
“One Step Forward — Two Steps Backward” for Mr. Green

by Jay Lovestone

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No one will question the fact that the deadening spirit of Mr. Samuel Gompers ruled the deliberations and dominated the decisions of the last convention of the American Federation of Labor [45th: Atlantic City, NJ — Oct. 5-16, 1925]. We need but look at the endorsement given by the delegates to the capitalist schemes of militarism, to the vicious anti-Soviet Union policy of the Washington government. Who is there who can forget the deaf ear turned to the eloquent plea of [A.A.] Purcell, the chairman of the Amsterdam International, for international trade union unity?

The Labor Party Question.

Yet, in one respect, there was a new keynote struck at this convention of the American Federation of Labor. This was in reference to the labor party.

It is true the resolution for a labor party was overwhelmingly defeated. But the utterances of President [William] Green, in urging the defeat of the labor party resolution, are instructive as well as significant. In every previous convention of the American Federation of Labor, the leaders of the Gompers machine, from Gompers down, denounced the idea of independent working class political action, the plan for the organization of a labor party, as absolutely incongruous with “American ideals” and absolutely impossible for American workers. All the piffle and balderdash about the purity of American capitalist democracy and about the American workers being constitutionally unfitted to act as a class against their exploiters were usually

played to death by the loyal henchmen of the Gompers clique in their attacks on the labor party at the previous conventions of the American Federation of Labor.

“Not Opposed to Labor Party in Principle.”

This year, Mr. Green, who sways Gompers’ presidential scepter of reaction as much as the “Grand Old Man” did in his balmy days, turned just a wee bit aside from the hackneyed path of discrediting and rejecting the idea of a labor party for the American workers.

Mr. Gompers used to denounce the labor party idea in principle. To him the idea of a labor party developing in the United States was synonymous with and the sure forerunner of the collapse of all the glories of the American ruling class which he so loyally served. Mr. Gompers and his aide-de-camp time and again have categorically rejected the idea of a labor party in principle, forever, absolutely.

This year Mr. Green did not reject the labor party idea “in principle,” for the American workers. Mr. Gompers’ successor fought the labor party resolution as violently as it was ever fought at a convention of the American Federation of Labor. But Mr. Green fought the labor party idea mainly on the ground that it could not pay the American workers at this time. President Green declared that today a labor party could not successfully defend the interests of the workers as well as the time-dishonored policy of “reward your friends and punish your enemies,” the so-called non-partisan political policy of the American Federation of Labor could.

This loyal labor lieutenant of capital cited as proof of the correctness of his contentions the experiences of the American workers with the LaFollette campaign, which never was a labor party campaign, which in reality aimed at destroying the labor party movement then afoot in the United States. Nor must we forget that even the LaFollette movement to which the Gompers machine formally pledged some support, was sabotaged and stabbed in the back by the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor. The Gompers wrecking crew saw in the LaFollette campaign a movement of the masses towards the left, a movement away from the discredited non-partisan policy. Therefore, the American Federation of labor

leaders secretly undermined the LaFollette movement to which they publicly proclaimed their allegiance.

“A Labor Party May Be Desirable.”

But let us listen to the words of “wisdom” showered upon the delegates by Mr. Green in his tirade against the idea of a labor party for the American workers. This reactionary bureaucrat declared:

“When America ceases to be an agricultural nation and becomes industrialized, a labor party may be desirable, but for the present, we must elect our friends on existing tickets as we have just done with young Bob LaFollette. The workers can make of this government what they wish it to be. There is no need of a class struggle in this country.

“We have respect for the opinions of all those who believe that through a labor party the workers could advance their political and economic interests, but the great mass of the working people of America do not believe that way..

“There may be a time when we in America can organize a labor party, but we will have to change from an agricultural into a semi-industrial country before we can make a success along that line.”

These are certainly signified words. Mr. Green no longer rejects the labor party in principle. Mr. Green is not opposed to a labor party “in principle,” that is, not forever. Mr. Green is opposed to a labor party just now, today.

Mr. Green no longer denounces the labor party advocates only as dangerous destructionists. Mr. Green says he even has respect for the opinions of those who are for a labor party. To Mr. Green the class struggle is no longer an eternal impossibility in the United States. Times do change.

But we know the methods employed by the enemies of all policies, the application of which would set masses into motion, stir proletarian masses into action against the bourgeoisie. Usually they are not opposed “in principle” to an application of a certain policy, or a certain principle. Usually they are opposed to its application at a par-

ticular time. Usually this particular time is always whenever the advocacy of the application of the particular policy is made.

Yet, the admission by Mr. Green that a labor party may come in the United States, that a labor party may be of help of the workers in the defense of their economic and political interests, or that the American workers even have interests of any kind which differ from the interests of their exploiters is significant. Especially are these words meaningful if they come from the mouth of a member of the royal family of the ruling clique in the American trade union bureaucracy. The writer well recalls how he saw the same Mr. Green sit as a delegate from West Virginia, side by side with the notorious murderer of the striking workers, Sheriff Don Chaffin, in the last national Democratic Party convention in New York City [June 24-July 9, 1924].

For such a gentleman and deserving democrat, such words are certainly blasphemy of the fundamentals of all that is holy to bourgeois America.

But let us examine the reasons given by Mr. Green for a labor party not being timely at present. In our examinations of these reasons we will resort to the investigations and data prepared by the very capitalist government which Mr. Green so anxiously wants to maintain.

Mr. Green now tells us that a labor party is undesirable today and he is opposed to it at present because the United States is still an agricultural country. Mr. Green tells us that a labor party might be desirable in the future when the United States becomes at least "a semi-industrial country," "when America ceases to be an agricultural nation and becomes industrialized."

Some Indisputable Facts.

We will be very frank and blunt about things with you, Mr. Green. On the basis of the reasons you have given above, your case against the labor party doesn't have a leg to stand on, it won't hold a drop of water. It is full of holes. In plain language: You are off. You don't know what you are talking about, Mr. President Green of the American Federation of Labor.

Here are the facts:

You are asleep to what has been happening in the United States in recent years. America is no longer an agricultural country. The United States is no longer a semi-industrial country. The United States left this stage some decades ago.

In the last ten years America's urban population has increased 28.8 percent and its rural population increased only 3.2 percent. In 1923 alone there was a net migration of 1,200,000 from the country to the cities.

For the past 50 years there has been a steady fall in the agricultural proportion of those gainfully employed in America. From 1900 to 1920 the proportion of the total gainfully employed to be found in agriculture in the United States declined from 35.7 percent to 2.3 percent [*sic.*]. From 1910 30.8 percent of the total gainfully employed in agriculture fell 1,705,924 [*sic.*].¹ The last five years have seen a further fall in this direction. At the same time the number gainfully employed in the manufacturing and mechanical industries, in mining, transportation, etc. increased 4,130,497.

More than that, Mr. Green, we now have a bit, definitely crystalized working class, despite the fact that somewhere in the back of your head there still lurk the illusions of the existence of "free land and untrammled, equal opportunities" for the working masses.

In the years of 1910 to 1920 the total number of wage earners — manual and clerical — has increased from 22,406,714 to 26,080,689. Today, while you are opposed to a labor party, Mr. Green, on the ground that the United States is not yet even a semi-industrial country, the wage-earning elements constitute about 63 percent of the total gainfully employed in this country.

The proportion of persons engaged in manufacturing and mechanical industries in the United States has risen from 22.5 percent in 1900 to 30.8 percent of the total gainfully employed in 1920.

And the United States official census figures show that the industrial proletariat — that is the wage workers in mining and quarries,

¹ This is clearly garbled in the original. A possibly correct rendition might be: "From 1900 to 1920 the proportion of the total gainfully employed to be found in agriculture in the United States declined from 35.7 percent to 30.8 percent. From 1910 the number gainfully employed in agriculture fell 1,705,924."

building trades, transportation, manufacturing, stationary engineers and firemen — increased from 12,800,325 in 1910 to 15,540,486 in 1920. Today, while you are opposed to a labor party, Mr. Green, the industrial proletariat is nearly 60 percent of the whole wage-earning class and the wage-earning class is nearly 63 percent of the total gainfully employed in the United States.

With a wage-earning class of more than 26 million and an industrial proletariat of more than 15 and a half million, America is far from being an agricultural country. Under these conditions the time and material for a labor party are at hand, now, today, and not in some unknown date in the distant future.

Mr. Green Asleep at the Switch.

If we were polite, Mr. Green, we would say that you are a sort of a Rip Van Winkle. you have been asleep a good many years, insofar as the development of an American working class and the protection of its interests are concerned. The imperialist development of America, the World War, the Dawes Plan, the rise of the world's banker and manufacturer as well as the world's pantryman have all escaped your observation and understanding, to express it charitably.

These very powerful social forces with their deep going effects on class relations in the United States, which you profess to be ignorant of, Mr. Green, have for some time been working energetically and against you.

The very fact that you are now compelled to take one step forward and tell the world that you are no longer opposed to a labor party in principle, Mr. Green, shows that these social forces working behind your back which you have so shamefully turned on the workers, are driving you to see the hastening collapse of your dastardly policy of reward your enemies and hang yourself, the breakdown of your beloved so-called non-partisan policy.

Towards a Labor Party.

Nor, Mr. Green, will your moving two steps backwards, by urging the American workers to believe that the United States is still in the

days of 1870 or earlier and that they should therefore today reject the idea of a labor party, halt the operation of and fermentation of these social forces.

Backward or sideward, as you may move, Mr. Green, the reasons you have given the last American Federation of Labor convention against a labor party are shoddy, threadbare. The fabric of your case is full of holes.

Economic and political developments are weaving a new warp and woof of class relationships in the United States. America is headed for a labor party, separate and distinct from and opposed to the political parties of the capitalists. The American workers are waking up despite the fact that the Greens, the [Matthew] Wolls, and other high-priced lieutenants of capital in the ranks of labor may be asleep, blind, or bitterly hostile to this forward movement of the working class in the United States.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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