

# The Proposed C. P. Changes

"How about the two-party system? Isn't it a rotten fake all the way through?"

By Robert Minor

The two-party system is the form under which the election struggle on the issue of the war is taking place this year.

Historically the two-party system has been a millstone around the neck of the nation for more than 90 years—ever since the Congressmen of the Whig and Democratic Parties in 1850, while "fighting" sham battles against each other, made the famous "Compromise" in adopting the Fugitive Slave Law.

What is the essence of the two-party system? It is not in the mere fact there are only two major parties. The essence was to be found for many decades of our history in the fact that under the two-party system the issues that are vital to the nation were not brought before the people for decision. Two parties fought out the election on non-essential issues, but the vital issues were not raised and were settled over the heads of the people.

A striking picture of the two-party system was given by Frederick Engels in 1891:

"Nowhere do 'politicians' form a more separate, powerful section of the nation than in North America. There, each of the two great parties which alternately succeed each other in power is itself in turn controlled by people who make a business of politics, who speculate on seats in the legislative assemblies of the Union as well as of the separate states, or who make a living by carrying on agitation for their party and on its victory are rewarded with positions.

"It is well-known that the Americans have been striving for 30 years to shake off this yoke, which has become intolerable, and that in spite of all they can do they continue to sink ever deeper in this swamp of corruption.

"It is precisely in America that we see best how there takes place this process of the state power making itself independent in relation to society, whose mere instrument it was originally intended to be. Here there exists no dynasty, no nobility, no standing army, beyond the few men keeping watch on the Indians, no bureaucracy with permanent posts or the right to pensions.

"And nevertheless we find here two great gangs of political speculators, who alternately take possession of the state power and exploit it by the most corrupt means and for the most corrupt ends—and the nation is powerless against these two great cartels of politicians, who are ostensibly its servants, but in reality exploit and plunder it."

In 1912 Lenin made a brilliant analysis of this system:

"After the liberation of the Negroes the difference between the one and the other party became ever smaller. The struggle of these parties was conducted predominantly over the question of higher or lower customs tariffs. This struggle had no serious significance whatever for the masses of the people. The people were deceived, diverted from their essential interests by means of affected and meaningless duels of the two bourgeois parties.

"This so-called two-party system reigning in America and in England was hindering the rise of an independent workers' party, that is a real socialist party."

Lenin put his finger upon the decisive thing—that the real struggle for the essential interests of the people was prevented by the fakery of the two-party system. Obviously, there would be no disadvantage in having but two political parties if one of these two represented and conducted a powerful struggle for the essential interests of the people;

but that was not the case.

That was the old picture of the American two-party system, and certainly we are reminded of this again today by, for example, the swindle to deprive ten million soldiers of their votes, the cynical denial of necessary war funds, etc.

But what would happen if American patriots let it go at that, as though nothing had changed?

We would be missing the decisive thing in the new situation. We would be throwing up our hands and passively accepting defeat in the midst of this war crisis.

Does anyone think that the election this year is a sham battle? Does anyone believe that the issue between President Roosevelt and the defeatist gangs of Dewey, Taft, Bricker, etc., or of Farley or Wheeler—is a "meaningless duel"?

Of course, not. The whole matter of the prosecution of the war through to victory—the whole fruit of the successful military struggle in "peace for many generations" is at stake in this election. The defeatist gangs have challenged the whole policy of all-out war, just as the defeatists challenged President Lincoln's prosecution of the war in the 1864 election.

The struggle will take place within the framework of the two-party system, and the ballots will be cast for candidates under the names of these two parties.

But something is changed.

For many decades it was assumed that the two-party system would break up through the rise of a new great mass party. This seemed to be happening in 1912 in the rise of Theodore Roosevelt's "Progressive" Party (which Lenin considered even more significant than the 800,000 vote cast for Debs that year), and again in 1924 with La Follette's party. But it did not happen. History took another course. And it is now clear that in the great crisis of this time the political battles will be fought out within the form of the two-party system. As Earl Browder says:

"This 'two-party system' has been tremendously strengthened and buttressed against the storms of constant political changes that go on within it. . . . The enormous gains in legal recognition of the right of organization, collective bargaining, social security, and the growth of the trade unions from three million to 13,000,000—under conditions obtained within the form of the two-party system—were followed by the tremendous achievement of the Roosevelt Administration in foreign policy, setting the nation on the path of military victory, of prolonged world peace and a postwar world economy permitting full production and employment with a rising standard of living and social gains to be won in orderly democratic procedure. Inevitably, as Browder says:

"The American working class shares very largely the general national opinion that this 'two-party system' provides adequate channels for the basic preservation of democratic rights."

With the enormously changed conditions, this general opinion is justified. For although the form of the old two-party system remains, its substance is vital changed, among other things, as Browder says, "by the system of direct primaries which give all voters the right to enroll under one or other of the two major parties and participate in choosing its candidates, as well as in the party committees and delegates to conventions." As he pointed out:

"These two parties are essentially institutionalized channels, semi-governmental in nature, through which the citizenry groups and regroup itself from election to election according to the leadership that is thrown up and the issues that are thereby developed."

Through these "institutionalized channels, semi-governmental in nature"—it is evident that the electoral struggles, and all forces that are to exercise any influence upon the outcome of them, will function. This is because it is no longer true that the issues vital to the nation

are not being brought before the people for decision within the form of the two-party system. The substance has changed, and the vital issues are brought before the people.

Is it still true that "two great gangs of political speculators" in both parties are striving to "take possession of the state power and exploit it by the most corrupt means for the most corrupt ends"—and is it true that these "corrupt ends" include now the getting of the nation's war policy and a plunge into defeat through "negotiated peace" in accord with the pro-Hitler aims of the backers of these gangs? Of course it is true.

But it is NOT true today that "the nation is powerless against these two great cartels of politicians."

Today these "political speculators" and their powerful financial backers can be beaten, but can be beaten only if the full strength of the democratic forces of our country is thrown into the struggle within the forms of this "two-party system" which has become a "peculiar American system without counterpart anywhere in the world." Nor is it an "emergency situation," for, as Browder says, it is "merging into a 'normal' situation."

The struggle in this election cannot be said to have "no serious significance for the masses of the people."

The form of the two-party system continues. But the substance of the election struggle under that form is changed fundamentally and decisively. The reelection of a President who leads the war in the interest of the nation, and the election of a Congress that will support the President—against the defeatist, "negotiated peace" candidates of the "gangs of political speculators" and the sinister power behind them—is not a "meaningless duel."

It is the duty of all Americans to take part in this struggle within the forms in which the struggle will occur. You cannot take part in it in any other way.

But has one of the two parties of this two-party system been transformed into a true representative of the national interest? No. Is it sufficient merely to "vote Democratic"—for Farley? Dies? "Cotton Ed" Smith? For those Congressmen who vote against the soldiers' vote, against the necessary funds for war?

No. It is not possible to pick either party as representing the national interest. The party of patriotism, the party of democracy and victory is not defined by the party lines of either of these parties. The real party of patriotism is present and will cast its votes for the war and the victory, by voting for the reelection of President Roosevelt.

It is not a matter of the Democratic Party. Republicans also will cast many of these votes, and millions of independent voters. And in some cases the win-the-war candidates for Congress are Republicans. The win-the-war party cuts across the formal lines of both the Democratic and Republican Parties. The election of a "Democrat" irrespective of President Roosevelt would be a defeat of the win-the-war party just as definitely as the election of a Dewey or a Taft.

No third party can have the slightest effect upon the election except to help divide the people's vote and thereby to lose the election to the lose-the-war forces.

Therefore, those who wish to influence the course of history in the biggest moment of history, to help decide the fate of all civilization in favor of democracy and peace, are facing the fact that the fight must be within the form of the two-party system, and will throw all their strength in to win the fight.

The rottenness and the fakery will be defeated this way.

The next question, to be answered in Wednesday's Daily Worker, will be one contained in a letter from an official of the American Youth for Democracy.