

THE 1936 ELECTIONS

By Jay Lovestone

Beginning with this issue, we will run a series of articles by Comrade Jay Lovestone dealing with the 1936 election campaign results. In this series of articles, there will be examined the situation in which the campaign was waged, the causes of the Roosevelt sweep, the consequences and significance of the results, the role played by organized labor in particular and the working class as a whole, and the perspectives for the radical parties of labor and the labor movement as a whole in the light of the new situation.

NO ONE questions the very great significance of the 1936 Presidential elections and their results. What were the causes of the Roosevelt landslide? What are the likely social, economic and political consequences of the Democratic avalanche? What new problems and tasks does the Roosevelt sweep place before labor?

Before attempting to answer these questions, it will not be out of place to clear the ground a bit by presenting a general picture of reactions to the election results, forecasts put forward as to its outcome, and an examination of the objective conditions prevailing at the time of the election struggle.

Therefore, let me, first of all, strike a sort of holy note by calling upon the "Commonweal," a Catholic "weekly review of literature, the arts and public affairs." In its issue of October 30th, Mr. Charles Willis Thompson made the following forecast: "The indications are for the re-election of Mr. Roosevelt by a greatly reduced popular majority and with the loss of many states that he carried in 1932—so many that, to a wise man, his re-election would carry at least as much warning as pleasure . . . Mr. Roosevelt is as aware as anybody of the probable slump in both his popular and his electoral vote."

A few months before, Earl Browder, General Secretary of the American Section of the Communist International, took his place as a forecaster in behalf of the Communist Party, by making the following reply to the following question: Question: "Then you are not presupposing that Landon would be stronger than Roosevelt in the elections?" Answer: "I am not assuming that Roosevelt has the edge in this election. I think it is anybody's election." ("Daily Worker," June 15th, 1936).

And the "Commonweal," in its issue of November 6th, has Mr. Thompson estimating the probable results of the elections in the following manner: "Now as to the general result of the campaign. It has restored the Republican Party to its former position, that of a major party coherent in form and harmonious in intent and purpose. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, is facing an ominous future. It, like the Whig Party in the 1840's and the early 1850's, is composed of elements not merely uncongenial but hostile, hating each other more than the common enemy; or, to be accurate, hating only each other and having nothing against the common enemy except a natural preference that the latter should not hold the offices if it can be avoided. The Democratic Party has been split before, but not since 1860 has there been a split in it comparable with this. It is not manifest so much in spectacular facts, like the two last Democratic Presidential candidates on the stump for Landon, as in the waiting butchers behind the scenes, axe in hand and only suspending the cutting up until the formal election is over and Congress meets. The South is to be heard from. The welding of shattered Republicanism, beginning in the Cleveland Convention, was

completed by the course of the campaign."

Life belied these prophecies and cast stinging ridicule on these prophets. Both the spokesmen of American Catholicism and official American communism were not able to judge and did misjudge totally the entire situation in which the election fight was waged.

Yet, everybody appears to be satisfied with the election results. The Pope has mastered enough strength to express delight, though his servant and radio crooner, Coughlin, got what was coming to him and more than he prayed for. The French Chamber of Deputies, with the Communist and Socialist members voting in the affirmative, unanimously congratulated Roosevelt on his great victory. Hitler is reported to have patted himself on his own back with delight over the extension of what he calls "the Fuehrer principle" thru the huge popular majority rolled up by F.D.R. Even Hearst has once again changed his mind; so he says. He now says that Roosevelt is a real Jacksonian, and hastens to declare that "perhaps Roosevelt, like Jackson, has given essential democracy a new lease of life and will establish it in fact for a generation." For the first time in its history, the American Legion, thru its National Commander, Harry M. Colmery, has denounced "the use of force or violence or intimidation to suppress any group," and has further emphasized that he views "with alarm red-baiting and riding . . . martyrs on a rail." Finally, even Pravda could join the chorus of the articulate admirers and the obviously satisfied.

In a sense, we are also somewhat satisfied with the election, but only somewhat. In one respect, the election was a great laxative. It was a purge of the first order. It ran counter to the pleas of 85% of the editorial writers of the country. It put the Lippmanns and the Dorothy Thompsons, the Menckens and the Frank R. Kents, as well as the Literary Digest experts, in their proper places—outside the pale of competency as social and political observers. We still hope that all these experts will get a chance to get a piece of the red, white and blue victory cake Landon had prepared for himself!

One thing must be emphasized by us at the outset. This campaign, which was at least as bitter and as dirty as any Presidential election held in this country in the last four decades, was much more than the ordinary Presidential campaign of tweedledum versus tweedledee. There were serious differences between the Republican and Democratic Parties, despite the fact that these issues were not always put forward sharply or honestly by the contestants. Substantially, the differences dividing the ranks of the American ruling class involve the following questions:

1. Has American economic life, has the American economic system, reached that stage of development at which it needs, for its own self-preservation, for the perpetuation of capitalism, active, continuous systematized government regulation and participation?
2. Has the time arrived to reconstruct the present government structure to a certain extent so as to help it serve more effectively as an instrument for stabilizing and perpetuating the capitalist system in the United States?
3. Has the time arrived for enacting some social legislation in order to choke off discontent in the ranks of labor, in order to satisfy, in some measure, some immediate needs of the workers, so that they will not turn so soon to making sweeping demands, more fun-

damental demands?

Regardless of the pussy-footing on the part of Roosevelt, in spite of the liberal camouflaging on the part of Landon, it must be said that in general the group dominating the Democratic Party during the campaign answered these questions in the affirmative and the forces dominating the Republican Party answered these questions in the negative.

Why is this so? What is the basis of these conclusions arrived at by the ruling class parties in this country? In trying to answer these questions, let me, before anything else, pose another question which will help us secure an understanding of the background of the whole situation, of the very period which America has just left. The first question that arises for us, therefore, is the following: What lessons can be drawn from previous election campaigns for this one? This logically leads us to another question: Which campaigns have any striking similarities to the 1936 campaign? We believe the election struggle of 1896 and 1912 should be examined in this light.

What was the situation in 1896? We then had the rising American imperialism. The first serious stand against big capital was then being made by the petty-bourgeoisie, who fought in order to preserve and continue their satisfactory social and economic status. In this campaign, we witnessed the brazen participation by biggest business under the leadership of Mark Hanna. It was a filthy campaign, even as far as American elections struggles go. It was the era of McKinley versus Bryan. What do we find today, as compared with 1896? In the last election struggle, American imperialism, despite momentary economic improvement, continues in deep crisis. We find big business playing as brazen and as frontal a role in the contest. The petty bourgeoisie are again in arms. But this time it is sort of a last stand fight. It is a fight in defense of a position most of which has been lost and the re-



A painting by Diego Rivera

mains of which are hardly tenable. There is mud-slinging aplenty. Its champion is one who has the advantage, from his own electoral viewpoint, of having the support not only of the overwhelming majority of the middle class, but also of the working class. More than that, he has won the support of important, though not very noisy sections, of big business—the so-called enlightened captains of industry and finance, who are able to view the situation more critically and more soundly.

Now let us turn to 1912. This year marks a wave of bourgeois progressivism, soon to be checked by the World War. It is on this wave that Wilson rode into office in 1916. It was only because of this

trend and the ensuing division in the Republican Party that Wilson had his chance in 1912. The Roosevelt challenge to the Republican Party was a challenge to the two party system which is the buttress of capitalist reaction in the United States. At that time, Lenin was very quick to note the inestimable historical importance of the undermining of the two party system insofar as labor was concerned, insofar as any serious movement towards independent working class action was concerned. It is very interesting that, unlike 1936, the 1912 campaign found the working class radicals, at that time crystallized politically in the Socialist Party, somewhat hit by the Roosevelt wave of progressivism, but still able to come forward vigorously and clearly as the champion of class-conscious workers, of working class radicalism against bourgeois progressivism. It is for this reason that the highest proportion of the total vote ever cast by the Socialist Party was in 1912 when Debs polled close to a million. It is furthermore interesting to emphasize at this time, that it did not take long after the 1912 election for Roosevelt the First to betray the uprising of the petty bourgeoisie against trust capital.

CANADIAN FASCISTS BREAK UP MEETING TO AID SPAIN

The Fascist rowdies in Montreal had a hectic and, sad to say, rather successful week end in this city. A mass meeting had been called by the local committee for medical aid to welcome a Spanish delegation. The affair was purely of a People's Front character; such respectable people as the former Minister of Education in the Spanish cabinet, the Spanish delegate to the League of Nations, and a Catholic priest were to speak for the embattled Communists, Socialists and Anarchists of Spain. Despite this fact, the meeting as far as the Fascists were concerned, was a Communist affair and they made preparations to disrupt it. The police authorities, however, saved them the bother by prohibiting the meeting at the last minute—at the request of the reactionary student organization of the University of Montreal. In order to make doubly certain that the meeting would not take place, the organizers of the fascist hooligans instructed them to be present at the hall—ready for action. As a result, in the evening, the neighboring district resounded with shouts of "Down with Communism", "Down with the Jews", and bands of youngsters marched the streets, yelling themselves hoarse. A second meeting hall, fearing a threatened attack by the fascists, also

closed its doors on the Spanish delegation. A third place was obtained, but there, too, the oncoming bands of hooligans forced those attending to cut their meeting short.

On the following Sunday, a huge rally of one hundred thousand Catholics was turned into an anti-Communist demonstration, where the leaders of the Catholic church together with the leading lights of the blackest reaction urged the fight against Communism "to the last drop of blood." The Catholic church was praised as the "only guarantee for the maintenance of social order."

The grave menace that these reactionary demonstrations present for the labour movement in Quebec is obvious. Rooted as it is among the French Canadian masses, backed by the Catholic church, which holds an unbelievable power over the unbelievably backward masses of Quebec, this movement is a tremendous resource of blackest reaction. The Labour movement is the only factor capable of destroying this menace, by involving the French Canadian masses in struggle for their demands. The task is a tremendous one. There is no doubt that French Quebec is the toughest nut to crack on the American continent as far as Labour is concerned.

UNION DRIVE FORCES WAGE CONCESSIONS

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crease in speed up actually resulted in a net loss for each worker of \$2 per week."

The fact that these moves came almost upon the very heels of the election and from these particular industries is a very different picture from the one painted in their campaign against the New Deal. Roosevelt doesn't seem to have done so badly by them, altho on the workers side of the fence it is quite a different story. Here the idea, even tho false, that Roosevelt is labor's man, and that his re-election is a victory for labor, will, undoubtedly aid the growth of unionism and encourage stiff resistance to the attacks of the capitalists on their living standards. Thus the employers hope to make impossible the canalization of these moods into the field of organization. At best it could only be a temporary obstacle, and labor has already seen thru it.