

The American Labor Party of New York State in the Great Depression: Ambiguous and Conflicting Political Representation of the American Labor at the Conjuncture

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Contents

- I . Introduction
- II . New Deal and the Labor
- III. The ALP and Industrial Unions
- IV. The Role of the ALP in New York State
- V . The Rival Unionism and the decline of the ALP
- VI. Conclusion: The meaning and limits of the ALP

I. Introduction

One of the most intriguing still as unsolvable questions of what happened during the Great Depression in the United States has been the absence of more radical political movement, or the working-class political representation. While the absence of the labor party in the United States was not solely phenomena confined to the 1930s, the political crisis accompanied by the economic catastrophe made the contemporary observers to expect, in vain, to find out revolutionary spirit among the working people (Lynd & Lynd, 1937:487-488). As has been known, however, the working people of the United States

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during the Great Depression chose to vote for the Democratic Party and integrated into the New Deal coalition rather than pursuing more radical revolutionary alternatives (Nelson, 1990:40-48).

In the 1930s, like most of other periods, there still existed insurmountable structural obstacles built into the U.S. political system that argued against the success of any third party, labor or otherwise. Especially the distinctive federalism of the U.S. electoral system fatally penalized the political schemes that did not fit to the two-party straightjacket. The lack of a party vehicle in turn prohibited the subsequent articulation and development of working class politics (Oestreicher, 1988: 1268-1269, 1283). Therefore, while sentiment did indeed become translated into political consciousness “as the class basis of partisanship became successively more marked from election to election” as Oestericher points out, organized labor in the United States has been stuck with the winner-takes all system, even at the time of crisis (Oestereicher, 1998: 19-50).

However, exploring the 1930s reveals that the period was in reality a juncture for political representation of organized labor as organized labor figured in American electoral politics. On the one hand, the sublime of the working class political consciousness subsided into the New Deal coalition mostly through the Democratic Party as its vehicle. At the same time, the unions served as an organizing infrastructure for Democratic vote mobilization. On the other hand, during the same period when the Democratic Party played a role of a kind of a labor party, there were serious attempts to build independent labor parties in some parts of the nation. The labor party movement of New York State shows both the climax of the independent labor party movement and the beginning of the integration of organized laborer into the existing political system. Focusing on the American Labor Party of New York State, therefore, this paper shows the ways in which the dream of organized labor for

an independent labor party has been channeled into the bigger political system, and the process in which the aspirations of organized labor has been reshaped under given structural restrictions.

II. New Deal and the Labor

The rise of the ALP should be understood in the background of the political circumstances of the 1930s and in consideration of the changing relationship of organized labor with the Democratic Party, New Deal, and FDR. When economic calamity scuttled Republican domination of the national government, Herbert Hoover was discredited and Franklin D. Roosevelt became prominent. Meanwhile, a series of widespread protest movements in the 1930s promoted Roosevelt to inject the language of class into national political rhetoric.

At the peak of the labor unrest, Roosevelt threw his support behind legislation to protect unionization efforts, and with this change of government labor policy, organized labor broke with its traditional stance of abstaining from national electoral politics to become a full fledged partner of the Democratic Party. Therefore, the Democrats gained the overwhelming allegiance of most manual workers and their unions in the 1930s, and the Democratic Party became, if not a labor party, at least the party of labor (Piven, 1992: 235-264; Brody, 1993: 43-80).

However, it was in the election of 1936, not in the 1932, that the Democratic Party ostensibly became “to some extent a labor party.” As Skocpol and Finegold point out, while the Democratic Party in 1932 did not even mention unions in its platform, the Party in 1936 clearly stood for laborers. The close relationship between the organized labor and the Democratic Party has been built partially due

to the New Deal labor policy, as the labor policies like section 7 (a) of the NIRA stimulated the growth of a trade union movement that was willing to become directly involved on behalf of the Democratic Party.

The presidential vote for 1936-- but not for 1932-- shows the class cleavage that made the Democrats the party of the workers. . . . With the help of labor unions and urban party organizations, many potential voters overcame the somewhat less formidable restoration requirements of the northern states and moved from exclusion to a location inside the Democratic coalition. Industrial workers made economic gains in their struggles with employers and made political gains with the passage of the Wagner Act (Finegold and Skocpol, 1995:47-50).

In the mid 1930s, the new industrial unions rapidly allied themselves with the Democratic Party, and shortly thereafter the craft unions did as well. This development seemed to promise the emergence of an entirely new political formation in American electoral politics. The newly formed CIO began to work for the Democratic ticket, creating a political arm that performed much like a campaign organization, spending money to stage rallies, print leaflets, and recruit voters in the industrial states where the CIO unions were strong. Therefore, the CIO union played a significant role in recruiting the support of the organized labor for FDR. Once legal protection for unionism had been won through the enactment of the Wagner Act, even the socialist unions like the ACWA (Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America) and the ILGWU (International Ladies' Garment Workers Union) supported the New Deal Democrats. After the rise of the CIO in 1935, progressive unions affiliated with the CIO formed the Labor's Non-Partisan League (LNPL) in 1936 in order to support the New Deal and FDR. Specifically committed to the

reelection of Roosevelt, the LNPL tremendously increased labor's part in electoral politics, both in the volume of money contributed and by the organizational resources brought to bear at the grass roots. The LNPL was crucial in securing and hammering home labor's loyalty to Roosevelt. Led by LNPL, the CIO unions contributed \$770,000 to Roosevelt's campaign and were credited with carrying New York State for the Democrats (Brody, 1993: 68). At this time, committed political action became on labor's agenda.

However, while the Democratic Party was a focal point of the New Deal coalition that has been built in the midst of the 1936 Presidential election, the Party still could not gain enough support from certain sections of the laborers even in the industrialized states like New York. It was in this context that the American Labor Party (ALP) emerged. The ALP was created to reassure socialist voters, who might not have abided by Tammany Hall but still could vote for FDR in 1936 election. More specifically, the formation of the ALP in the 1930s was initiated by the desperate labor leaders of the CIO in New York State, who attempted to maintain the industrial unionism by supporting the New Deal. In other words, the industrial unionists had apparent reason to support FDR and the New Deal, and their attempts to build the ALP was actually for backing up the New Deal.

III. The ALP and Industrial Unions

The initial membership and electoral support of the ALP came from Sidney Hillman's ACWA and David Dubinsky's ILGWU. According to Eric Leif Davin, the industrial unionism and independent political action of labor appeared "as inverse sides of the same coin" (Davin, 1996: 140). The ALP started as the New York

affiliate of Labor's Non-Partisan League (LNPL).¹ When Hillman proposed the formation of the ALP to his colleagues in the garment industry in Spring 1936, he was motivated by a desire to prevent the Democratic National Committee from dealing exclusively with the AFL-Democratic machinery in New York.² But, more important motif behind the formation of the ALP as Hillman asserted at the ACWA annual convention was the reelection of FDR.³ He justified the support of FDR in the future of the industrial unions. In replying to the adherents of the independent labor party, Hillman warned that under the Republican administration, it would be impossible to have industrial unions. "There would be no room for the CIO. You talk labor party. But can you have a labor party without an economic labor movement? I say to you that the defeat of Roosevelt and the introduction of a real Fascist administration such as we will have is going to make the work of building a labor movement impossible."⁴ Hillman described his rationale supporting the ALP at a 1936 union meeting.

We had a policy, which was not to endorse either of the two political parties, and that if we took a position it should be along Socialist lines. The position of our organization is now that we are

¹ LNPL in theory was an independent organization open to all who shared its left-liberal agenda. It had no institutional connection with the CIO per se. However, all CIO leaders enthusiastically endorsed it, while the AFL leaders criticized it. Robert Zieger, *The CIO* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 39.

² Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York: Free Press, 1991), p. 363; Sidney Hillman, "Address at General Executive Board Meeting, Atlantic City," April 19, 1936, ACWA paper, Kheel Center, Cornell University.

³ ACWA, *Proceedings of the 11th Biennial Convention*, 1936, p. 404.

⁴ ACWA, *Documentary History of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, 1934-1936* (New York, 1936), p. 402.

for a labor party. . . . But since Roosevelt took office in 1933 things have happened. . . We have participated in making the labor policy of this Administration. We know that the defeat of the Roosevelt Administration means no labor legislation for decades to come. . . I don't know whether legislation would put all the unemployed back to work, but we do know in our industry that the reduction in hours took in 50,000. . . . A change in the Administration raises a definite question whether the Amalgamated would have to fight completely on its own and not get the support which it enjoyed under the NRA (Josephson, 1952: 397).

Likewise, David Dubinsky of the ILGWU joined the ALP for the same reason as Hillman. The ILGWU, like the ACWA, had grown tremendously under the impact of the New Deal's NIRA (Danish, 1957: 94-95; Bernstein, 1969: 66-89). In considering the Supreme Court decision defeating the early New Deal policies, Dubinsky said that the CIO could not stand to have Roosevelt defeated. "The NRA had been killed by the Supreme Court; the Wagner Act (giving labor the legal sanction to organize) had just been passed, but nobody could be sure the Court wouldn't kill that too." Dubinsky pointed out that "all enemies of labor are now combining against the New Deal, against FDR, and that means against labor." Therefore, argued Dubinsky, labor and especially the struggling young unions that the CIO was building in the mass-production industries could not afford to let FDR lose. "The venom with which reactionaries were ganging up against him made me decide I had to align myself openly with his re-election campaign" (Dubinsky, 1977: 265).

The political orientation of these labor leaders reflected organizational imperatives of the industrial unions. The New Deal gave unions the opportunity to grow. As a result, even socialist union leaders undermined efforts to create a national Farmer-Labor party

that just germinated in the early 1930s. Hillman and Dubinsky were the two most influential socialist labor leaders who opposed to the creation of the Farmer-Labor Party, called by Socialist Party in 1933 (Lovin, 1976: 142).

While the labor leaders were eager to seek to preserve their gains by reelecting and aiding FDR, the idea of forming a third party to support the New Deal and FDR was also plausible to FDR, who sought to capture the New York City for the 1936 President election. The ALP was understood “to help implement the political aims of FDR” (Moscow, 1979: 102). Edward J. Flynn, a Democratic National Committeeman and leader of the Democratic organization in New York City’s Bronx County, gave his version of the immediate circumstances regarding the establishment of the new third party:

President Roosevelt with Jim Farley and myself, brought the American Labor Party into being. It was entirely Roosevelt’s suggestion. James A. Farley and I never believed in it very much, but he felt at the time -- and it is true today -- that there were many people who believed in what Roosevelt stood for but who, for some reason or other -- because of leaders or individualists-- would not join the Democratic Party. If another party were created, you could bring these people into it actively. That was really why it was created. . . .Sidney Hillman and David Dubinsky played a great part in it and we couldn’t have formed the party without them. They were the nucleus. These and other people were names but the voting strength was from the unions that were controlled by Dubinsky and Hillman. At that time both of those unions were rather leftist--more so than the Democratic Party. There again it would attract a great

many more who would . . . [vote] for Roosevelt who might not have voted at all.⁵

For FDR and other key New Dealers, New York State was seen as a target because it had a long history of strong electoral radical movements. Hundreds of thousands of New York residents voted for leftist third-party candidates. Circumstances peculiar to the political, economic and cultural aspects of the State also worked. Politically, New York State law permitted candidates to run with multiparty endorsements (Waltzer, 1977: vii). Economically, this highly industrialized state was a cradle for the newly emerged industrial unions which desperately asked legal and political protections. Culturally, the atmosphere of the New York State was tinted to liberal-left, influenced by the popular front culture. And the Industrial unionists who initiated the formation of the ALP contained within themselves the seeds of a kind of social democracy and supported the ALP in order to come up these seeds.

The ALP was to nominate Roosevelt and other New Deal Democrats on its own ballot, thus permitting Socialists and others on the left to vote for Democratic candidates on a non-Democratic third-party slate (Carter, 1965: 16-17). And it worked successfully not only in terms of the electoral outcome but also in regarding to the strategy implementing the labor-left agenda in to American political scene.

⁵ Edward J. Flynn, "The Reminiscences of Edward J. Flynn," Oral History Project, Columbia University, p. 21.

³⁶ In 1936, Governor Irving Lehman wired his acceptance of the nomination to the ALP convention. *The New York Times*, August 14, 1936. The ALP endorsed only President Roosevelt and Governor Lehman whereas it did not nominate any other senators or assemblymen in 1936 election. *The New York Times*, October 28, 1936.

IV. The Role of the ALP in New York State

After the presidential election of 1936, the ALP in New York State was reorganized as to enhance trade union control (Fraser, 1991:376). The social objectives of the ALP were outlined in a seventeen-point program of purposes. The program included encouraging the principle of collective bargaining; supporting labor and social legislation; securing such democratic institutions as free speech and free criticism; and establishing social programs like employment insurance and old age pension. Some of its major goals also included the institutionalization of the social democratic programs.⁶ As Robert Frederick Carter points out, the ALP's program reflected the social climate of the years "the lingering effects of the Depression, the labor-management struggle, and the idealism within the labor movement to correct social justices" (Carter, 1965: 21). And the Party succeeded in putting its programs into practice. New York State Governor Irving Lehman consulted regularly with Hillman and Dubinsky on labor and social legislation. The ALP pressed its own legislative program through its representatives in the Assembly as well (NYT, January 5, 1938).

The ALP played a significant role in the New York State politics. First of all, it achieved legal status by polling 50,000 votes for

⁶ *Labor Party Herald* (September 1936), pp. 1, 3. The seventeen-point program of the ALP includes: To promote and maintain the principles of a political party, namely, the "American Labor Party"; to encourage the practice and procedure of collective bargaining by protecting the exercises by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization and designation of representation of their own choosing for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection; to aid labor legislation to keep step with changing developments in industrial life and with forward steps in social legislation; to aid labor to play its part in the study and development of any economic policies for the future of the United States; and to secure and maintain the institution of democracy in our industrial and mercantile life in the public interest.

Governor Lehman in 1938 election (Huthmacher, 1971: 219). Therefore, it helped reelect Lehman as well as Senator Robert Wagner, the first by a plurality of only 64,394 over Thomas Dewey. It tallied substantially well for its independent candidates and doubled its vote outside New York City (Walter, 1977: 135). Especially in considering the hostile environment for New Deal reform in 1938, the ALP played an important role consolidating the New Deal coalition. In 1938, the GOP was reborn as a national power and the New Deal was consequently further threatened. In this situation, the ALP helped to keep the state in the New Deal column (Waltzer, 1977: 177; Patterson, 1967: 211-249; Kim, 2005: 66-94).

Major party leaders sought ALP endorsement, as they recognized that in a close election such assistance might mean the margin of victory and control of the Convention (NYT, September 21, 1937). Though the ALP found that the Democratic candidates were more liberal than the Republican candidates, party leaders refused to offer a blanket endorsement of the Democrats (NYT, September 26, 1937). Even though the Democrats sometimes grumbled that the ALP did not wholly support the Democratic candidates, the ALP mostly kept the balance of power in favor of the New Deal coalition.⁷ In the late

⁷ Wilbert L. Hindman, *The New York State Constitutional Convention of 1938: The Constituent Process and Interest Activity*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1940), p. 38. According to Hindman, no Democratic candidates would have been elected without the endorsement of this party. "Had the entire Democratic ticket been endorsed, there would have been the interesting division of 84 Republicans, 83 Democrats and one American Laborite. Instead there were 92 Republican delegates, 75 Democrats and one American labor Representatives." Therefore, Hindman argues that the independence of the ALP in this election was undoubtedly a large factor in Democratic defeat. "Some Democrats termed the Labor Party a traitor for throwing the Convention control into the laps of the Republicans. It is clear, of course, that complete endorsement of the Democratic slate would have resulted in the election of all the Democratic delegates-at-large. Moreover, had the Labor Party endorsed Democrats, instead of endorsing Republicans or putting up its own candidates, in certain New York City district contests the results might well have been changed in

1930s and early 1940s the ALP was very successful. The ALP provided Fiorello LaGuardia with more than one-third of his votes in his campaigns for a second and third term as a New York City mayor in 1937 and in 1941 (Shefter, 1986: 58). The ALP was able to poll over 400,000 votes in state-wide elections (Bone, 1946: 277).

While the ALP was initially formed by the socialist labor leaders, it still had conflict with the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party ran independent candidates of its own for various local posts and it found it difficult to coexist with the ALP. The ALP refused to allow the Socialist Party to affiliate as a unit. However, the 1937 Socialist convention refused to allow party members to join the ALP as individuals (Waltzer, 1977: 122). When the ALP nominated Herbert H. Lehman as the Democratic candidate for New York State Governor in 1938, the Socialists were annoyed by the fact that the ALP bargained with the old party. As a result, the Socialist leader Norman Thomas ran for governor on the Socialist ticket, which turned out to be disaster for the Socialists (Bell, 1967: 179-180). After 1938, the Socialist Party was forced to decide that the members of the party could join the ALP as individual members while remaining in the Socialist Party, stating "We consider the American Labor Party as the electoral expression of the working class in New York" (Warren, 1974), 104-105.

V. The Rival Unionism and the decline of the ALP

The NYSFL, which at first supported the ALP, changed its stance adversely over time, partially because of the rival unionism. Upon the creation of the ALP, George Meany, the President of the NYSFL, and

favor of the Democrats in a number of instances."

Joseph Ryan, the President of the City Central Trades and Labor Council, joined the ALP (NYT, August 6, 1936). Although working with a labor party was “contrary to Meany’s philosophy,” Meany saw practical reasons for an exception in this case: re-electing FDR. Thereafter, the NYSFL cooperated with the ALP in various ways. Meany even let the ALP copy the mailing list of the NYSFL for the purpose of sending out mailings. However, after the 1936 election, Meany decided not to cooperate with the ALP because he regarded the relationship just “a one-shot deal, something for that election” (Robinson, 1981:88-90).

Moreover, within a couple of years, Meany and the NYSFL denounced the ALP as an alien “class party”(NYT, October 4, 1938; October 12, 1938). The bitterness specifically had grown worse with the disagreement between the ALP and the NYSFL over the Burchill bill (Senate Int. no. 501) introduced in 1938. In this case, the rival unionism aggravated the situation. “We had experienced in New York State,” argued Meany, “where the American Labor Party deliberately and officially set out to thwart the thoughts of the rank and file of one of our AFL unions [the subway bargaining rights bill]” (Robinson, 1981: 99). According to Meany, the NYSFL was in favor of the bill, which provided for collective bargaining of the workers employed on the “Independent Subway System,” operated by the Board of Transportation.

However, after the Burchill bill had passed the Senate, the legislative committee of the ALP on March 12, 1938, announced that it was opposed to the bill. Alex Rose, state executive secretary of the party, stated that the matter of collective bargaining for the employees should have been threshed out in a series of conferences between organized labor and Mayor LaGuardia before an adequate bill could be drafted and introduced, which was a plausible reason for the ALP withdrawing support from the bill. Commenting on the ALP’s action

of opposing the Burchill bill, however, George Meany said that “[t]he bosses of the ALP publicly opposed this bill without even consulting the representatives of the unions responsible for its introduction and thereby lined up with those who do not believe that civil service workers are entitled to the rights of collective bargaining in any form.”⁸

After the defeat of Burchill bill, Meany denounced the action of the ALP, arguing that his experience with the legislature had convinced him that when the political welfare of a political party clashed with the interests of labor, the party opposed labor. “This was as true of the American Labor Party as any other party.” Meany argued that “[t]he bosses of that party had entered into a deal to defeat that Burchill bill to satisfy the demands of an organization which contributed to its party funds.”⁹ Meany saw this incidence as a proof of the collaboration between the ALP and the CIO. “Mr. Lee Pressman [CIO general counsel] came into New York City and called a meeting of the CIO representatives and announced that they were opposed to this particular bill. . . . The very next day. . . this so-called American Labor Party decided they were also opposed to that particular bill”(Robinson, 1981: 99). After this incident, the NYSFL Non-Partisan Committee renounced the American Labor Party, as “a branch of John L. Lewis’s CIO political machine.” The NYSFL annual convention consequently adopted following resolution:

Whereas, there exists today a so-called ALP, created in direct opposition to and in open defiance of the time honored non-partisan political policy of AFL; and whereas, this self-styled "American Labor" party is claimed to be, and is accepted as, the political

⁸ The NYSFL, *Bulletin*, Series No. 3, April 4, 1938.

⁹ The NYSFL, *Bulletin*, Series No. 4, April 26, 1938.

adjunct of a disgruntled "rule or ruin" minority group of seceders from the AFL, who now comprise that communistic infested dual labor aggregation known as the CIO; therefore be it

Resolved, that the NYSFL, . . . repudiate the so-called "ALP" as it would any other group of shams or pretenders, masquerading under the title of American Labor in a brazen attempt to foist themselves upon the public as being representative of the real bona fide American Labor that is recognized to be and known throughout the civilized world as the AFL; and be it further

Resolved, that the NYSFL pledge unswerving loyalty to the AFL, full observance of and strict adherence to its non-partisan political policy as set forth in the slogan: "reward your friends, defeat your enemies." ¹⁰

In March 1938, the Central Trades and Labor Council of Greater New York and Vicinity ordered its affiliates to withdraw ALP support. In April, George Meany had called upon all union members to dissociate themselves from the ALP (NYT, June 28, 1938). The NYSFL's denouncement of the ALP was a part of the AFL and the CIO conflict in New York State as the ALP was regarded by the NYSFL solely as a creation of the CIO unionists "as a means of marshaling progressive forces and demonstrating their weight and influence" (Zieger, 1995: 179-180). The NYSFL, which used to participate in politics and support the New Deal programs in behalf of its membership now declared to go back to "non-partisanship." Even worse, it from time to time collaborated with the foes of the reform during the late 1930s and weakened the political power of organized labor. Eventually, it was this rival unionism that crippled the potential of the American Labor Party to consolidate the power of labor.

¹⁰ The NYSFL, *Bulletin*, Series No. 6, September 9, 1938.

VI. Conclusion: The meaning and limits of the ALP

Was the ALP merely an ersatz labor party or was there any meaningful implication in it in the political scene of New York State in the 1930s? When the labor leaders discussed about the formation of the ALP, they did not aim at building a permanent nation-wide working class party. They chose the way partially because they understood the structural obstacles which made almost impossible to build any efficient independent labor party. In addition, even in the mid-1930s, with strong popular movements and widespread anti-business sentiment, independent labor party with sort of socialist programs for state ownership of productive resources and central planning could not be accepted in American atmosphere.

Still, the progressive labor leaders, mainly affiliated with the CIO were desperate to preserve the industrial unionism by blocking the conservatives from gaining power. They formed the ALP as a means of supporting the New Deal and FDR when the New Deal policy was in peril, being attacked by the anti-New Deal coalition. The increasing vehemence of right-wing attacks of Roosevelt and the New Deal led many workers who were dissatisfied with him to have second thoughts.

The creation of the ALP was less a pursuit of independent politics than the break with them. Sidney Hillman who initiated the ALP even saw the creation of the ALP as “a realignment of political and social forces,” in which labor could become a major player.¹¹ This realignment was some distance from the old labor party dream. But the ALP, which emerged through this realignment, was not necessarily at odds with the perspective and accomplishments of social democracy that occurred in European counterparts. In addition,

¹¹ Sidney Hillman, “Forward with American Labor,” *Forward*, October 1936.

it coincided with the aspirations of the Keynesian New Deal elites. In other words, as organized labor recognized that organization and political action are indissolubly linked, it tried to become a “major player” and create a supportive political environment for organized labor through the ALP, which could be interpreted as a break with independent politics.

Therefore, the ALP was from the beginning different from the normal labor party developed in western societies or the one in Marxist sense. Initially, the ALP emerged from peculiar circumstances of the 1930s New York State, and like most of labor parties that existed in the United States, it never advanced beyond local level. The activity and membership of the party was mostly confined to the metropolitan area of New York State. More than anything else, the ALP did not pursue an independent labor party as its ultimate goal from the very inception. Its goal was to re-elect FDR and preserve the New Deal order. That made some critics even argue that it was far from the political representation of rank and file laborers in America. As Norman Thomas, the Socialist Party leader, criticized, the ALP was “not even the valid beginning of a labor party. It [wa]s frankly a tail to the Democratic kite.”¹²

Nonetheless, it has been created by progressive labor leaders with their keen awareness of the reality, set the limited goal of reelecting Roosevelt and realigning the New York State liberal-lefts. As a consequence, the ALP played a significant role as an extended form of the New Deal coalition in New York State when the New Deal was attacked by the right wing conservatives. The existence of the ALP also disapproved the notion that the laborers in the United States were indifferent to politics and only interested in bread and butter issues. The ALP just typified that the laborers in the United States, if not

¹² *New Bedford Standard Times*, August 10, 1936.

apolitical, attempted to achieve their political aims through the existing economic and political system, rather than choosing alternative ways. The problem of the ALP, therefore, was not its failure to pursue an independent labor party of its own, but its malefaction, primarily due to the rival unionism, to solidify organized labor and to block the conservatives' regaining power at the end of the 1930s.

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Abstract

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Jin Hee Kim

The labor party movement of New York State in the 1930s shows both the climax of the independent labor party movement and the beginning of the integration of organized laborer into the existing political system. Focusing on the American Labor Party of New York State, this paper shows the ways in which the dream of organized labor for an independent labor party has been channeled into the bigger political system.

When the labor leaders discussed about the formation of the ALP in the mid-1930s, they did not aim at building a permanent nationwide working class party. They chose the way partially because they understood the structural obstacles which made almost impossible to build any efficient independent labor party. Still, the progressive labor leaders, mainly affiliated with the CIO, were desperate to preserve the industrial unionism by blocking the conservatives from gaining power. Therefore, they formed the ALP as a means of supporting the New Deal and FDR when the New Deal policy was in peril, being attacked by the anti-New Deal coalition. The critics argued that the ALP was not a valid beginning of the labor party, However, the ALP achieved its limited goals of maintaining workable political environment for organized labor by reelecting Roosevelt and realigning the New York

State liberal-lefts when the New Deal was seriously attacked by the conservatives.

Key words: American Labor Party, third party tradition, two party system, New Deal, New York State, Industrial unions