

Campaigning For Communism

By Wm. Z. Foster

(EDITOR'S NOTE:—In his next article, Comrade Foster will point out some of the organizational lessons to be learned from the campaign.)

I.

In the presidential campaign just closed it was my fortune to travel approximately 18,000 miles, visiting fifty big industrial centers in thirty-two states, and speaking to over 50,000 workers in mass meetings. I talked to miners in Ohio, steel workers in Pennsylvania, clothing workers in New York, textile and shoe workers in New England, lumber and migratory workers in Washington, in fact, I talked to every important section of the working class in the great centers in which they toil and are robbed by the employers. During such an extended trip one gathers many impressions. Only a few of these can be registered in the brief space at my disposal.

The most interesting and instructive phase of the trip was to watch our party go into action in this, its first national election campaign. For it to get under way in full vigor serious obstacles had to be overcome. It was not such a simple task as might be imagined. Ever since the organization of the Workers Party, the truth has been pounded into the membership that it is the duty of Communists to participate in mass movements of the workers. This propaganda, which had been accompanied by our active campaign for the formation of a farmer-labor party, for amalgamation, etc., had struck home. Consequently, when our party, just on the eve of the election, cut loose from the skeleton national farmer-labor party and set up a presidential ticket of its own, it was difficult for the membership to readjust itself to the new situation. Something of a crisis developed. It was evident everywhere.

There were the masses undoubtedly going with the LaFollette movement, at least great sections of them that were advanced enough to break away from the two old parties. Our membership displayed a strong instinct, if I may so describe it, to go with them. This was due not only to our propagation of the necessity for participation in mass movements of the workers, but also to the enormous pressure that was brought to bear upon our comrades in the unions and elsewhere. It was a great test of the intelligence and discipline of our party membership that they were able to understand so quickly that the LaFollette mass movement was not one that they could participate in. As the campaign progressed one could sense everywhere the growing confidence of our membership. The feeling of isolation, of nakedness in the political struggle, gradually disappeared and gave way to a militant defense of our own party, as against the treacherous arguments of the LaFollette movement. When the campaign ended, our party had fully established itself and was making a struggle that did credit to it.

The great strength of the LaFollette sweep was also a marked characteristic of the first stages of the campaign. Counting the million or so votes that were certainly stolen from him, LaFollette probably ran up a total of at least 5,500,000. Undoubtedly most of this came from trade unionists and others of the more advanced sections of the workers and poor farmers. In my travels I came into contact with great numbers of these. They had LaFolletteitis badly. To a remarkable degree they looked upon LaFollette as the great champion who was going to solve all their problems for them. It was not that they were familiar especially with the LaFollette program, but the movement had developed into a sort of crusade for them. The pressure of exploitation had been so great for so many years, and the opportunities for organized opposition to it so few, that they rushed pell-mell and blindly into the LaFollette movement.

Everywhere the socialist movement collapsed before the LaFollette drive. Men, who a few years ago called themselves socialists and revolutionists, not only defended the LaFollette can-

didacy on the basis that it would lead to a mass labor party, but they openly and militantly defended all the planks in LaFollette's program, completely abandoning every conception of the class struggle. In many places I met anarchists wearing big LaFollette buttons and loudly touting his cause. Forgetting their anti-parliamentarianism, they were dragged along with the mass. The I. W. W. was also considerably afflicted, many of its members being avowed LaFolletteites. As for the trade union bureaucrats, most of them, at least of the minor types, looked upon the LaFollette movement as a godsend. It seemed a broad white way to the pie-counter. The Gompers' political policy has been such a failure that few of them have been able to work their way to political office. But when the LaFollette movement came storming along, with even conservative leaders like Wm. H. Johnston claiming that it would poll 20,000,000 votes, they saw at last the longed-for political jobs within their grasp.

Up till the last three weeks of the campaign the LaFollette movement kept gaining momentum. After that, it went into evident decline. This was to be seen by the lowered morale of the trade unionists whom one encountered. The great capitalist propaganda machine was getting into action and getting real results. Not only did the great newspapers carry on their "red" scare effectively, but the bosses on the job openly told the workers that if they didn't vote for Coolidge they would soon find themselves among the unemployed. At many of my meetings workers told me they were informed that if LaFollette was elected they should not come back to work after election. The result of this was a crumpling of the LaFollette movement. The action of the Central Labor Union of New York, in cutting loose from LaFollette and declaring for Davis just on the eve of the election, was a symptom of what was going on among the masses generally. They were being scared away from LaFollette en masse.

In the campaign it was made strikingly evident the wisdom of the change of party policy in cutting loose from the national farmer-labor party and the placing of candidates of our own in the field.

At many places where I talked I asked the comrades to try to visualize what would have been the situation had we gone ahead and made the campaign under the banner of the farmer-labor party. Almost unanimously they were appalled at the thought. It would have meant that we would have had in our meetings just about the same people that we did have. The difference would have been that in the one case we would have had to defend farmer-labor candidates and a farmer-labor program. The result would have been demoralization and confusion, which would have amounted to a first class disaster to our party. As it was, we were able to present Communist candidates upon a straight Communist program. We introduced the Workers Party formally to the masses as a factor in the political struggle.

The campaign was a striking justification of the policy of the Communist International to participate in election struggles. It was evident everywhere that the masses were in a thinking mood and it was a splendid opportunity to present our program to them. Besides the capitalist dictatorship was considerably less rigorous with regard to free speech than at any other period. All over the country I, in common with our other speakers, was able to present our program and to advocate the adoption of Soviets and the proletarian dictatorship without serious interference from the authorities. Besides, our party gained much invaluable political experience. This was sadly needed in many localities. In my judgment the New York district showed the greatest responsiveness in exploiting the situation to the advantage of Communism. The two big mass meetings I addressed there, which together comprised about 6,000 people, were an inspiration. Those leftist elements in our party who still believe that partici-

pation in election struggles is not profitable for Communist Parties, would do well to study the lessons of the campaign just ended.

If the campaign was a justification of the party policy of severing its connections with the farmer-labor party and running candidates of its own, it was also a striking justification of the correctness of the decision of the Communist International that there should be no "third party alliance." This justification was because of the almost complete absorption of the farmer-labor party movement by the LaFollette movement. In the famous controversy over the "third party alliance" both sides were wrong in that they overestimated the strength of the farmer-labor movement. The anti-third partyites took the position that there was sufficient definite farmer-labor party sentiment in the country to make practical the running of a farmer-labor party in the campaign with its own candidates. The other group held that the only way the farmer-labor movement could be preserved was thru the proposed alliance. But both were wrong. The sweep of the LaFollette movement shrivelled the tender plant of farmer-labor party movement like a hot blast from the desert. Not even the proposed "third party alliance" had been made,

party alliance" could have held enough of it together to make it a mass movement. The practical effect of it would have been to saddle a dead farmer-labor party upon the back of the Workers Party. We would have been in pretty much the same situation in that respect as we were after the St. Paul convention. I am forced to this conclusion after seeing, during my trip, the sad wreckage of the budding farmer-labor parties by the LaFollette movement. They were simply knocked dead everywhere. The Comintern was right in its decision.

This campaign was an historical event. It was the opening round in a long and desperate struggle against the hard center of world capitalism. In this fight it was my privilege to be the standard bearer of the Communist movement, to lead the attack against the great fortress of the international capitalist class. This was the supreme honor of my life. This campaign was just the merest skirmish, a faint indication of the tremendous battles that are yet to come, a forerunner of the time when the organized millions of the proletariat will strike to earth the capitalist system and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

(To be continued.)

Problems Facing the A. F. of L. Convention

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adheres to the democratic party, and will have Major George L. Berry, strikebreaking head of the Pressmen's Union, as spokesman. Another, tools of the republican party, will rally behind John L. Lewis, president of the Miners' Union, and W. L. Hutcheson, of the Carpenters. A third, the railroad shop unions associated in the C. P. P. A. with independent unions, headed by Wm. H. Johnston, will seek to adapt the LaFollette movement to the republican idea. Gompers will try to ride all three horses, defending the independent candidacy of LaFollette this year while keeping himself free for any kind of political alliance that may seem expedient in the future, and openly bidding for re-entry into the democratic fold.

The Left Wing Stands Firm.

Into this mess of political trading, corruption, and middle class illusions, it will be the task of the left wing militants, the T. U. E. L. adherents and the Communists, to bring the message of clear-cut working class action on the political as well as the industrial field. Against the LaFollette illusion, which means the control of the workers politically by their class enemies, we must bring the conception of a party of the working class, fighting against the capitalists and all their hangers-on—which means a revolutionary party, the Workers (Communist) Party of America.

The political and industrial proposals of the left wing present a practical and comprehensive program of class struggle, to be placed against the whole program of class collaboration of the labor officialdom. This includes the demands for amalgamation of the craft unions into powerful industrial unions; formation of a solid network of shop and factory committees by all workers in each industry; organization of the unorganized; equality of all races in the labor move-

ment; nationalization of the basic industries with workers' control and operation; struggle against wage cuts and lengthening of hours; organization of unemployed councils, and struggle for relief of the unemployed; against Fascism, the Ku Klux Klan and the American Legion, and against "education week"; against deportation of workers, against syndicalism laws, and for the release of all labor prisoners; unconditional recognition of Soviet Russia; struggle against American imperialism and the converting of the Pan-American Federation of Labor from an instrument of the U. S. department of state into an organ of working class struggle for freedom from Morgan's imperialism; for national and international unity, affiliation to the Red International of Labor Unions and support of the world unity movement initiated by it; for the class struggle and the formation of a revolutionary mass party of the working class.

The program of the Trade Union Educational League is a practical program, laying down the necessary basis for any effective struggle by the workers against the exploitation of capitalism. The working class will rally to such a program, in the degree that the "open shop" aggressions of the employers force them to fight—and in the degree that the militants themselves make the workers familiar with the program. In order to put such a program into effect, the workers must also learn that it requires struggle against the labor officials, against the bureaucrats who, holding the offices of the labor movement, at the same time are the greatest defenders of the capitalist system—more zealous even than the capitalists themselves. The slogan must be: "Away with the bureaucratic leaders," "Abandon the class-collaboration policy," "Enter the fight upon the basis of the class struggle and under revolutionary leadership."

COME AND FIND OUT

THOSE who missed last Sunday's Open Forum, which is held every Sunday night in the lodge room at the Ashland Auditorium, Van Buren street and Ashland boulevard, will never know what they were deprived of by not coming to hear Oliver Carlson lecture on the life of young folks in Soviet Russia.

But as there is no way of making amends for the past except by future behavior, it is expected that everybody will be there tomorrow night at 8 o'clock, to listen to Earl R. Browder, editor of the Workers' Monthly and members of the Central Execu-

tive Committee of the Workers Party, who will speak on "The Meaning of the Election Returns."

With the whole labor movement in confusion and demoralization, the A. F. of L. divided in its support to two old capitalist parties and the LaFollette "progressives," reaction triumphant in the election of Coolidge and an industrial crisis threatening along with the open shop to reduce the workers to new low standards, the problem of what to do is of immediate and vital importance. The struggle must go on. But how? Come to hear Browder Sunday night and find out.