
The “National Farmer-Labor Party” — In Memoriam

by William F. Dunne

Published in *The Daily Worker Special Magazine Supplement* [Chicago], March 29, 1924, pg. 7.

Robert M. Buck and J.G. Brown, for the group calling itself the National Farmer-Labor Party, in *The New Majority* for March 22 [1924], explain the position of that almost defunct organization relative to the recent Minnesota conferences, the June 17th convention, the July 4th conference, the Communist bugaboo, and many other things.

To Correct False Impressions.

It is solely for the purpose of clearing up any false impressions created by the gentlemen mentioned above that this article is written. Their expressions of despair at and disappointment with the outcome of the Minnesota conference are merely an extension of the attitude they assumed at these important meetings and it is therefore necessary to state clearly what that attitude was and what the delegates to the Minnesota conferences represented. Neither from the article in *The New Majority* on the Minnesota conferences signed by Robert M. Buck, nor from the official report of Buck and Brown as delegates can be learned the fact that every conference and convention [endorsed the June 17 gathering], beginning with the St. Paul meeting of the Farmer-Labor Party representatives from 7 states on March 10 [and] the convention of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party



on March 14, represented by delegates of delegates of functioning Farmer-Labor Parties and economic organizations, hundreds of thousands of workers and farmers.

These delegates had been elected by their organizations for the specific purpose of passing upon the advisability of calling a great convention of delegates from labor unions, working class political parties, cooperative societies, etc., and organizing these forces on the political field.

The organizations represented at the Minnesota conferences were those which had committed themselves to a political party separate and distinct from the parties of American capitalism and whose attitude towards independent political action was not predicated upon the bolt of one or more progressives from the old parties, but adopted as the fundamental principle of political action for a mass party of workers and farmers.

Authoritative Gathering.

The St. Paul conference was a mandated body. Every delegate came with authority to make decisions on behalf of his organization and represented there were the Western Progressive Farmers of Washington, the Farmer-Labor Parties of Washington, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, the Progressive Party of Nebraska, the Farmer-Labor Federation of Minnesota, the local party of Buffalo, NY, and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. In addition to these bona fide parties

there were the National Farmer-Labor Party of America — a party in name only, without members or even a good mailing list — represented by buck and Brown; the seceding Illinois faction of this same organization represented by Rodriguez and Gifford Ernst, and a non-existent labor party in Washington, DC, represented by one William V. Mahoney.

The vote against holding the proposed convention on June 17 [1924] is given by Buck as 12 to 6 without any explanation of its character. It is enough to say here that Rodriguez, Ernst, Buck, Brown, William V. Mahoney of Washington, DC, with one Minnesota delegate voted in opposition, with the obvious corollary that the June 17 convention was favored by all of the bona fide Farmer-Labor Parties outside of Minnesota and by half of the Minnesota delegation. It should be noted also that the secession of Rodriguez and Ernst gave the "National" Farmer-Labor Party 2 more votes — a total of 4, one for each member.

This gives the lie to the statements made and reiterated by Buck and Brown to the effect that it was Communist control that forced the setting of the convention date. As a Communist I wish that this were true, but the facts are otherwise.

The truth of the matter is, and everybody who attended the Minnesota conference knows it, that Buck and Brown, united for the purpose with Rodriguez and Ernst, came to St. Paul, not to work for unity in the Farmer-Labor ranks, but to destroy the movement for a class Farmer-Labor Party in the interests of the Conference for Progressive Political Action and the middle class elements which the officialdom of that organization follows.

Destructionist Efforts.

This group, representing nothing and nobody but themselves since they bolted the July 3rd [1923] convention, tried to scare the other elements in the conferences with the threadbare

tales of the Communist menace, disrupt the Northwest movement, and leave nothing but scattered fragments to be picked up by the politicians and union bureaucrats who will dominate the July 4th [1924] gathering. They were willing to take the risk of wrecking the whole movement for a class Farmer-Labor Party in order to accomplish this purpose.

Meeting with no success in St. Paul because their tactics and the motives that prompted them were well understood by the real representatives of the Northwest Farmer-Labor movement who, however, accorded them the courtesy of listening patiently to every lie, misrepresentation, slander, innuendo, and jesuitical argument they had to lay before the conference, this group then went to Minneapolis, and, forming another united front with the most reactionary section of the Minnesota labor and farmer movement, hung around the fringe of the powerful organization that was taking form and peddled their poison to everyone that would listen.

United Front of Reaction.

During the 3 conferences that were held in Minneapolis following the St. Paul meeting, the conferences that brought unity in the labor-farmer movement in Minnesota, these free-lance apostles of a policy of timidity and hesitation were seen with such obstructionists as Baldus and Thomason of the now defunct Non-Partisan League, [and] Parsons and Vandenberg, meal-ticket artists and fakers par excellence. In short, they cooperated to the best of their ability with the Van Lear-Townley clique that prostituted the *Minnesota Daily Star* and did its best to make the Minnesota movement a tail to the political kite of spineless and crooked office-seekers.

William V. Mahoney of Washington [DC] even journeyed to St. Cloud and continued his scandal-mongering at the convention of the official Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota until he was

squelched by William Mahoney of St. Paul, chairman of the Farmer-Labor Federation of Minnesota.

The report published in *The New Majority* is therefore sadly lacking in both detail and truth. Were it a truthful record of what took place in Minnesota it would state that the men who signed it and 2 of their allies already named, at a time when a great coalition of the working class forces of the Northwest was taking shape, deliberately sabotaged the unity process as well as they could and that their activities were a source of aid and comfort to every foe of the labor movement and were commented upon gleefully by the capitalist press of the Twin Cities.

Habitual Bolters.

After mentioning not a single one of the developments in Minnesota that are recognized even by labor's enemies as of the greatest significance, Buck explains that his organization (composed of himself and Brown) did not sign the call for the June 17 convention "in view of its domination by the Communists, not from any red-baiting motives, not because they are radicals, but because it is impossible to work with them toward the establishment of a Labor Party that organized labor will support."

This is a rather frank admission that the secession of the Buck Brown group last July was no accident but that they are habitual secessionists; it is also an admission that at St. Paul they refused

to be bound by the majority decision of the real Farmer-Labor Parties, who find no such difficulty in working with Communists and that in any gathering of workers where their vacillating policy is beaten by a policy of action they will refuse to go along.

The Future.

The Buck-Brown-Rodriguez-Ernst group now pin their faith on the CPPA and July 4 [1924]. They bolted the Cleveland convention of this organization [Dec. 11-12, 1922] against the advice of the Communists, who told them to stay on the inside; now they are going back to their vomit. They have no faith in June 17, they say, because they do not believe it possible that respectable middle class politicians will accept support from an organization with which the Workers (Communist) Party of America is affiliated; they have forgotten all about the June 17 convention as the best guarantee of independent action on July 4 and they now stake all, not on the workers and farmers, but on politicians and labor officialdom — the same elements they have many times denounced as hopeless.

Where will this little handful of former progressives finally align themselves? It is hard to say but right now they are headed with John Fitzpatrick, their economic foundation, straight for the Gompers camp. There they may find a quiet resting place but just at present they are homeless, helpless, hopeless, and alone.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.