

HAS LaFOLLETTE SWALLOWED THE FARMER-LABOR MOVEMENT?

By JAY LOVESTONE.

The opposition to the party continuing the use of the slogan of and campaign for a mass farmer-labor party divides itself into two main classes. First, are those who are opposed on principle to a farmer-labor party. Second, are those who contend that they are not opposed on principle to a farmer-labor party but that, within the last few months, the conditions have changed and that the time has come for the party to discard and throw overboard its farmer-labor united front activities.

Anti-Marxist and Pseudo-Marxist Opposition.

With the first school of opposition we will waste no time. This school is frankly anti-Marxist in method and purpose. The Communist International in its decisions on the American question, has dealt with this school effectively and at length.

The second school of opposition makes a pretence at being Marxian, at least in its method. This group of opponents of the Communists, utilizing and accelerating the movement towards independent working class political action thru a farmer-labor party, talks about "conditions having changed." This group contends that the political and economic conditions of the country have so changed as to require the Workers Party to make a sharp change of its united front tactics on the political field by cutting itself loose from the farmer-labor slogan agitationally and organizationally.

Five Contentions—Five Fallacies.

The contentions of the latter group of opponents to the farmer-labor policy laid down for the party by the Communist International in its last decision can be subdivided into five principal points:

1. They believe the LaFollette movement has swallowed the farmer-labor movement thru the fact that the various farmer-labor parties have lined up with the LaFollette outfit during the last election campaign. These comrades insist that the union of the farmer-labor party movement with the LaFollette movement during the elections has signed the death warrant and marked the doom of the farmer-labor movement as a distinct political movement.

2. They believe that the LaFollette election venture was such a great success as to ensure not only the complete destruction of whatever organizational strength the farmer-labor movement had attained up to June 17, but to have brought about even the total liquidation and utter extermination of the mass farmer-labor sentiment existing in the country before the LaFollette nomination. These comrades would have us believe that the movement for a political united front of the workers and poor farmers now views the LaFollette conglomeration as the farmer-labor party. These comrades would have us believe that, therefore, the hundreds of thousands of farmer-laborites of yesterday don't want and are not interested now in another political movement.

3. Or they believe that the LaFollette movement has received such a crushing defeat in the election campaign as to spread paralyzing pessimism, bitter disappointment, a shattering of hopes in the ranks of the farmer-labor masses; thus making it impossible for the Communists to rally these masses out of their supposed present sloth of depression. These comrades would have us believe that the setback received by the LaFollette campaigners has extinguished the farmer-labor flames that many once hoped could be kindled into sweeping the country like a prairie fire.

4. They believe that within the last few months the economic conditions which served as the basis for what was once the peak of the farmer-labor united front movement have changed so fundamentally as to remove the grounds for such a farmer-labor united front movement and have destroyed the soil in which such a movement of the masses can grow and flourish.

5. They believe that since June 17 the process of the political radicalization of the masses in the United States has reached such a high state of development and that the Workers Party has won the political leadership over so many masses as to make it possible and practicable for the Communists to make a mass appeal to the workers and poor farmers to join the Workers Party directly, follow it politically or rally around it extensively in the everyday economic struggles. This contention translates itself into the conclusion that the Workers Party no longer needs a united front on the political field with the non-Communist organizations of the workers and poor farmers.

The writer proposes to examine each of these contentions and to show that not a single one of them holds water; that the conditions have not changed fundamentally; that insofar as recent months have seen a change in the politico-economic situation, the change has been distinctly in favor of the party extending and intensifying its farmer-labor united front campaign.

Why and Wherefore of Election Alliance.

Let us see first whether the mere election alliance of the farmer-laborites with the LaFollette movement means that the latter has swallowed

the farmer-labor sentiment and demand as a political force.

It is true that in the election campaign the farmer-labor movement was swept along with the LaFollette tide. The farmer-labor party sentiment had for sundry reasons not yet been crystallized strongly enough organizationally to be able to beat back the alliance of the petty bourgeoisie and a large portion of the trade union bureaucracy. In a measure we, the Communists, were responsible for this organizational weakness of the farmer-labor movement thru our failure to pursue an aggressive campaign of organization over the heads and opposition of the Fitzpatricks, Nockels, and other so-called progressive labor leaders.

But perhaps the outstanding force of the causes impelling this turn of the farmer-labor sentiment into the channels of LaFollette's venture was the belief among a great section of the farmer-labor masses that by their lining up with the LaFollette combination in the election campaign they would hasten, if not actually achieve, the successful launching of a farmer-labor party.

Meaning of the Alliance.

The fact that, during the election campaign, the farmer-labor movement did not put forward national political standard bearers of its own does not mean that the LaFollette campaign organization has swallowed and digested the farmer-labor elements to such an extent as to enable one correctly to pronounce the farmer-labor movement dead, the farmer-labor sentiment extinguished beyond redemption. Only the politically purblind can maintain that an election alliance can swallow at once and paralyze for many years at least, all of the farmer-labor sentiment that it took many years to develop, a political mass sentiment that was developing uninterruptedly at an accelerating pace especially since 1918.

The fact that so many farmer-labor organizations lined up for LaFollette and allowed themselves to be submerged during the few months of the election campaign does not mean that they have totally read themselves out of the political life of the country. Marxists view all political situations as entities and not merely from the immediate superficial appearances at hand.

It may be true that such an event does not by itself tend to accelerate the swift crystallization of a farmer-labor movement on a nation-wide scale. Yet no one who makes the slightest pretense at the use of Marxian historical method in analyzing and evaluating the political and economic movements of classes will contend that a setback or a defeat now and then means the collapse of an upward working class movement. At most such setback may only delay and make more difficult the development of mass political consciousness, but they do not eradicate the inherent conditions of American capitalism making for the development of a powerful united front of the workers and poor farmers on the political field.

Skepticism—A Menshevik Disease. Thus Lenin in his introduction to "Karl Marx, Letters to Kugelmann," said: "The Marxian doctrine has welded the theory and practice of the class struggle into an INDIVISIBLE WHOLE. He is no Marxist who, to justify existing conditions, distorts the theory which soberly confirms the objective situation, who goes so far as to adapt himself with the greatest possible speed to any temporary lull in the revolution (!), to throw quickly overboard his 'revolutionary illusions' and to set about collecting the 'realistic' shreds."

It is a truth long known to Bolsheviks that only the ordinary empiric does not look at developing class conflicts and movements "any further

than the horizon of the then-given situation." Amongst mensheviks skepticism and doubt rise in direct proportion to the "drawn-out and laborious character" the development of class movements tends to assume.

Farmer-Labor Strength.

The fact of the matter is that a mere election union does not by itself mean the organizational liquidation of a movement. Least of all, does it follow that such a campaign alliance means the uprooting of the idea and of sentiment for a farmer-labor party. In certain sections of the country many farmer-laborites maintained a hostile attitude thruout the campaign to the LaFollette encroachments on their organizations. For instance, in Minnesota, Magnus Johnson and Olson running on the farmer-labor party ticket polled a higher vote than LaFollette. The majority by which LaFollette, running on an independent ticket, was beaten by Coolidge was much larger than the majority on which those running on the farmer-labor party ticket were beaten.

Let us quote from the Minnesota Trade Union Advocate of Nov. 13, 1924: "In the states where a well-organized progressive movement existed, the LaFollette managers came in and sought to launch a new movement without regard to the effect it might have on the established farmer-labor organization. This resulted in misunderstanding and antagonism which was never successfully overcome. . . .

"The result of this unwise policy is now well-known. LaFollette not only ran behind the state ticket of Minnesota, but the confusion and antagonism created by it is held responsible for the failure to elect at least the candidates for senator and governor. . . .

"Only a few counties of the state were carried by LaFollette and in these instances he ran behind the nominees of the farmer-labor party for United States senator and governor. "Many theories are advanced in explanation of these differences. It is claimed by some that the vicious attack on LaFollette caused many to withhold support, while others maintained that the policies of the LaFollette movement in Minnesota, repelled farmer-labor supporters.

"There is no doubt but what the LaFollette movement in the state had ambitions to displace the established farmer-labor party, and while this intention was disavowed towards the end of the campaign, the entire proceeding of the campaign committee from its inception was condemned by many who showed their opposition at the ballot box. Coolidge's vote over than of LaFollette will be twice as large as that of Christianson's over Olson."

In Washington, for example, the farmer-labor party maintained its distinct organization, ran its own state and congressional candidates and merely endorsed LaFollette and Wheeler. More than that. There is good reason to believe that the leaders of this farmer-labor party would likely never have sought to secure the endorsement of their organization for LaFollette or be tempted to drive their followers into the LaFollette election camp if the Workers Party had not cut itself loose from the national farmer-labor party on July 10. The bungling manner in which we handled our change in policy then was especially harmful.

In Montana, the farmer-labor party also maintained its own organization and engaged in a sharp contest against LaFollette's senatorial candidate, United States Senator Thomas J. Walsh. In this conflict the farmer-labor party was able to appeal to a goodly portion of Montana organized labor, because of the declared hostility of the Montana State Federation of Labor to Senator Walsh as an enemy of the workers.

In Washington county, Pennsylvania, and in Denver, Colorado, the farmer-labor parties likewise main-

tained their own organizational independence.

Opposition to LaFollette Reviving.

It is clear that the strong opposition shown by the LaFollette machine during the election campaign to the existing farmer-labor organizations has only succeeded in sowing among the masses the seeds of strong opposition to LaFollette domination over them. Thus, we find again the Minnesota Trade Union Advocate of Nov. 20, 1924, declaring: "Just what attitude Senator LaFollette and his progressive colleagues who were engaged in the recent campaign will take in the formation of a new party remains to be seen. It were much better that they withdrew entirely from the movement if they insist on a mongrel organization of liberals without any definite economic principles upon which to build, and to guarantee permanency." The same journal goes on to say: "The organized workers of Minnesota are committed absolutely to a political party of the wealth producers; and have a definite and determined course of action developed."

It is as yet only a few weeks after election. But already there are multiplying signs of a strong revival of aggressive opposition to LaFollette domination in the ranks of the farmer-labor movement. It is only natural that the first tangible crystallization of disillusionment with LaFolletteism should manifest itself in Minnesota where the farmer-labor movement had a strong substantial basis in the economic organizations of the workers. It is only a matter of time when similar anti-LaFollette manifestations will be displayed in other sections of the farmer-labor movement.

LaFollette "Swallowers" Disintegrating.

And while the farmer-labor movement is already, only a few weeks after election, raising its head out of the LaFollette campaign debris, the LaFollette movement itself is showing increasing signs of disintegration. The Gompers right-about face, the hasty retreat of Wheeler into the democratic party, the unspeakable cowardice of William H. Johnston at the American Federation of Labor convention, and the degrading vacillation and hesitancy of the LaFollette congressional leaders only auger the probable discarding by the petty bourgeoisie of their plan to organize their own new party.

In the face of the multiplying signs of the decline of LaFollette's strength and the increasing signs of a farmer-labor revival, it is the plainest folly to contend that the election alliance of the farmer-laborites with the LaFollette organization means that the latter has swallowed the mass farmer-labor sentiment and destroyed, for years, the farmer-labor movement—as a means of enabling the Communists to rally about their own political party, the Workers Party, masses of workers and poor farmers over whom it is seeking to establish its leadership.

Party Activities Of Local Chicago

Wednesday, Dec. 3.

C. C. C. meeting, Workers' Hall, 722 Blue Island Ave.

Italian Cicero, Circolo Giovanile Hall, 14th St. between 51st and 50th Ct.

Douglas Park Jewish, 3420 W. Roosevelt Road.

Italian Terra Cotta, 2475 Clybourn Ave.

Englewood English, 5414 S. Halsted St.

Thursday, Dec. 4.

South Slavic No. 1, 1806 S. Racine St.

Finnish Branch, 2409 N. Halsted St.

11th Ward Italian, 2439 S. Oakley Blvd.

31st Ward Italian, 511 N. Sangamon St.

South Side English, 3201 S. Wabash.

Russian No. 1, 1902 W. Division St.

Scandinavian Karl Marx, 2733 Hirsch Blvd.

Lithuanian No. 41, 4138 Archer Ave.

Friday, Dec. 5.

Industrial organizers' meeting, Room 307, 166 W. Washington St., 8 p. m.

Polish North Side, 1902 W. Division St.

Greek Branch, 722 Blue Island Ave.

Saturday, Dec. 6.

Metal Trades T. U. E. L. Group, 7:30 p. m., 722 Blue Island Ave.

NEEDLE TRADES GROUP.

A special meeting of the needle trades Party and Young Workers' League members has been called for SUNDAY MORNING, DEC. 7, AT 10:30 A. M. AT 3322 DOUGLAS BLVD.

Every member of the Workers' Party and the Young Workers' League in the needle trades is instructed to be present at this meeting.

There will be a complete discussion of the policy in the needle trades, past and present and with this clarification every comrade is expected to put his energies to the end of developing the systematic work and organization within the needle trade unions.

ALL PARTY MEMBERS AND ORGANIZATIONS JOT DOWN THIS DATE

Fourth international bazaar for political prisoners of Europe, India, and America will be held jointly by International Workers' Aid and Labor Defense Council, Feb. 11, 12, 13 and 14. All organizations are requested to avoid conflicting affairs.

UPON ONE POLICY WE ARE ALL UNITED and that is to

Insure The Daily Worker for 1925

A MOST complete discussion upon future party policy is possible today because we have the DAILY WORKER. Every party member who reads the DAILY WORKER, yes, and every one that does not because he cannot read English, will understand this to be an advantage of prime importance to the theoretical development of our members.

But the DAILY WORKER serves the party in many other ways. It is an all the year around weapon against the foe, it is an educator, it is a propagandist—and also, it is a bond, a chain, which ties member to member, city to city, district to district. It is the DAILY WORKER that helps to centralize our party into the effective machine it should be.

We must keep the DAILY WORKER and make it safe for 1925. To do this we must give of our dollars generously today. If we expect to win, then the DAILY WORKER must live and prosper. With the DAILY WORKER, forward to victory, or—nothing. It should be easy to choose.

INSURANCE POLICIES are in the hands of the branches. They are priced \$10, \$5 and \$1. The Central Executive Committee has decided that every member shall buy. Every member should buy no less than a \$5 POLICY.

And while the party seeths with discussion over our future policy and tasks, there is one POLICY upon which there must be unanimous agreement. That is the POLICY to BUY A POLICY to INSURE THE DAILY WORKER FOR 1925.

WILLIAM Z. FOSTER,

Chairman.

C. E. RUTHENBERG,

Executive Secretary.