CHAPTER 11

Communist Bogey

"WALLACE'S COMMUNIST Front Party," "The Pink Façade," "How the Reds Snatched Henry Wallace"—titles such as these and repeated epithets of "Communist-dominated," "dupes of Moscow," "fellow travelers" were indicative of the invective hurled at the Wallace Progressive Party in 1948. Reaching their high-water mark at the Philadelphia Convention as noted earlier, such charges constituted a powerful current all through the campaign. How valid were these charges? What role did the Communists play in the party? What was the effect of their participation?

The press generally reflected the opinion expressed by the professedly (and professional) "reformed Communist" Louis F. Budenz in Collier's that "the Communists conceived the idea of a third party . . . organized it, named it and chose [Henry A. Wallace] as their candidate." This view was identical with that earlier voiced by Americans for Democratic Action, the anti-Communist Liberal group which supported the Democratic ticket. In a document aimed at proving "It All Goes Back to Frère Jacques," (the reference being to Jacques Duclos, French Communist leader) the ADA stated:

It is fair to say that the core of the Wallace's supporters [sic] is composed chiefly of those individuals and unions which in the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact were the spear-
head of the Wallace opposition the only other time he ran for public office.

The Communist Party itself, while not taking sole credit for the Progressive Party, was far from modest in its claims as to its role. In a draft resolution for its 1948 national convention, the National Committee of the Communist Party admitted, according to the *New York Times*, that

The Communist party, from the earliest days after the end of the war, understood that its traditional fight for a new people’s party directed against the two-party system of the monopolies had once more been placed by events as an immediate practical question before the American people, and, acting upon this understanding, it boldly proclaimed the need for such a new people’s party.

Because of its correct line, the party was able to carry on effective mass work and make significant contributions to the struggle for peace and democracy and to the forging of the new political alignment and people’s coalition.

On the other hand, the presidential candidate himself asserted repeatedly:

I am not a Communist, have never been one and never expect to be one.

The Progressive Party is not controlled by Communists nor was its convention or program dictated by them.

And Professor Rexford Guy Tugwell, who had reportedly absented himself from the party’s fall campaign because of Communist domination, concluded some months later in the *Progressive* that “no matter how it may be represented, I believe [the Progressive Party] to be genuinely Progressive and not Communist.”
In the midst of all these conflicting statements, what measure of truth can be found? With the press so universally opposed to recent third-party candidates, its reporting in 1948, as in 1924, tended to depart from objective standards and include editorial material. It accepted as fact some of the more violent claims of an opposition united in trying to pin the Red label on the Progressive Party. On the other hand, the Communists were elbowing for a position in the forefront of the new coalition. Hence they might well exaggerate the extent of their participation to better advance their claims within the party. And from a third viewpoint, non-Communists in the party could be expected to play down as much as possible the actual degree of Communist participation, since common knowledge of such support might prove costly in votes.

With all the available source material subject to these many possible distortions, the obvious necessity is for a valid criterion by which to make an objective appraisal of both sources and material. Unfortunately, there seems to have been no such clear-cut standard in 1948. In the realm of policy there simply did not exist, at the time, any sharply defined differences within the Progressive Party by which to distinguish Communists and party-line followers from non-Communist Liberals. Both groups had expressed their willingness to accept the "Peace, Progress and Prosperity" program of Henry A. Wallace.

In 1941, it would have been possible to separate isolationists and pacifists from Communists on the basis of their views toward World War II. The former groups consistently opposed hostilities, while the latter exhibited an overnight change in attitude toward the "imperialist war" following the invasion of the Soviet Union. And in 1950, it became possible to distinguish Communists and "party-liners" from Liberals in the Progressive Party on the basis of their respective attitudes toward the action of the United Nations to halt Red aggres-
sion in Korea. Indeed it was the division in the party over this issue that was finally to drive Wallace, as well as most of the remaining non-Communists, from the party’s failure-thinned ranks.

But in 1948 no such significant criteria existed. True, there were some differences of opinion over policy, but these tended to be of an inconsequential nature. Thus, as has been observed in an earlier chapter, such matters as the Vermont Resolution and the report of the Rules Committee at the Philadelphia Convention found reputed “fellow travelers” on the unexpected side of the ideological fence, while persons obviously non-Communist favored what should have been, in theory, the “party line.” The underlying difference over the issue of “progressive capitalism” never came to the fore.

In a dispassionate report of what actually went on “behind the scenes” at Philadelphia, one firsthand observer, John Cotton Brown, concluded that “there was no greater behavioral unity among those members of the Platform Committee whose reputations and vocabulary suggested that they might be Communists than there was among the others.” While seeking to prove his hypothesis that the Progressive Party was “principally controlled by a minority of Communists and left-wingers,” Brown, careful to avoid factual distortion, reported further:

Prof. Frederick L. Schuman told me . . . that he had carefully watched for signs of Communist tactics, but had observed none.

I thought I detected several instances of Communist tactics during the four days of committee sessions, although I must confess that on several of these occasions, though by no means all, certain evidences of Moscow plots were subsequently vitiated by the behavior of those who impressed me as suspect-Communists.
The same commentator, having attempted to set up six contrasting “Left-Wing” and “Non-Left-Wing” beliefs, finally reached the conclusion that

A “common left-wing system of beliefs” rendered the Progressive Convention behavior of Communists and non-Communist left-wingers indistinguishable.

By contrast it was not possible to locate any sort of right wing.

In short, the program established by the Progressives’ presidential candidate had, much earlier, eliminated virtually all those not in substantial agreement. Consequently, debate over adoption of a platform at Philadelphia centered around minute detail, language shading, and emphases, rather than around fundamental policy disputes. Therefore, any criteria for distinguishing Communists from non-Communists in the 1948 Wallace Progressive Party on the basis of policy were so tenuous as to be virtually worthless.

On the other hand, there were some organizational evidences that, as has been suggested, served a better means of distinguishing between the Communists and their followers and the moderates in the party. Thus the former were generally united in supporting and working for a narrow, restricted group with a hard core of support which could be tightly organized and closely disciplined. The moderates, on the other hand, believed in setting up as broadly based an organization as possible. To this a great mass of American voters would be able to attach themselves loosely, subject to little discipline, as is customary with American major parties.

Despite early claims by A. B. Magil in the Communist New Masses that “Since we want a mass party and not a sect we must operate through organizational forms that will unite rather than divide the labor and progressive movement,”
the Communists and fellow travelers, once the Progressive Party had been organized, apparently proceeded to operate in given localities on an opposite assumption. As noted, in Colorado and New Mexico open rifts between the moderates and the extreme leftists developed over this policy. And in New York the policy of exclusiveness was abetted by the adamant refusal of state ALP chairman Vito Marcantonio to allow a "fifth" or Progressive Party line on the ballot. Moreover, scattered reports from local organizations with strong Communist membership indicated that similar tactics were generally pursued by the "party-liners."

Opposition to these methods was voiced by Wallace at various times, but he failed to take vigorous action to curb the techniques of his more extreme followers. Consequently mass action tactics, deliberate law violations to invite arrest, and similar methods continued throughout the campaign. They served in no small part to repel many prospective followers who came to fear a loss of "respectability" in third-party participation.

Outside the realm of policy and organizational evidence, there was little but hearsay, accusation (most of it undocumented), and the admissions of self-confessed former Communists. Relatively little light was shed by these disclosures on 1948 Communist Party policies, but some evidence was thereby made available as to the earlier political affiliations of some of the party's leaders. Thus, Lee Pressman who served as secretary of the Progressive Platform Committee later revealed in 1950 testimony before the House Committee on un-American Activities that at one time he had been a Communist. Similarly, he claimed that John Abt, party counsel, had been a "member of a Communist group."

The attempt to identify Communists by means of their "reputation and vocabulary" and their use of "Communist tactics" proved uniformly unrewarding to those who attempted to utilize such means of examining third-party mem-
bers. Senator Taylor remarked that in all the meetings he attended he had noted "no evidence of any Communist tactics, steamroller or otherwise." In his opinion there had instead been "complete freedom of discussion" and "scrupulous adherence to the rules" of democratic procedure. Nevertheless, the fact that Communists were present was admitted freely by all concerned. This being the case, what was the effect of their presence on the Wallace Progressive Party? What were the factional lines within the party?

At one pole were the extreme leftists, three closely related groups—admitted Communists, past and present; the party-liners and fellow travelers who failed to differ noticeably with the Communists as to either policy or principle; and finally those non-Communists who, in the period under surveillance (1944–50), failed to take issue with the Communists on policy, but whose underlying principles seemingly differed. Lee Pressman, Vito Marcantonio, and C. B. "Beanie" Baldwin offered examples within the party leadership of each of the three respective groups. It was to this group as a whole that Wallace later applied the appellation, the "Peekskill Boys," on the basis of their endorsement of the mass action tactics similar to those employed in connection with the Peekskill, New York meeting for singer Paul Robeson which led to a full-scale riot.

In the middle were grouped an apparently large majority of Progressive Party followers—the moderates. Exemplified by both national candidates, these individuals were willing to accept Communist support, because they felt that it was inconsistent, in the light of their ideals, to oppose Red-baiting by others, yet attempt to read Communists out of the new party.

At the right were arrayed those who, feeling that Communist support should have been disavowed in no uncertain terms, yet were unwilling to adopt the ADA tactic of violent attack on the Communists. This group would have approved
making the Progressives "non-Communist" rather than "anti-Communist," excluding but not assailing the Reds. Most persons sharing this view had, like Max Lerner, completely avoided the party, but others like Rexford Guy Tugwell joined and stayed, if reluctantly, through the campaign. While few in this group favored, as did Tugwell, the Marshall plan, they were all agreed on the necessity for a third party in the face of totally repugnant Truman-Dewey alternatives.

In the period following 1948, these groups tended to leave the party in the order of their views from right to left. Most of the rightists departed during or shortly after the campaign, accompanied by many of the moderates. And the moderate defection, so marked following election day, 1948, became a nearly complete walkout in the summer of 1950, with the policy rift over Korea and Wallace's departure. Consequently, by the close of 1951 the few remaining portions of the Wallace Progressive Party were composed almost exclusively of the earlier extreme left group. These were the ones who had favored a "narrow" organization; after the Wallace break, they finally achieved this goal, with the departure of almost everyone else.

But while these may have been the facts with respect to groupings within the party, they were ultimately far less important than the public image—the stereotype projected by press treatment of the issue. For what the public thinks is often far more important than what is. And in 1948, 51 percent of the American public, in a poll conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion, "agreed that" the Wallace third party was Communist-dominated.

The tenor of the press portrayal was illustrated in many publications, including the weekly news magazines. Journalists for Time, reporting the Philadelphia Convention in their own inimitable fashion, opined:
Henry Wallace, the Iowa horticulturist emerged last week as the centerpiece of U.S. Communism's most authentic-looking façade. The façade was Wallace's helter-skelter following, assembled under careful Communist supervision at a founding convention in Philadelphia and brazenly labeled the Progressive Party.

A similar approach was employed by Newsweek:

The Communist Party boasted that it had decided that Wallace would run for the Presidency even before Wallace did, and that Sen. Glen Taylor, the self-styled "Singing Cowboy" from Idaho, would be his running mate. It had done much to organize the party for them and even picked the name.

The position taken by these and other journals was that the failure of Wallace to repudiate Communist support constituted overwhelming evidence of Communist domination. The conclusion was simple: "No repudiation, therefore domination." Actually there were grounds for believing that even had the third party denounced Communist support as strongly as did Robert M. La Follette in 1924, large segments of the press would have continued to call it Communist-dominated, averring that the disavowal was merely camouflage. For all during 1948 the ADA, despite the vigor of its anti-Communist attacks, continued to be branded as "pink" in both conservative and irresponsible circles. In short, a "status quo" group shortsightedly viewed all attacks upon its entrenched position as "Communist-inspired." The general effect of this approach was noted by sociologist C. Wright Mills commenting on the labor picture in his The New Men of Power:

The greatest success of the Communist Party in the United States has been accomplished with the active aid
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and support of conservatives and reactionaries. Together they have made the mass public think that “Communist” is a synonym for “left” in general and “radical” in particular.

In 1948 there were evidences of this same unwitting cooperation by both right and left extremists to impress upon the average voter the fact that the Wallace Progressive Party could be nothing but Communist. The candidate's own view was that this concerted attack indicated that the press was “not after the Communists but after the whole Progressive movement.” Regardless of their motivation, these views and their “documentation” were much the same wherever found. First summarized by the ADA in mimeograph form, the opposition “line” may be sketched as follows:

The idea for a third party originated at a meeting of the Communist Party national board in 1946—a meeting whose location was variously described as West 12th Street, the home of Frederick Vanderbilt Field, and “a mid-Manhattan apartment near Bellevue Hospital.” Unfortunately, such detailed (though conflicting) reports were not available for the date of the meeting which was set at sometime in 1946. The exact date, if provided, might have been significant, as will be noted below.

At this meeting, so the version went, the decision was reached to form a third party for 1948 with Henry Wallace at its head. This verdict was then communicated to the several Communist-dominated unions of the CIO, ordering their support for a third party. Following this, a group of progressive organizations—all of which were subject to Communist dictation—were directed to unite in the Communist-dominated PCA. The chief purpose of PCA was to be the building of machinery and organization for a third party, without clearly revealing the intent.

Then, according to this interpretation, when the time
seemed propitious, the “heat” was turned on Wallace to announce his candidacy. While “not a Communist himself,” the former Vice President clearly became the tool of these leftists when, spurred on by their urgings, he announced his intention to run for President on a third-party ticket. At the same time he accepted, perhaps unwittingly, the entire program of the Communist Party in the United States as his own.

Third-party opponents also claimed that during the course of 1948 the Communists used typical tactics—“going to meetings early, staying late”—to insure their control of local Wallace groups and state parties. At the Philadelphia Convention, they ran roughshod over all opposition, forced acceptance of a platform virtually identical with their own, and put through rules which would insure their control of party organization in the future. Finally, according to these reports, the Communists were quick to silence even the faint note of protest emitted by a Vermont delegate hopeful enough to bring to the convention floor an innocuous resolution stating that the party platform was not to be construed as an endorsement of Soviet foreign policy.

In brief, then, according to this opposition view, Henry Wallace, Glen Taylor, and the whole Progressive Party were little more than muddle-headed dupes of a Soviet plot organized through the Communist Party in the United States. Unfortunately this view, while long on “interpretation,” proved somewhat short of facts that would hold up under investigation.

But what of the evidence supplied by the Communists themselves? Examination of their writings makes it relatively easy to plot their shifting course, but fails to shed much light on the actual extent of their influence. Publicly, the Reds claimed credit for participation in the Progressive Party’s formation, but disclaimed any intention of seeking a “special position” within its ranks. They boasted—after the fact—in
The Communists had long known—and stated publicly—that a new party was essential to America, if its people were to move forward along the path of peace and security. So it was that the Communists, armed with their Marxist understanding of American history, renewed their traditional call for a new people's party at the time of Wallace's ouster by Truman.

Discounting the inherent braggadocio and attempting to fill in the important omissions, this was indeed a rather accurate résumé of Communist action with respect to a third party. In 1944, as already indicated, the Communists had been one of the firmest if weakest components of the vice-presidential support for Henry A. Wallace at the Democratic National Convention. At this time, it will be recalled, the Communist Party in the United States, under the leadership of Earl Browder, had been operating within the American two-party system—attempting to gain an influential position within the Democratic Party. Ever since the attack by Nazi Germany on Soviet Russia in June, 1941, it had been vigorous in its support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

It should be noted, however, that this position represented the latest wartime reversal of a much older view of the Marxists concerning American politics. The earlier policy, which had enjoyed an off-again, on-again popularity in Communist ranks through the 1920's and early 1930's was that of the "popular front." As outlined by Georgi Dimitrov to an assemblage of the Comintern in 1935:  

The establishment of unity of action by all sections of the working class, irrespective of their party or organiza-
tional affiliation is necessary even before the majority of the working class is united in the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and the victory of the proletarian revolution.¹

In America, the popular front was to be advanced through the medium of a new farmer-labor party which would challenge the inherently conservative position of both old major parties. During World War II, this approach had been shelved in favor of accepting the Democratic Party, and trying to influence its views from within. Consequently, when at the end of the war, Earl Browder was ousted from his position as head of the CPUSA, the party line seemed to revert to the earlier popular front orientation. As Robert Minor, writing in the *Daily Worker* on the 1948 Communist Convention, remarked:

The resolution [proposing Communist support for the third party] gives a correct picture of the New Party movement as the beginning of a break up of the “Two-Party System.” This is a further development of the correction made by our emergency convention three years ago which discarded one of the most dangerous mistakes we made when we accepted the anti-Marxist theoretical proposition made by Browder that the political struggles of the country could be fought out within the two-party system.

Thus it seems clearly indicated that a 1945 meeting of the party’s national committee was responsible for resumption of a policy calling for an attempt to break down the American two-party system. The best way to achieve this, the Communists now believed, was by introducing a third party—with both labor and farm support—into the American political scene. While this new party might not achieve immediate suc-

cess at the polls, it still might gain a balance-of-power position in presidential elections comparable to that of the American Labor Party in New York State contests.

Nevertheless, there was little evidence in party-sponsored literature indicating that the decision had been made that the time was yet ripe for the actual formation of a third party. Eugene Dennis had remarked in February, 1946 that the Communists must proceed

to lay the foundation now to establish in time for the 1948 elections a national third party—a broad people's anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist party . . . . If possible—and it is preferable—steps toward forming a third party should be taken early in 1947.2

But both the *Daily Worker* and *New Masses* had remained reluctant to take up the cudgels, making only infrequent references to a third party during the latter part of 1945 and the first eight months of 1946.

Yet during this period there were evidences of Communist political activity and of Communist tactics in organizations not too far afield. One of the most significant was their operation within the American Veterans' Committee. An article concerned with this problem, "Why I Broke with the Communists," shed considerable light on CP organizational tactics. Writing in *Harper's*, Julian H. Franklin described the operation of the Reds in forcing moderates and non-Communist liberals out of local AVC chapters.

They said they were quite glad they were driving out "the fascist opposition." They said they didn't care how small AVC became as long as it remained ideologically

correct. Rather a chapter of two members and a national 
AVC of 40,000 that would hew to the party line. "Then 
when the depression comes," they predicted with relish, 
"we will attract a vast following."

Comparison of these sentiments and techniques with later 
reports from the Progressive Party indicates a striking similarity of approach. Still, in 1945 and early 1946, there was no 
positive indication that the Communist board of strategy felt 
the time yet ripe for a serious third-party attempt.

But, in September of 1946, with the delivery of Henry A. 
Wallace's Madison Square Garden speech, came the overnight 
shift to a new positive plan of action. Or, more properly, the 
transformation came with the belated observation of the 
effect of the Wallace speech on both Truman administration 
and American press and public. It will be recalled that the 
Communists' first reaction to Wallace's remarks had been one 
of disapproval, or at best, of faint praise. It required several 
days for the light to dawn that this event could be adapted 
to their purposes, that it had elevated Henry A. Wallace into 
a prominent position as potential leader of a new party. While 
it is interesting to speculate on the sources of Communist 
illumination, it is virtually impossible to pinpoint them. Louis 
F. Budenz in his Collier's article blithely ascribed the shift in 
CP line to a Pravda dispatch of September 16 which reportedly supported Wallace. The fact of the matter was that 
the shift in position of the CPUSA came in the Daily Worker 
on September 15. Hence, if the decision originated abroad 
as it may very well have done, it was transmitted by some 
other and less public means.

Regardless of origins, the fact remains that the party line 
did change, and Henry A. Wallace became the man to whom 
the Communists turned as the prospective leader of a new 
party. Moreover the timetable was to be speeded up. Appearing in an article by A. B. Magil, published almost immediately
after the shift in policy—October 8, 1946—in *New Masses*, the new interpretation followed these lines:

The Wallace episode has widened popular dissatisfaction with the two major parties. It has thereby provided an opportunity for accelerating a political realignment which, under labor’s leadership, can in the post-election period bring this simmering discontent to the point where it boils up into a new vigorous people’s party.

The ALP . . . is the nucleus of the broad anti-monopoly party which on a national scale still lies in the future.

Also establishing the party line for the 1946 election, the article went on to say, “To reject a Mead or Lehman because he doesn’t talk like a Wallace is just as unrealistic as to reject a Wallace because he doesn’t talk like a William Z. Foster.” In other words, while Wallace might be far from the ideal party-line candidate, the Communists must be realistic and take advantage of the furor caused by a speech which they hadn’t liked particularly. They immediately set to work, as suggested, to build fires under the discontent. Party publications, not yet openly embarked on a third-party-in-1948 trend, began to throw broad hints in this direction, with the emphasis on building a “coalition,” a “popular front.”

“Since Henry Wallace [had] come to symbolize the fight against the reactionary foreign policy of the Wall Street-controlled Republican Party which the Truman administration [had] made its own,” according to Magil one week later in *New Masses*, he might be accepted as the leader, “not that the conference [of the Communist Party] committed itself to his leadership or that its program was identical with his.”

This decision having been reached by the CP conference, the party apparently then embarked upon the initial phases
of their new tactics at the Conference of Progressives, held at Chicago in October, 1946. The Communists, however, may scarcely be said to have dominated—or even excessively influenced—this assemblage, since its ranks included a far greater representation of non-Communist liberal thought. Included in the Conference of Progressives were many individuals later found in the ranks of the ADA, as well as significant leaders from American labor—the Political Action Committee of the CIO and the Railway Brotherhoods. As noted earlier, there was at this time substantial opposition on the part of liberals of all hues to many aspects of both foreign and domestic policies of the Truman administration.

It was reported that the Communists were strongly represented at Chicago in such organizations as the NC-PAC and the ICC-ASP. But objective criteria were lacking whereby their actual influence in these groups could be measured. Subsequent developments failed to bear out the contention that these groups were nothing more than "Communist fronts" as their opponents charged. When, shortly thereafter, the NC-PAC and the ICC-ASP merged to form the Progressive Citizens of America, this same problem carried over into any attempt to determine the exact extent of Communist influence within the new body. Like its predecessors, the PCA failed to bar Communists from membership as did its newly organized opponent, the ADA. This latter group accepted at face value the "Communist presence, hence Communist control" dogma. It assailed non-Communist liberals who joined the PCA, ignoring the fact that ADA acceptance of the Truman doctrine type of foreign policy, even as modified by the Marshall plan, left dissenters no place else to go.

Following the establishment of the PCA, the Communists began, early in 1947, to work in earnest for a third party. It soon became apparent, however, that they were moving away from the broad people’s coalition of which they had spoken so recently. A narrowing influence was taking hold, and party
spokesmen began to assail "the illusion that middle class liberals can be both the brains and body of a broad people's movement. This illusion," so the new line ran according to A. B. Magil in New Masses, January 14, 1947, "helped shipwreck the third party movements of the past and if allowed to gain ascendance can have no happier results in the future. It is only the working class which . . . can challenge the power of big business."

At the same time, the Communists were seemingly aware that they could not rely solely upon those of socialistic persuasion in "the political coalition that can become—and should become by 1948—a new anti-fascist, anti-monopoly people's party." They entertained, according to the same article, hopes of eventual conversion for these capitalistic infidels, however, concluding that

One can be critical of Communists, as Communists are critical of other progressives, and still see that the two can and must work together if reaction is to be defeated . . . . In this fight the bonds that tie so many to faith in the capitalist "promise" will loosen and the socialist truth will take root in the minds of millions.

By the summer of 1947, the Communists had become absolutely convinced that the time for a third party was now at hand. "When it is already so late, the new party that must come cannot come too soon," said Magil on June 3 in the same party organ. At the same time he more clearly indicated some of their goals.

While [a new party] may not succeed in winning power on its first try, [it] will nevertheless become a power capable of influencing whatever administration takes office and capable, moreover, of achieving its highest goal in 1952.

5,000,000 votes to start with is a very substantial num-
ber . . . *enough to be the balance of power* in most national elections. [Italics supplied.]

Their decision finally having been made, the Communists turned their full attention to fomenting, as best they could, action leading to a third party—trying to bring the discontent of which they were aware "to a boil." The PCA, in which they were permitted to participate, was one means of accomplishing their goal.

The exact role of the Communists in pushing the PCA decision to support a new party is difficult to assess. Certainly they exercised every possible means of enlisting support for the venture. And yet, in this formative stage, much of the third-party pressure within PCA ranks came from the non-Communist group. Testimony to this effect was given by a journalist who had opposed PCA support for a third party. Writing in *PM*, Albert Deutsch commented:

> While I disagree with the PCA decision on the Wallace candidacy, I believe it was made by a group of sturdy Americans according to the dictates of their democratic and patriotic consciences. To suggest that their decision was made in Moscow is nothing less than irresponsible balderdash.

> I am frankly dismayed by some of my shifty-eyed fellow-liberals who seem unable to form a conclusive opinion without first looking over their left shoulders to see what the Communists think . . . dutifully reading the *Daily Worker* to find what they should oppose.

> If a cause seems right to [the true liberal], he does not discard it because others may follow the same path for longer or shorter distances for their own reasons.

According to Wallace, non-Communist PCA leader Frank Kingdon had "put more pressure on [him] to run than anyone else." Nevertheless, when the decision was finally reached,
Kingdon conspicuously absented himself and in fact denounced the new party, in his New York Post column.

Who asked Henry Wallace to run? The answer is in the record. The Communist Party, through William Z. Foster and Eugene Dennis, were the first . . . . I was finally convinced when the steamroller ran over me the night PCA became the second organized group to demand the Wallace candidacy.

According to Mrs. Elinor Gimbel, also a member of the PCA Executive Board which made the decision, Kingdon submitted a statement of his new position just prior to their meeting, following which the sixty-odd members of the board voted, with only three abstentions, to support the Wallace candidacy.

Once the new party had been launched, it became quite apparent that Communists were participating fully in its organization, its drives to obtain a place on the ballot, and in its campaign. Numerous reports from moderate leaders attested the fact that the extreme leftists, whether actual Communist Party members or not, were among those most willing to get out and work for the Progressive Party, putting in long hours for little or no compensation. Yet at this very time that the Communists were working so vigorously in behalf of the Wallace Progressive Party, there were significant long-range policy differences between them and the moderates. Perhaps the most significant was the fundamental cleavage over "progressive capitalism." Despite the fact that there was little open dispute during 1948 over this concept supported by the presidential candidate, it was one to which no Marxist could subscribe. As Adam Lapin wrote in the Communist Masses and Mainstream, October, 1948:

[The Progressive Party] is not . . . free of the illusion that capitalism can somehow be made "progressive" and subordinated to the interests of the people.
Here is the measure of the difference between the Progressive party and the Communists. It is a difference which extends to some tactical questions, but even more to fundamental objectives. The Communists reject utterly the theory of a "progressive capitalism."

Nevertheless, this fundamental difference of principle remained submerged in the short run of 1948. The general agreement on immediate policies, most of all the similarity of views on foreign policy, meant that for this period at least, Communist and non-Communist were moving in the same direction. With the Communists willing to subordinate their economic tenets, the Progressive Party, narrow as it was, was still broad enough to accommodate both groups. It should be noted, however, that this era of agreement was to be relatively short-lived. Those moderates who remained in the Progressive Party after the disastrous 1948 election returns soon found differences increasingly difficult to resolve.

Early evidence of the growing rift came in September of 1949 when, at a New York City Conference on the Bill of Rights, Professor Thomas I. Emerson offered a resolution favoring a pardon for a Trotskyite group convicted of violation of the same Smith Act under which the Communists' own leaders had been indicted. Opposition to the act was widespread in liberal circles, and party moderates, including such leaders as Henry Wallace and Professors Frederick L. Schuman and Harlow Shapley, felt that it should not be employed to suppress the civil rights of any group. On the other hand, the extreme leftists opposed the pardon, feeling that a selective application of the rights of free speech was desirable to protect only Stalinists. Communist Benjamin Davis phrased it in no uncertain terms according to Gus Tyler in New Republic: "Free speech is not for those who come among us as disrupters."

Further indications of growing disunity were observed at
the second national convention of the Progressives in February, 1950. Eventually, however, this assemblage adopted a compromise position, accepting Wallace’s lead to agree that the foreign policies of both the United States and the Soviet Union were subject to valid criticism. But the final split came in the summer of 1950, when the Progressive Party failed to accept Wallace’s support of U.N. action against Red aggression in Korea. Here the Communist line could brook no compromise. For the first time, the left wing in the third party stood clearly apart on a matter of substantive policy. While the Wallace position supporting American defense of Formosa might have been open to non-Communist doubts, there were few moderates who could go along with the refusal of the extremists to support the United Nations action in Korea. Party ranks, vitiated by continued failures which had discouraged most of the moderates, were now susceptible to domination by the extremists. Wallace’s position thus made untenable, he withdrew from the party he had founded, accompanied shortly by most of the remaining non-leftist Progressives. Not only had the Communists achieved their narrow, ideologically correct organization, but in the process they had also alienated virtually all the moderate elements which had earlier been willing to cooperate with them.

But what of the “Communist acceptance” stand taken by various non-Communists in the Progressive Party’s earlier history? What were their views, their reasons, and their reasoning?

Factors both ideal and practical influenced the decision of the moderates not to disavow Communist support. First, it was, as Wallace observed, a matter of preserving one’s “fundamental integrity.” While both he and Senator Taylor would have preferred that the Communists stay out of the party, they felt it impossible to live up to an ideal that op-
posed Red-baiting by adopting tactics that smacked even slightly of the same thing. Any form of intolerance in an organization based on the promotion of tolerance and understanding was to them both incongruous and deplorable. As an official of the American Labor Party expressed it, there could be no "loyalty test" for membership in the party.

Moreover, it did not necessarily follow that adherence to this ideal must automatically lead to Communist domination. For, despite the stereotype of the Reds as political super-Machiavellis, and their own claims to "superior understanding of American history," the verdict of most who worked with them was that they were, on the whole, "eager and willing but lacking in political sense."

Party leaders were hopeful of creating a flood tide of major-party dissent on the part of moderates and non-Communists that would swell new party ranks and completely dominate it, submerging the Communist participants. As Rexford Guy Tugwell commented in the *Progressive*, April, 1949:

> If there had been a flood of Progressives [to the party]—energetic, determined, dedicated—where would the Communists, about whom we hear so much, have been? . . . They would have been lost as they were always lost when they tried to claim President Roosevelt . . . . The reason Communist workers were so prominent to the Wallace campaign was that the Progressives were . . . sitting it out; wringing their hands; and wailing.

As it turned out, the Communists, instead of being submerged, became sufficiently prominent, aided in no small part by press dispatches concerning their prowess, to keep many moderates away from the party. A spectral "Red domination" became the bogey that had a greater influence on the destiny of the Progressive Party than did the actual presence of the Communist Party members.
In this sense it proved unfortunate that Wallace did not see fit to pursue a more vigorous policy, completely disclaiming Communist support, or even, as Senator Taylor had done, pointing out to the Communists that their own long-run interests would not be served by his program. Instead, the defensive attitude, adopted in the face of constantly harrying press questioning, turned out to be ineffective. Nor did the presidential candidate inject himself sufficiently into the organizational details of the party to avert Communist domination in several localities. Admittedly, this would have been difficult and might have deprived the Progressives of some of their most conscientious workers. Nevertheless, the long-range effects of such a course would have proved beneficial—certainly in retaining the full support of the moderates who had joined the party.

But, turning from such speculation, what evaluation may be made of the Communists' role in the crusade? What impact did they have on policy, organization, personnel, and candidates of the Progressive Party?

In the realm of actual party formation, they undoubtedly played an active part in getting the drive under way. But, notwithstanding the fact that they were among the earliest exponents of the idea, they constituted only a relatively small segment of a broad liberal group with an early interest in third-party action. It was only as increasing numbers of Progressives ultimately decided against this course of action that the Communists gained a more conspicuous position. At no time in this formative period did they actually attain the dominant position attributed them by the press.

It was Henry A. Wallace himself, rather than the Communists, who constituted the decisive factor in the determination that there was to be a third Progressive Party. Had Wallace not delivered his Madison Square Garden speech, with its
resultant repercussions, it seems hardly likely that the Communists would have united on a third-party drive as early as mid-1947—or that they would even have entered the 1948 campaign. Had Wallace not eventually decided to run in December of 1947, it is even more doubtful that the Communists could have agreed on any other national figure around whom they might rally the discontented. It is equally doubtful that they could have seriously considered such a course of action had Wallace not decided as he did. Rather, the Communists pursued an opportunistic course in attempting to employ Wallace for their own particular purposes.

Nor does it seem likely that the Communists exercised any preponderant influence on the decisions leading to Wallace’s activities. Certainly the Reds were not the instigators of the 1946 Madison Square Garden speech which they initially found so distasteful. And while they contributed their voices to the cries of “Wallace in ’48,” they formed but a small part of a much vaster group—non-Communists all—which also looked to the Wallace program of “Peace, Freedom and Abundance.” The audiences attracted by Wallace during his PCA-sponsored 1947 tour were much more than “drummed up left-wing demonstrations lacking in political significance,” despite Carey McWilliams’ label in the Nation. Admitting, as seems proved, that the Communists were present en masse at these meetings, whooping things up, there was also present in far larger numbers a broad cross section of America—people from all walks of life hopefully turning their faces to new answers to problems so long bungled by both traditional parties.

Long after the campaign Wallace, realizing that he had been moved by urgings less spontaneous than they had appeared at the time, still felt that his decision had been finally swayed by real issues that could not have been answered, or even compromised, within the framework of the two major parties. It was his reluctant conclusion that the Truman ad-
ministration could not have been forced to budge an inch upon the vital issues of foreign policy which led primarily to the third-party decision. The pressures exerted by labor and progressive groups, and by friends and advisers, especially Frank Kingdon and Beanie Baldwin, had been only secondary in his decision. Personal antipathy toward the President, said Wallace, had not entered into his decision. But as non-Communist support for a third party began to fade in 1947, the Communists were among the leaders in keeping the façade of support intact. They may not have built the Potemkin village, but they were persistent in keeping the candidate’s attention focused on it.

In terms of policy, there was little viable evidence of Communist influence actually resulting in basic shifts during 1948. The original planks set forth by Wallace formed the platform of the party adopted at its convention. “Peace, progress and prosperity” became “Peace, Freedom and Abundance.” Regardless of personality clashes (such as Marcantonio versus Tugwell over Puerto Rico), minor semantic battles over specific wording, and the omission of specific planning for “progressive capitalism,” there was little to indicate Communist dictation, or even domination, in the spelling out of the Progressive Party’s stand. Rather, 1948 was a period during which Communists and non-Communists in the Wallace party could, without serious difference, advocate a single program. The orbits of the two groups, divergent earlier and later, lay in the same plane for the campaign year.

Consequently, the greatest extent of Communist activity in 1948 was to be found not in policy but in the organizational sphere of the Progressive Party. Extreme leftist victories resulted in the domination of several local groups. State organizations in New York and Colorado bore the leftists’ stamp. And Wallace’s failure to intervene organizationally left his New York headquarters subject to overly strong “party-liner” influences.
But perhaps the most significant conclusion concerning the whole Communist issue was that reached by so many leaders—among them candidates Wallace and Taylor and Professors Tugwell and Emerson—with apparent validity. These moderates felt that the extent of Communist influence exerted—most particularly in the local organizations—was primarily the result of default. The failure of non-Red-hued progressives to rally to the banners, thus placing undue emphasis upon the Communist role, was the most significant single factor.

Nor was there anything in the organizational structure of the Wallace Progressive Party that would have led to Communist domination, had there been any sizable influx of moderate support. Even as it was, domination by the extreme left did not occur, save in isolated instances, until 1950. It was only then that the policies of a skeleton party, decimated by nearly two lean years—years of continuing moderate withdrawals—could be swerved from a strictly Wallace party line.

If, then, the Wallace Progressive Party was Communist-influenced but not Communist-dominated in the 1948 election campaign, what further conclusions may be drawn from its experiences? In attempting to make any over-all appraisal, it seems pertinent to recall the comments of Henry Wallace himself that a new party must build upon a broad base if it is to have any chance of success. It must be rooted in middle-class America rather than limited to any sharply defined or exclusive group. The experience of the 1948 party bore out this view, yet at the same time it indicated the paradox—the two horns of the dilemma involved. The broad, amorphous group whose participation was vital to success failed to sense sufficient urgency or the imminence of any disaster that would overcome their inherent inertia and bring them to the point of action. On the other hand the narrow, rabid group that sensed a need for action and responded to the Progres-
Communist Bogey

sive Party, by its very response, and by its vigorous action, kept the others—the moderates—away.

In the light of Wallace's belated and futile attempts in 1950 to finally rid the Progressive Party of its Communist label, it is clear that more decisive steps should have been taken in 1948. Substantiation is also lent this view by the conclusions of O. John Rogge in New Leader, January 29, 1951, that

The Progressive Party, by allowing a small organized minority to have a voice in its councils, had too difficult a time in trying to maintain its independence.

As Max Lerner had commented in PM, there had been a need for a non-Communist rather than an anti-Communist party. With a clear disavowal of both Communist support and red-baiting, it might have been possible to temper some of the hysteria of the times. While it is unlikely that any large segment of the American press would have ceased its attacks on the party as "Communistic," "radical," and "Red-dominated," support from other sources might well have been forthcoming. Many Liberals sincerely opposed the Truman foreign policy and were unwilling to "go along," like the ADA, with what they considered a course toward war. Yet the Communist bogey kept them from the new party.

And in the final analysis, it was this Communist bogey, rather than the Communist Party itself, that had the greater influence on the destiny of the Wallace Progressive Party.