

The Federated Farmer-Labour Party of the United States

July 3rd, 1923, will always be accounted a most important date in the history of the Labour movement of America. On that day was convened the conference from which emanated the Federated Farmer-Labour Party of the United States. Born amidst the enthusiasm of delegates representing farmers and workers of thirty-one States of the union, this party is the crystallisation and expression of the will to power of the militant organised workers and farmers of the country.

The Federated Farmer-Labour Party is the product of many years of struggle of the American proletariat and farmers to find a way out of the straits into which they have been driven in the struggle against capitalism. In the 'eighties of the last century, the Knights of Labour attempted to organise a party of the working class. The farmers have also made several attempts to organise parties, such as the People's Party in 1890 and more latterly the Non-Partisan League in 1915. The militant workers and the farmers of the United States, however, have at last realised that they must unite their forces in order effectually to cope with capital in its present concentrated form in the United States.

During the war, when prosperity appeared to be general property, the farmers profited very little. Mortgages increased in number, the amount involved more than doubled from 1910 to 1920, and to-day is above **eight billion dollars**. The farmers have suffered at the hands of the speculators and the railroads. Although the cost of food in the cities is high, the farmer has not received the benefit of the high prices. Unable to obtain decent prices for his produce, he has been forced to pay inflated prices for industrial products. **With more than 40 per cent. of the farms mortgaged and 38 per cent. of the farmers reduced to the status of tenants**, it was quite natural that a veritable exodus of the farming population should take place. In 1922 more than **2,000,000** left the farms for the city, disgusted and hoping to find work in industry.

The farmers have grasped the value of co-operation and have built up tremendous co-operative selling and distributing concerns. But the capitalists have not been slow in attacking their endeavours to help themselves; they have put every obstacle in their way. They have tried to break them economically by boycotts and finally by legislation. The farmers realised that their economic organisations would not suffice and organised politically. The first effective move took place in the State of North Dakota, where the Non-Partisan

League took power. It established State banks and other mutual and State institutions for the benefit of the farmers. Wall Street mobilised against the State: banks were forced to close their doors—the force of the Non-Partisan League in North Dakota was broken and the capitalists again assumed power.

But the idea behind the Non-Partisan League could not be stopped so easily. It has spread to several States of the Middle and Far West, assuming diverse forms. Thus, in the most recent past, the farmers were not the most forward and effective in political action.

The workers have been restrained from political action by the stupid policy of the American Federation of Labour. For more than twenty years the leaders of the A.F. of L. have proclaimed the policy of “rewarding the friends and punishing the enemies of Labour”; and for twenty years Gompers has had to complain that the results of this policy have been negligible. The continual reiteration of the policy indicated that there was an undercurrent of unrest in the organised Labour movement of the United States that sought independent political expression. Pursuing a false policy, the Radicals in the past have left the American Federation of Labour to form Radical and revolutionary independent unions. This fact militated against the coalescence of the political forces within the Labour movement and left the organised workers a prey to their reactionary leaders and to the shrewd politicians of the capitalist parties.

The Socialist movement, isolating itself from the Labour movement and adopting an intransigent attitude in the matter of organisation, could not reach the masses. The result was that the only party that might have offered leadership to the workers and have formed an effective union with the farmers was able to gather less than a million votes. And these votes were merely votes; they did not represent a solid, united body that would fight. They were not a body of men either class-conscious or growing in class-consciousness. They were merely a gathering together of the disgruntled elements, who, on election day, voiced their protest against the existing regime.

The Farmer-Labour Party was formed in 1919 and comprised farmers' and workers' organisations, which affiliated as bodies. This party, too, was a purely electoral party, although it had a small permanent membership. Nevertheless, the Farmer-Labour Party did not make the proper progress. Although it gained in influence in several States, there was lacking an understanding of the struggle against capitalism. It is a party that believes in American “democracy” and trusts to the united forces of the workers and farmers to gain power and finally secure “justice” for the producing classes. The particular feature of this party, however, was that the Labour elements comprising were organised workers. The leaders are men who have fought in the Labour movement for decades, men who have

been in the front line in the violent Labour struggles that regularly shake the fabric of American capitalism. In the elections of November, 1922, the Farmer-Labour Party received the co-operation of the Non-Partisan League and achieved several notable victories, those in the Minnesota being conspicuous among them.

The existence of many groups and small parties seeking to organise the workers and the farmers has been a curse to the American Labour movement. The idea of the United Front caught the fancy of the more far-sighted elements. It was time to unite in a political party all the progressive workers and farmers, in order, with united force to go forward in the struggle against the old capitalist parties, and particularly against the philosophy and ideology created by the slogan of Gompers, of seeking out and supporting the proper capitalist candidates.

In February, 1922, the first conference was called in Chicago, for the purpose of forming a new party to comprise workers and farmers' organisations. The Workers' Party, which to-day is the Communist Party of America—looked somewhat sceptically upon the idea. Was the country ripe for the experiment? Was it the notion of a few men, or were the organised workers and large section of the farmers prepared to join forces in such a party? The Workers' Party did not participate in the conference. It sent a letter stating its position. The conference organised and decided to call another conference in December.

Since 1919, the American Labour movement has passed through severe trials. During the war, the organised workers were able to obtain many concessions from the employers, owing to the scarcity of hands, and the necessity of producing at high speed—which meant tremendous profits for the capitalists. Despite the appeals of President Wilson that they should not take advantage of the war situation to profiteer, the manufacturers indulged in a profiteering orgy such as the country has never witnessed. They could, therefore, very well yield to the demands of the workers—with the reserve that when the war was over, they "would show Labour its place." In the year 1919 began the capitalist offensive. Tremendous strikes broke out. The steel strikes convulsed the country and brought out Federal troops in large numbers in aid of the steel trust. The miners' strikes in 1919 and 1920, with their injunctions, thuggery and troops; the tremendous unemployment of 1921, with the Government indifferent to the sufferings of the 8,000,000 jobless men and women, including about a million ex-service men; the strikes of the railroad shopmen, miners and textile workers in the summer of 1922, with the usual features of repression and violence, gradually taught the workers the necessity of getting together politically as well as industrially. The Daugherty injunction issued in September, 1922, was probably the best instrument in driving the workers together and clearly demon-

strating to them that they must obtain political power in order to beat the employers; that they must secure his power to deprive the capitalists of the might to crush them, even with such edicts as this injunction. For this injunction—which was made permanent in **July of this year**—denied the workers the right to strike; it prohibited the expression of sympathy with the strikers, the offer of financial aid or moral support.

The Supreme Court had rendered decisions so sweeping that the very existence of the Labour movement has been endangered. By one decision, it rendered unions liable for damages in case of strikes; by another it declared the Child Labour Law and the Minimum Wage Law unconstitutional. How combat these facts? Surely the policy of rewarding and punishing cannot help. The workers of America were face to face with the most powerfully concentrated financial power in the world, epitomised in Wall Street; with political power, which revealed itself to the working class in the form of repressive legislation, court injunctions, and decisions, gunmen, militia and Federal troops.

Several of the international unions, such as the miners, railroad workers, needle workers, typographical workers, etc., central Labour bodies and a large mass of the organised workers generally, were on record as favouring the formation of a Labour Party. The American worker was instinctively moving to an expression of class-consciousness, even though it was not yet clear.

The reactionary and pseudo-progressive leaders of the American Federation of Labour realised the danger of this movement, December, 1922, was a menace to their power. The left wing was forming in the trade unions—the workers and the farmers were talking unity in political action. In the capitalist parties, too, there was a sense of impending disaster. The Progressives in the Republican and Democratic Parties comprehended that a realignment of forces was not only essential in American political life, but also imminent. Should the vital Labour and Farmer forces be united in a Farmer-Labour Party, the bourgeois progressives would be deprived of the very support on which they hope to build a new party—with themselves as the leaders. La Follette is a shrewd tactician; he held a conference with the moderate trade union leaders on December 1. On December 9 these leaders proceeded to the conference for Progressive Political Action at Cleveland called for the purpose of forming a Labour Party, and there, in conjunction with the Socialists, sabotaged the formation of a Labour Party. The Socialists had been loud propagandists for a Labour Party, but when the moment for its formation arrived, they sold out to the leaders who had pledged their word to La Follette.

The Communists had carried on a campaign for the establishment of a Labour Party. The growing demand for a party of the

workers and farmers convinced them that the producing classes of the United States are waking up. But the efforts of the Workers' Party were of no avail. Through the trickery of the Socialist Party and through the inability of the Farmer-Labour Party and the elements co-operating with it, to fight, the delegates of the Workers' Party and of the local unions who represent the militants in the Labour movement, were not seated. The conference was an abortion—the working class of America was again betrayed.

The Farmer-Labour Party, unwilling to accept this treachery, disconnected itself from the conference and called another conference. The Communists realised that the best tactics would be to remain in the conference and fight for control. But the Farmer-Labourites knew with whom they had to deal; they were men whose aim it was and is to keep the farmers and workers unorganised, to keep them from united political action. The Workers' Party accepted the call. It began a militant campaign in behalf of the idea of a Labour Party, the Trade Union Educational League, the organising body of the Left Wing in the trade unions, issued a referendum among the 35,000 local unions of the A.F. of L., the returns of which demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of the rank and file of organised Labour in America is in favour of a Labour Party.

On July 3 there assembled in Chicago 740 delegates, representing more than 600,000 workers and farmers, who had answered the call to form a Federated Farmer-Labour Party. The birth of the new party, however, was not to be one of unmixed joy. Events of great importance had transpired during the month of June, which intimidated the leaders of the Farmer-Labour Party, the convokers of the conference.

The struggle for the recognition of Soviet Russia is assuming vast dimensions in the United States. International Unions, State and local central Labour bodies demand the recognition of Soviet Russia. The Seattle Central Labour Union has long demanded recognition; it stands for most of the progressive measures advocated in the Labour movement of the country. For its militancy, it was threatened by Gompers with expulsion from the American Federation of Labour. The Minnesota State Federation of Labour was threatened with a similar fate. The fight has been waged with the greatest intensity, however, in the United Mine Workers of America. The miners have passed through the hardest struggles, with leaders always ready to negotiate, but afraid to fight. The miners demand militant leadership. They face hunger and danger day by day, a strike for decent conditions signifies a struggle against the most powerful group of capitalists in the country—the United States Steel Corporation, backed by the Government. But the militants are strong and courageous. They organised the Progressive Miners' Committee and proclaimed war on the reactionary clique ruling the

miners' union. They captured the Pennsylvania district, the most powerful in the organisation, and were preparing to capture the national organisation at its next convention. Lewis, the yellow leader of the union, declared the Progressive Miners' Committee a "dual union" and ordered the expulsion of its members. He also expelled a district in Canada because of its militancy. The fight is on in the American Federation of Labour; militant unionism, recognition of Soviet Russia and a Labour Party, against the reactionary bureaucracy of the American Federation of Labour.

The leaders of the Farmer-Labour Party, who are also leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labour, were afraid of the fight.

It means a fight without compromise. It means a fight against not only the reactionary A.F. of L. officialdom, but also the capitalist class. The Farmer-Labour leaders failed; they had called the conference for the formation of a Labour Party, but now declared the time inopportune. They stood alone with a small group of their party delegates. The farmers of the West and Middle West, the organised miners, railroad workers, needle workers, the central labour bodies, the Workers' Party, the Young Workers' League (Young Communists), the important State organisations of the Farmer-Labour Party, the Proletarian Party, the Minnesota organisation of the Socialist Party, which defied the decision of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party and sent delegates to the conference, the World War Veterans, the African Blood Brotherhood (a militant Negro organisation), and numerous fraternal workers' organisations—all of them declared that the time had come for the formation of a Federated Farmer-Labour Party and that delay would be disastrous.

To give up the fight in any of its phases is to slip back into reaction. The Farmer-Labour leaders fell from the militant position they have occupied in the American Labour movement. They have fought for industrial unionism, for recognition of Soviet Russia, they have fought militantly for the relief of Soviet Russia, and defended the Communists after the raid on their convention in Michigan. They issued the call for the formation of the new party. Despite these facts, they fell—and resorted to the methods of denunciation employed by Gompers, the yellow-Socialists and the capitalist Government. They denounced the Communists; and yet their denunciation only had the effect of drawing the farmers and the rank and file of the Labour movement closer to the Communists, the Workers' Party. The names "Communist" and "Bolshevik" have no fears for the farmers and militants. All fighters in the United States are called those names. The propaganda of the Workers' Party had been responsible for the success of the conference; the clear-headed strategy of the Workers' Party leaders alone kept the conference from being wrecked. There is no doubt that the militant workers and the oppressed farmers looked to this conference to create a party and

adopt a programme that would unite the producers in the struggle against the parasites. Despite the sabotage of the Socialists, who declined the invitation to the conference, preferring the company of the officialdom of the American Federation of Labour and La Follette's Liberals; despite the denunciation of the disgruntled, intimidated group of Farmer-Labour leaders, the Federation Farmer-Labour Party was established. **A mass party of the workers and farmers of the United States is a fact.**

The Federated Party has the same organisational form as the British Labour Party, being a party of affiliated organisations and not of individual membership. For the present, it differs from the British party in that it is the result of a movement from below, against the will of the leaders. Its growth will come from below, from the rank and file who will force the leaders to show colour.

Early in the conference it was obvious that something was wrong; a fight was made against seating some of the delegates. The Workers' Party was forced to take the leadership to protect the conference from the disruptive tactics of the Farmer-Labour Party leaders. It was obliged to maintain this leadership throughout—otherwise no party would have resulted. Nevertheless, the new party is not a Communist Party; its programme is not a Communist programme. It is a programme on which the militant workers and farmers in the present stage of the struggle in the United States can unite. It is a programme that all organised workers can accept. Coming from this conference, as a matter of course, it will be called Bolshevik.

With a short introductory analysis of conditions in America, it demands control of the Government by the workers and farmers, public ownership of public utilities with workers' and farmers' control, protection against unemployment and sickness, a maximum eight-hour day, minimum wages, soldiers' bonus to be provided by a tax on excess profits, inheritances and unearned income, payment of war debts by an excess profits tax, creation of a tax system that will "eliminate landlordism and tenancy and secure the land to the users of the land," a moratorium for all working farmers on their farm mortgage debts for a period of five years.

The Communists are aware that conditions and the struggle in America will clarify issues and gradually make the programme of the Federated Farmer-Labour Party more Communistic. The formation of the party was a momentous event, not only for the workers and farmers, but particularly for the Communists. Through the Trade Union Educational League, the left wing has been formed in the trade unions of America. Being the most active spirits in the League, the Communists have secured contact with and leadership among the progressives and radicals of the trade union movement.

The new party will give them political contact not only with the workers but above all with the militant farmers. In a country like America with a large farming population, oppressed and harrassed, sinking into debt and poverty—but a farming population that in many strikes has shown its solidarity with the workers by furnishing them with food, etc.—it was essential not only that contact should be secured with the farmers, but that they should be persuaded of the necessity of intimate co-operation with the industrial workers.

Two significant facts were demonstrated by the conference; the industrial workers, particularly of the Middle and Far West are not to be intimidated by names. “Communist” and “Bolshevik” and “Reds” did not abash them. Secondly, the **Farmers showed more radicalism than many of the industrial workers.** At the Cleveland Conference, in December, a United States Senator from the west declared that even the “bankers of the West are more radical than the workers in the East.” The radicalism of the farmers is most significant, for Wall Street is at present trying to prove to the farmers that the cause of their plight is the high wage demanded by the city worker. A conservative farmers’ organisation—the National Farm Bureau Federation—is carrying on a campaign on behalf of the railroads against the demands of the workers in general and of the railroad workers in particular for higher wages. But increasing mortgages and increasing farm tenancy are more potent arguments in the mind of the farmer than the regular propaganda against the workers issuing from the offices of Wall Street.

What is the outlook of the Federated Farmer-Labour Party? Several facts must be taken into consideration. A realignment of political forces in the United States unquestionably is taking place. The Progressive Bloc in Congress is wielding great power. If the Republican Party nominates a real progressive, it will remain intact and probably win the election next year. A real progressive will attract a large part of the farmer and labour vote, who would still hope for betterment from a “good man.” If, on the other hand, the Republicans nominate a conservative, the party will split, and La Follette will probably be the candidate of a third party. La Follette would concentrate a big section of the labour and farmer vote, thereby detracting from the support of the Federated Farmer-Labour Party.

The Socialists have formed a sham party called the American Labour Party as a unit within the Conference, for Progressive Political Action. The split of the few leaders of the Farmer-Labour Party may result in a coalition between these two groups. This would merely create some confusion in the political atmosphere. The Federated Farmer-Labour Party will call another conference in December or January for the purpose of nominating candidates for the elections of 1924. They will invite the conference for Progressive Political

Action and all organised labour to co-operate. It is not improbable that a large number of the bodies affiliated to the conference will answer the call. The trade union leaders will continue to sabotage; the Socialists will refuse to co-operate, fearing the organisational power of the Communists. There will probably be an accretion from the local unions—the rank and file of the organised labour movement.

After the elections of 1924, the growth of the Federated Farmer-Labour Party is assured. The old parties will practice the same deception. Prosperity will be at an end, the capitalist offensive will begin once more and labour and the farmers will be out on the defensive. Their answer will be a counter-offensive under the ægis of the Federated Farmer-Labour Party.

The initial step has been taken. The **real** political struggle between labour and capital in the United States will now begin.

I. AMTER.

