

LaFollette In Congress

By Jay Lovestone

IN his twenty-five years at Washington, Robert M. LaFollette has been the outstanding figure in the fight for but one measure which might be called a labor law in the strict sense of the term. Except for the fight led by him in behalf of the enactment of the Seamen's Law, Senator LaFollette has not been directly connected with any noteworthy labor legislation.

It is true he voted for the Woman Suffrage Amendment, the proposed Child Labor Amendment, the establishment of the Department of Labor, and the eight-hour day for government employees. It is true he was against the Ship Subsidy Bill, the Esch-Cummings Act, and the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Bill. But these votes could scarcely be interpreted as signs of genuine progressivism, as evidence of unrelenting hostility to the employing class interests. Many Republicans and Democrats have voted for and against those measures precisely in the same way as LaFollette did. Yet, no one would on his account call these congressmen and senators progressives worthy of the support of the workers and farmers. Many of those who have voted for the Woman's Suffrage Amendment or the Howell-Barkley Bill for abolishing the Railroad Labor Board are today ardent advocates of the election of Coolidge or Davis.

Progressivism On Wane

If we analyze LaFollette's attitude towards such pressing questions in Congress as the raising of revenue, the regulation of business and the tariff, we will find that the Wisconsin Senator has not been fundamentally antagonistic to the corporate interests of the country and has consciously expressed and fought for the needs of the middle and smaller capitalists as against the encroachments of the biggest capitalist groups. At no time has LaFollette spoken or worked for the laborers as a class against the employers exploiting them.

Then LaFollette's insurgent group in the House has even less cause to speak of its being genuinely progressive. We have seen that their leader, John M. Nelson, now LaFollette's national campaign director, voted for the conscription law. In the feeble effort made to liberalize the rules of procedure in the House and in the half-hearted attempts at shifting the burden of honourous taxation from the poor to the rich, the LaFollette progressives acted disgracefully.

When LaFollette first entered congress he was a regular in every sense of the word. His Senate radicalism, whatever there has been of it, is on the wane.

In such questions as the restriction of immigration, the giving of more power to our capitalist government to control the movements of workers, or in the matter of Japanese exclusion, LaFollette has not taken a commanding position to stay the hands of the exploiters in utilizing these occasions to divide and weaken the workers.

Not Against Big Capitalists

In debating the various revenue measures preparatory to America's entering the war Senator LaFollette made it very plain in offering his amendments that he did not relish the idea of being considered a foe of the business interests of the land. Thus he declared, on February 23, 1917, in behalf of his own amendments before the U. S. Senate. "These amendments, embodying as they do a complete scheme of raising revenue without the tax on business and the bond issue, should be voted on bloc."

Continuing to assure the democratic defenders of the big capitalist groups that he was not in fundamental disagreement with them on the basic issues, LaFollette further said: "It is in no spirit of partisanship that I criticize the revenue bill now before the senate but in the hope and belief that that majority is open to argument and will accept amendments to the measure calculated to improve it without encroaching upon any of

the tenets, political or economic, of the majority party." (C. Rec. p. 4489, Feb., 23, 1917.)

In general, LaFollette represented the interests of the small business class and the small bankers on this all-important questions of revenue-raising. On August 18, 1917, for instance, LaFollette voted against a bill to put a tax of one cent on checks, drafts, etc. Senator Simmons, the democratic tax expert, thus explained the opposition to the proposal: "It is stated and stated correctly that there was a protest, I might say quite a general protest, on the part of the bankers against this tax, but this protest came chiefly and especially from the smaller banks."

Fair to Business

And on August 19, 1911 LaFollette, in making a plea to the senate for fairness to business, thundered against the supreme court on the following grounds: "As the law now stands, as amended by the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court may exercise a power over the business interests of the country more despotic than any monarch of the civilized world over his subjects."

"To one corporation it may give approval that the combinations which it has entered into in restraint of trade are reasonable. To another corporation it may say that the combinations which it has entered are unreasonable."

Further strong interest in the wel-

examination of the rates on sixty articles in this law shows that on the whole they were practically identical with the rates on the same articles in the Fordney-McCumber Act of 1922. Addressing the House of Representatives on May 10th, 1890, in behalf of the McKinley Bill, LaFollette said:

"Repeal the protective duties and you have stopped the looms, put out the fires, stunted as with the hand of death the busy industries of my state. . . . It is to preserve the markets of this country to our own producers that we have kept the duties like a breastwork, high enough to protect the man who is busy adding to the sum of its wealth from assault from any foreign source."

Then in a speech he delivered at the Schlitz Park Theatre, Milwaukee, on September 20, 1900, LaFollette justified the American declaration of war against Spain and the annexation of conquered territory. He advocated the use of American troops to put down insurrection in the eastern hemisphere and vigorously assailed all the critics of the administration. At that time LaFollette was making his first race for governor.

In denouncing the Bryan proposal to establish a stable government in the Philippines and then withdraw, LaFollette entered into the following eulogy of American imperialism:

"The market which the Philippines will afford the U. S. while amounting to many millions annually, is unim-

in order to build up this industry. The American Tin Plate Company, capitalized at more than fifty million dollars, the Tin Plate Trust, a subsidiary of the United States Steel Corporation, is a monument to LaFollette's progressivism on the tariff.

Then, when the Payne Aldrich Tariff Bill was being considered, LaFollette put up an aggressive fight to secure an amendment "to enable the mills now manufacturing print paper in Wisconsin to so adjust themselves with respect to the manufacture of paper not requiring spruce wood, that they could manufacture it economically without changing the location of those plants."

LaFollette has always been a loyal defender of the zinc interests in his state. On June 16th, 1909, LaFollette made a special plea to the senate to lay a duty on zinc "based on the difference in the cost of production in this country and Mexico . . . a protective duty measuring the difference between the cost of production in Mexico and in Wisconsin and in Joplin as well. . . ."

Votes for High Tariff.

Though LaFollette made a strong plea for a higher duty on zinc than that fixed by the house and a higher duty than that submitted by the senate committee, he asked that he be excused from voting because of his own property interest in zinc. Several years later appearing before the committee conducting hearings on the Maintenance of a Lobby to Influence Legislation, LaFollette made an interesting confession explaining why he refused to vote on the higher tariff rates on zinc, and why he spoke for it. He said in part:

"I own an interest in some zinc bearing lands in Southwestern Wisconsin" I ought perhaps to say that when the tariff on zinc was under consideration, four years ago, I felt as one of the Senators representing the state of Wisconsin in which are located about three counties producing zinc and lead that it was my duty to present to the senate the arguments that it seemed to me should be made from their standpoint. While my interest in the matter was such that I wanted to be excused from voting on the amendment relating to this subject, I felt that those I represented were entitled to have the argument presented and so I made on the floor of the senate what might be called an argument to influence action upon the question." (Pages 190-191)

Scrutinizing the various votes on the emergency tariff, (H. R. 15275,) we find that the Wisconsin Senator voted to change the tariff on wheat from thirty to forty cents, for two cents per pound on frozen meat, the Smoot amendment for tariff on sugar and molasses, a duty of eight cents per pound on butter and substitutes, and a tariff on condensed milk. Mr LaFollette is also recorded as voting in favor of the passage of the bill as a whole. True, these rates were not as high as the ones he voted for in the McKinley Bill, yet LaFollette's votes indicate that he believes in a tariff to protect the business interests of the country.

Progressive Group Shoddy

Senator LaFollette is noted for his ability to filibuster. On several occasions, in the Senate, LaFollette has held up various measures by his ability to talk the proposals of his colleagues of the opposition to death.

Last June LaFollette had an opportunity to prevent the Coolidge machine from adjourning Congress without being forced to expose its unwillingness and incompetency to meet the needs and demands of the bankrupt farming masses. But LaFollette refused to exercise his filibustering skill, which in this instance would have struck a damaging blow at the reactionaries. Instead he voted for the resolution of Senator Jones of Washington to adjourn, after making several vain efforts to secure a majority vote for his proposal to stay in session a few weeks longer.

In the consideration of the Tax Bill, (Continued on page 10)

25 YEARS IN CONGRESS HAS PUT BRAKES ON LaFOLLETTE BRAND OF RADICALISM IN POLITICAL ARENA

IN a quarter of a century in Washington, LaFollette has identified himself prominently as an aggressive advocate of only one direct labor law—the Seamen's Act.

The votes and speeches of the Wisconsin Moses in the House and Senate on such questions as taxation, tariff, and foreign policy, show plainly that he is not in fundamental opposition to the capitalist interests.

LaFollette's congressional record convicts him of being only a defender of the small and middle bankers, businessmen and manufacturers against the encroachments of the biggest captains of finance and industry.

LaFollette's insurgent group has consistently refused to launch spirited attacks on the reactionary strongholds. In their surrender to the old guard on the question of liberalizing the rules in the House and in their acceptance of the reactionary Longworth Tax Bill—both in the last session of Congress—the LaFollette lieutenants betrayed their total lack of genuine progressivism.

Whatever little progressivism that LaFollette may have displayed at one time or another in his past, is now steadily disappearing.

fare of the small manufacturer and manufacturing group on the part of LaFollette is displayed in the following comment on his amendment to the schedules on wool under consideration in the action on the tariff measure before the senate on June 10, 1909:

"The great manufacturers have their rights, which should be duly regarded. I would not disparage the men who are manufacturing under this wool schedule. . . ."

"The position on the carded wool industry is such as to invite the earnest attention of congress. It is the last branch of the wool industry which is still accessible to the man with moderate capital. With the American Woolen Company in control of about sixty percent of the output of American woolen cloth, and with the independent manufacturers of worsted cloth organizing into another combination, the carded wool industry, accords the only chance for the small manufacturer."

Similar solicitousness in behalf of the capitalist class was manifested by LaFollette when he voted on October 10, 1921 to provide for free tolls, free transit for American ships thru the Panama Canal.

Was Reactionary In Congress

When LaFollette first entered Congress, and during his six years as a member of the House of Representatives, he was a "regular" in every sense of the word. LaFollette was a member of the House Ways and Means committee which framed the McKinley Tariff Bill in 1890. An

important in contemplation of the value which will result from the Philippines as a point of distribution from which American products can command trade in the orient. From that point of vantage, with our harbors at Honolulu and Tutuila, in the Samoan groups, for coaling, watering, and repairing, we will be ready to conquer our rightful share of that great market now opening for the world's commerce. . . . Whatever ensues, under Republican reconstruction of our plain treaty rights we can legally and morally reserve unto ourselves perpetual commercial advantages of priceless value to our foreign trade from time to time."

Champions Capitalist Tariffs.

Though LaFollette is today attacking the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Law as an iniquitous measure, he has for many years been a high tariff advocate. It is true, the Wisconsin Moses has of late been changing somewhat his attitude on the question of high-tariff. Yet, on the whole his practice does not indicate a change, even at so late a date as the consideration of the Emergency Tariff in February, 1921.

In a speech delivered at St. Paul on October 9th, 1909, LaFollette put himself on record in this fashion: "I am a protectionist. . . . I was a member of the committee that made the McKinley Tariff Bill."

Working in close co-operation with Dingley and Payne, LaFollette as a member of the Ways and Means Committee in the Fifty-First Congress advocated a high tariff duty on tin plate

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before the last session of Congress LaFollette's progressives in the House, led in this debate by the Wisconsin Congressman Frear, joined forces with the reactionary Republican clique to vote for the multi-millionaire Longworth's bill. In doing so, the progressives did not get a thing from the administration and sacrificed even the insignificant demands they themselves had made towards shifting the burden of taxation to the richest.

Perhaps the most disgraceful behavior of LaFollette's so called insurgent group was shown in the disastrous sally it made in behalf of liberalizing the rules of procedure in the House of Representatives. These progressives were in a position, thru their power to obstruct, to win recognition for their demands. But the progressive group refused to fight effectively. It surrendered to the reactionaries by agreeing to a postponement of constructive action for thirty days.

Progressivism Disappearing

Most of the legislation enacted in Wisconsin is no longer considered radical. As we have seen, twenty-one of the thirty-one planks that LaFollette has presented to the Republican convention, prior to the last one, are now law. Competent political observers like William Hard, have declared that LaFollette is growing less radical with time.

In this light it is interesting as well as instructive to consider the follow-

ing written by Richard Barry, in the Hearst's International for Aug. 1922: "When early in the present Congress, some insurgents declared they would depose Penrose, from his Finance Committee chairmanship, LaFollette refused to join them. Penrose sought out his colleague from Wisconsin and expressed appreciation." Penrose, who is now dead, was one of the old guard reactionary senators from Pennsylvania. Mr. Carter Field writing in the 1924, said, apropos of LaFollette's New York Tribune of January 18th, friendship with Penrose: "It was 'Bob' and 'Boies' when they met, and that was not all. When LaFollette came up for reelection it was Penrose who hurried up to the hated Wall street and brought back money to help reelect 'Bob' every time."

Finally we call upon the Searchlight on Congress, an organ friendly to LaFollette, to dispel any illusions that may have been spread about the radicalism of the Wisconsin senator among workingmen and poor farmers. We quote from its issue of March 31st, 1924: .

"There may be some who look with apprehension upon this strangely altered situation because of their fear that LaFollette may prove ultra radical. Let no one lose any sleep on that score. LaFollette is not ultra-radical. He is not even radical. On the contrary, he is decidedly conservative.

"His record proves that. When given authority, he slows up."