alternative Vision, for the 1930s. So far, no good work has appeared covering the SP in either the 1920s or the 1950s, although Henderson, "Darlington Hoopes," does a creditable job with the 1950s.

There are four biographies of Norman Thomas, none very acceptable. The best is the most recent, W. A. Swanberg, Norman Thomas: The Last Idealist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979). Swanberg, like most who write on the SP, is more interested in diagnosing the faults of the organization and its leaders than he is in trying to glean an understanding of the process and effects on the people of a rapidly changing, maturing social order. Johnpoll's biography, Pacifist's Progress, is marred, as noted above, by the author's compulsive search for vindication for his own political mistakes. Fleischman's book, Norman Thomas: A Biography, and Murray Seidler, Norman Thomas: Respectable Rebel (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1961), both

suffer from the fact that the authors were SP leaders too close to the subject. All four are valuable for narrative and personal description of the players in the drama.

Memoirs are a very important source for any scholar writing about the American left, whether autobiographical, or oral-historical. Yorborg, Utopia and Reality, and Vivian Gornick, The Romance of American Communism (New York: Basic Books, 1977), give the researcher a good feel for the emotional depth of the subject. Most important to this essay were Bruce Bliven, Five Million Words Later: An Autobiography (New York: John Day, 1970) for a view of the liberal mind; Ralph Chapin, Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of An American Radical (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) for an intimate view of one man's re-conversion to the ethic of capitalism under the duress of Stalin's neuroses; Dwight MacDonald; Memoirs of a Revolutionist (Cleveland and New York: Merridian, 1963) for a look at the thought-processes of an important non-aligned radical; and Louis Waldman, Labor Lawyer (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1944) for a glimpse of a socialist forced right by his growing antipathy toward the Soviet Union.

Other interesting memoirs are: Louis Budenz, This is My Story (New York and London: Whittlesey House, McGraw-Hill, 1947); Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return (New York: Viking Press, 1951); John Gates, The Story of an American Communist (New York: Thomas Nelson's, 1958); Harry Haywood, Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978); Granville Hicks, Where We Came Out (New York: Viking Press, 1954); John Haynes Holmes, I Speak for Myself (New York: Harper and Row, 1959); Mary McCarthy, Sights and

Spectacles, 1937-1956 (New York: Farrar, Staus & Cudahy, 1956); James Maurer, It Can Be Done (New York, 1938); Al Richmond, A Long View From the Left: Memoirs of an American Revolutionary (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

The most important dissertations have been noted above: Venkatamarani, "Norman Thomas," Pratt, "Reading Socialist Experience," Henderson, "Darlington Hoopes," and Wilson, "Thomas: Critic of New America." Perhaps the most important one to this work from the point of view of analysis was Robert Clayton Pierce, "Liberals in the Cold War: Union of Democratic Action and Americans for Democratic Action, 1940-1949" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1979). Pierce details well the process among Loeb, Niebuhr and their followers of growing anti-communism destroying their earlier socialist outlook. It is to this group that Bell and Johnpoll belonged.

Other important dissertations are: William Winch Bilderback, "The American Communist Party and World War II" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1974); Norman Bindler, "American Socialism and the First World War" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1970); Paul Merlyn Buhle, "Marxism in the United States, 1900-1940" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975); Lewis Herbert Carlson, "J. Parnell Thomas and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1948" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1967); Robert Frederick Carter, "Pressure from the Left: The American Labor Party, 1936-1954" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1965); William Issacs, "Contemporary Marxian Political Movements in the United States" (Unpub-

lished Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1940); Maurice M. Isserman, "Peat Bog Soldiers: The American Communist Party During the Second World War" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1979); Margaret Honora Kinney, "The Independents: A Study of the Non-Communist Left in the United States, 1919-1929" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1973); Linda Kaye Kirby, "Communism, the Discovery of Totalitarianism, and the Cold War: Partisan Review" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Colorado, 1974); Lee Elihu Lowenfish, "American Radicals and Soviet Russia, 1917-1940" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1968); John P. McGreen, "Norman Thomas and the Search for an All-Inclusive Socialist Party" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University, 1976); Frederick J. Olson, "The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1952); Norma Fain Pratt, Morris Hillquit (1869-1933): A Political Biography of An American Jewish Socialist" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1976); Harold James Sylwester, "American Public Reaction to Communist Expansion: From Yalta to NATO" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kansas, 1970); Jacqueline Washington-Bolder, "American Socialism: Its Origins, Nature, and Impact on the Black Working Class and the Socio-Economic Development of the United States" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Howard University, 1975); Robert Hulings Lappe Wheeler, "American Communists: Their Ideology and Their Interpretation of American Life, 1917-1939" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1953); Gene Zeitzer, "The American Peace Movement During the Second World War" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Bryn

Maur College, 1978).

Several articles and books were extremely helpful to the author in formulating his thesis and broadening his outlook on the subject.

Lester K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism," American Historical Review, 75 (April 1970) 1,046-64; William McLoughlin, "Pietism and the American Character," American Quarterly, 14 (Summer 1965), 165ff; Donald Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); William L. O'Neill, The Last Romantic: A Life of Max Eastman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Norman H. Pierson, "The Nazi-Soviet Pact and the End of a Dream," in Danial Aaron, ed., Fourteen Crucial Episodes in American History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952); Richard Pells, Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); Robert A. Skotheim, "Beyond Innocence," American Quarterly, 13 (Spring 1961), 93-99.

The secondary, dissertation and memoir literature on American socialism and radicalism in general are voluminous. Yet more work remains to be done. Those who choose this branch of esoterica in the future should deemphasize the question of the causes of the left's failure. Newer works should instead concentrate on what this failure signified for American social and political development and what lessons one can glean from the left's reactions to the rapidly diminishing alternatives a maturing world social and economic order presented. From this starting point, perhaps it will be possible to draw larger

conclusions about how societies reacted to the increasing pressures of twentieth century industrialized life.