
Report to the Executive Committee of the Communist International on the Labor Party Campaign, Dec. 27, 1922.

by Abram Jakira

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To the ECCI
Dec. 27, 1922.

Report on the LP Campaign

Winning the Membership for the LP Campaign.

After the adoption of a clearly defined policy on the LP [Labor Party] based upon careful research into the history of previous attempts to form a Third Party, as well as an analysis of the present condition of the class struggle in the country, the CEC embodied its policy in a resolution and outlined a detailed plan for winning the membership for its policy in order to arouse them into effective action.

1. It toured members of the CEC to all districts and addressed conferences of the most active members.

2. Conferences with all Federations were held to explain the policy.

3. Minute instructions and leading article were furnished to the press.

4. A 48 page pamphlet dealing at length with the question was issued by the WP [Workers Party of America].[†]

5. The WP Executive Committee adopted the policy in favor of a Labor Party and instructions were

sent out to hold branch and city membership meetings of WP.

The result showed that practically the entire Party and WP favored the policy of the CEC. Only in isolated instances was there a dissenting view expressed. This is especially true in regards to the Polish organ, in which the editor, giving his own but not that of the Polish Bureau's opinion, expressed a confusing but essentially opposing viewpoint to that of the Party.

Campaign Among the Masses.

The Conference for Progressive Political Action, which was to meet on Dec. 11 [1922], served as a basis for the immediate campaign of the Party among the masses. This conference was to decide whether the progressive workers and farmers were to establish an independent political party or continue in the fruitless "Non-Partisan" policy of exerting influence as a bloc operating through the existing political parties, aiming to win the candidates by participating in the primaries of the dominant parties or throwing their weight for the election of progressive candidates.

The party issued the above pamphlet, aiming to convince the workers of the need and the possibility of a mass third party in this country, and also a popular leaflet calling for the formation of a Labor Party.[‡]

It held mass meetings in all important centers

[†]- Workers Party of America. *For a Labor Party: Recent Revolutionary Changes in American Politics: A Statement by the Workers Party.* (New York: Workers Party of America, 1922). The first edition of this pamphlet was issued without a byline, although two later editions of the same title acknowledge the authorship of John Pepper on the cover.

[‡]- "A Political Party for Labor," issued by the Workers Party of America in an edition of 25,000 copies.

throughout the country on the eve of the [CPPA] conference, addressed by the most prominent members of the WP.

The press, though not regularly and systematically desirable, made the LP question an important feature of the news and editorial columns.

The TUEL issued a resolution for distribution in the unions calling for the immediate formation of an LP, including all organizations of the workers and urging that unions go on record for this policy, as well as elect delegates to the conference. The issue of their monthly organ — a number just prior to the conference — contained a declaration which showed the effect of the Gompers non-partisan politics on the labor movement, and the burning need of an independent party of the workers.

Conference for Progressive Political Action.

The place of the conference, originally set for Chicago, was changed for Cleveland. This change was made in conformity with the plans of the reactionary labor officials that dominated the Executive Council of the conference, to increase the obstacles in the way of forming the Labor Party. On Dec. 9th and 10th [1922], Chicago was the scene of a rank and file convention of the railroad workers for amalgamation of their 16 crafts, called through the influence of the TUEL, and over the heads and in opposition to [Warren] Stone of the RR unions and [William H.] Johnston of the International Machinists. These two labor head officials were the most powerful leaders in the Conference for Progressive Political Action. They feared that this conference would strengthen those elements which stood for the Labor Party.

The WP sent 4 representatives and 1 YWL [Young Workers League] representative to the conference to demand the right to participate.† These delegates were prepared with a program which they were to fight for the adoption by the conference as the pro-

gram of the LP. They were instructed to unite with all elements standing for the immediate formation of an independent party. Copies of the Manifesto issued by the WP for this occasion, of a proposed LP program, and of the pamphlet prepared for distribution among the delegates at the conference.

The events of the conference can be understood only through reporting of a conference held 10 days prior thereto, of the petty bourgeois liberals, farmers, and labor officials, called upon the initiative and led by Senator [Robert] LaFollette. This conference was extensively held to unite those elements that stood on a program of opposition to the administrations of the two dominant parties and to effect the bloc that would



seek to capture these parties for the petty bourgeoisie, resulting in their victory at the next Presidential election in 1924. It aimed to sidetrack the movement for the third party that seemed likely to be formed on Dec. 11 [1922].

To this conference were invited and participated those yellow reactionary labor officials who had charge of the conference at Cleveland. They agreed to the LaFollette program. Their tactics, therefore, as far as the Cleveland conference was concerned, was to prevent the launching of an LP and to use the conference in support of the La-

Follette politics. To realize this object, they affected a merger with the SP. The latter organization up to the time of the conference had been systematically advocating the launching of a third party and in an issue following the call of the LaFollette conference had warned through the *NY Call* against the danger of LaFollette thwarting the third party movement. But the SP-Hillquit machine was only too glad to sell out for an alliance with the Stone-Johnston clique. The Right Wing of the conference consisted of the Johnston-Stone followers in alliance with the Hillquit machine. The Center consisted of the Farmer-Labor Party of Illinois, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and the Chicago Federation of Labor, under the leader-

†- The Workers Party delegation included Bill Dunne, Caleb Harrison, Ludwig Lore, and C.E. Ruthenberg, all of whom were also members of the underground CPA. The identity of their YWL colleague is not known at this time.

‡- The overlap of personnel between the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) and the Farmer-Labor Party of Illinois, an organization started through the volition of the CFL, was enormous — it was essentially one entity.

ship of John Fitzpatrick.‡ They proposed and were ready to fight for the formation of a Labor Party at this conference. The Left Wing was formed by representative of the WP, the Non-Partisan League of the Northwest, and the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party.

The attitude of these groups toward the seating of the WP delegates determined to a large degree the results of the conference. The Right Wing was severely hostile to the WP and would by all means oppose its being seated. When the Credentials Committee finally reported, it failed to mention the credentials of the WP, and when the issue was raised, it was stated by reporter of the Credentials Committee that the credentials of the WP had not been submitted. This indicated that they were either concealed or stolen and showed a desperate determination of the Right Wing machine to keep the WP out. This was shown by the Right Wing immediately making a violent attack on the WP through their spokesman, [Edward] Keating, a former congressman and now editor of *Labor*, and official AF of L organ. The arguments used by this lackey of the officialdom charged the WP with disruptive activities and relations with the D of J [Department of Justice]. The attack miscarried. After a vigorous reply by [Robert D.] Cramer of the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Council, the Right Wing machine was compelled to refer it back to the Credentials Committee in order to prevent the conference from seating the WP delegates.

The Center group was willing to seat the WP but would not put up a vigorous fight for that object. They stated it was their policy to concentrate their main fight upon the question of the LP and to beat the Right Wing machine on this issue. When the report of the Credentials Committee was mad against the seating of the WP, and through the trickery of the chairman, Johnston, no discussion was permitted, none of the Center group raised the least protest against the conduct of the chair or the report of the Credentials Committee. Only Cramer again raised a protest against the conduct of the chairman in shutting off discussion and steamrolling the report, but unsupported by the Center, he was unable to defeat the machinations of the Right Wing. Thus the WP was not seated.

When the question of organization of the conference was reported in which the question of the LP was finally brought up, the Center group was badly

defeated. The vote was 62 to 52. This defeat was to be expected, because the Center group in deserting the Left Wing failed to prepare the atmosphere for a successful battle by its policy of giving way to the Right Wing on the issue of seating the WP. In their false tactics of conserving their energies for the closing fight, and in their failure to clash with the reactionary wing earlier by taking the immediate offensive, they failed to impress the delegates with the need of a labor party. They did not arouse the conference to a decisive, determined opposition to the Right Wing that was essential, since the latter force was standing in the way of the formation of the LP. The characteristic vacillation and indecision of the Center group made the road easier for the Right Wing victory. The program repeats the planks adopted by the LaFollette conference for reducing taxation, repealing the Esch-Cummins law, aiding the farmers, etc. It has not gone a single step beyond the LaFollette program.

While the Right Wing succeeded in tying up progressive labor as the tail to the kite of the LaFollette petty-bourgeois bloc, the large vote in favor of the LP indicated that tremendous sentiment exists for independent political action by the workers which will soon crystallize into action. The important results of the conference were obtained entirely against the wishes of the dominant group:

1. It placed the WP in the position as one of the most important factors in the political life of the wage earners and farmers, and as the only political group that unequivocally and decisively expresses their interests. The WP was excluded not because of its weakness, but because of its growing strength in the labor movement. The Right Wing sees in the WP the organization that threatens its domination in the unions, a threat which the growing movement of the militant elements under the leadership of the WP in the TUEL will soon make a reality.

2. It lined up the SP, politically as well as industrially, with the yellow officialdom in the AF of L and thus isolated them from the militant trade union elements.

3. It showed that only by artificial methods and brazen trickery has the launching of a party representative of the class interests of the toilers in industry and on the farm been delayed.

Future Policy of the Party.

A renewed and more intense campaign for the LP is to be made by the party, adopting the tactics of forming an alignment with the Center group who, though undecided at the conference regarding their next steps, have now declared for a renewal of its fight for the LP, and who have condemned the continuation of the “non-partisan” plan adopted by the Cleveland Conference. It also condemned the SP for the treacherous role it played at the conference. A comprehensive plan of campaign will be worked out in a few days and will be forwarded.

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Documents and news reports on the conference under separate cover. The weekly organ of the WP [*The Toiler*] contains the story of the conference. A 24 page pamphlet, giving a political review of the conference, will be issued by the WP within several days and will serve as the basis for the campaign.† The conduct of J.B. Salutsky, EC member of the WP, who was a delegate from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and who remained silent when the party was attacked, ignoring every request of the secretary of the WP [Ruthenberg] as well as the editor [Lore] of the German organ of the WP [*Newyorker Volkszeitung*], who also represented the WP, is contained in the organ of the WP, issue of Dec. 23rd [1922].‡

Yours for Communism,

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†- Rather than being issued as a separate tract, this material was incorporated into a “2nd edition, revised and enlarged” of John Pepper’s pamphlet *For a Labor Party*. The expanded edition was published in May 1923 and was followed by further revisions and a 3rd edition later in the year.

‡- C.E. Ruthenberg, “Salutsky — A Communist?” *The Toiler*, Dec. 23, 1922, pg. 2. Available as a downloadable file from www.marxisthistory.org

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