P.C.A.'s Quixotic Politics

IT IS not too late for Henry Wallace to undo a sad day's work by the Progressive Citizens of America. In casting the die for a third party last week, the P. C. A. seriously altered the political landscape of the country—and not for the better. Not only a whole series of polls but the results of last month's election showed clearly that the Republicans had lost a great deal of ground since their victory in 1946. If Wallace, following the prompting of P. C. A., runs as the Presidential candidate of a third party, the gains of the Democrats may well be wiped out. Close key states like New York, Illinois, and California may go to the Republicans without a struggle, in which case we can look forward to at least two years of rampant Taberism on Capitol Hill and, in the White House, four years of Taft or reasonable facsimile thereof. For the G. O. P., believing it can win with anybody, will do no fancy experimenting with pseudo-liberals or popular generals.

Before concluding that the two major parties were identical and that only Wallace could give the voters a genuine choice next fall, the P. C. A.'s strategists might have asked themselves why political sentiment seems to have shifted so markedly in the past six months. If they had, they would have sensed that, for all the weaknesses and mistakes of the Truman Administration—and we have not glossed them over—there is still a gulf between the two parties, taking them by and large, both in intention and in program. It is a far-cry from the jungle economics of Republican Representative Knutson, who thinks the progressive income tax "conflicts with the American spirit of fair play," to the President's veto of the G. O. P.'s lopsided tax-reduction bill. No matter what dangers lurk in the application of the Marshall Plan, nobody can honestly ignore the difference—acknowledged, in fact, by Wallace himself—between the Administration's foreign-aid program and the vicious attacks of most Republican leaders on the projected "WPA for Europe." Nor do we see an identity between Republicans and Democrats on legislation dealing with inflation or labor.

With a record of having supported "Old Bob" La Follette in 1924, we are not ones to oppose a third ticket merely because it cannot win or because it will serve to elect the less desirable of the two major-party nominees. But it is impossible for us to welcome a third-party movement today or even to treat it as indulgently as the New York Herald Tribune. This good Republican organ coyly and understandably suggests that a third-party which waits for ideal conditions waits for the millennium. The G. O. P. is obviously eager for this hazardous venture to get started.

The fact is that the P. C. A.'s decision could not possibly be worse timed. Perhaps we could afford to take a chance on electing Coolidge in 1924, but the world of 1948 presents a different picture. Connolly, of the American Labor Party, calmly writes off the results of the next election on the ground that "what is important is to form a basis so that in '52 we can elect a people's party." By 1952, the fate of the American economy may well have been sealed and the question of war or peace decided. It is all very well for Communists to entertain the hope that after the deluge their turn will come, but why should Henry Wallace invite either consequence?

It is precisely because of the abnormal importance of the 1948 election that the P. C. A., by its quixotic move, now finds itself cut off from every important labor group in the country. The C. I. O. high command turned thumbs down on the third-party idea months ago. The Railroad Brotherhoods would have no part of it in spite of A. F. Whitney's former bitterness against the President. The A. L. P. will almost certainly be split on the issue. And the P. C. A. itself has been severely jolted by the resignation of Frank Kingdon, Bartley Crum, A. F. Whitney, and J. Raymond Walsh—all officers of the organization and supporters of Wallace's political views. The attitude of labor is alone enough to make Wallace's campaign very different from La Follette's. Never before has a serious progressive group in this country even thought of launching a third party without major support from the trade unions. The result of the P. C. A.'s decision, if Henry Wallace agrees to run, can only be to confuse enough progressives to assure a Republican victory without establishing a mass base for a future third-party movement.

London to Washington

BY FRED A. KIRCHWEY

THE reasons for the breakdown at London have been set forth by the Foreign Ministers, and their versions vary exactly to the degree and in the form dictated by the diverse interests of their respective states. But when those interests are understood and discounted, a certain common denominator emerges from the conflicting explanations: in essence, it was the Marshall Plan that killed the Foreign Ministers' conference.

When the sessions in London began, The Nation made this comment on the outlook: "With the Marshall Plan still in the lap of the Congressional gods, the Foreign Ministers can do relatively little. For all of them must know that the future of Europe is being decided, not in London, but in Washington." In his report on the last day of the session, the New York Herald Tribune's correspondent, Walter Kerr, summed up the reasons for adjournment in these words:

It is generally understood here that progress at