

LA FOLLETTE IN OPPOSITION TO WORKER'S RULE

Wants Only Competitive Capitalist Order

By JAY LOVESTONE.
(Concluding Article.)

There are two sacred parts to the ritual of the so-called "progressive" movement led by Senator Robert M. LaFollette.

First, we have an insistence on substituting for the highly concentrated industrial system of today a free, competitive capitalist order of yesterday. Then, being dominantly a movement in the interests of the middle and lower strata of the capital-owning class, it is opposed to rule by the working class or rule by the uppermost and highest developed, corporate exploiting groups.

Program Breeds Hostility.

In practice, however, the latter attitude tends more and more to translate itself into a policy of implacable hostility to the establishment of a workers' and farmers' republic. In the everyday political life of the country, this pillar of LaFolletteism is becoming an evermore dangerous obstacle in the path of the workingmen and exploited farmers who are seeking to end the dictatorship of the capitalist class. This "non-partisan" doctrine is today a toxin sapping the very life-blood and energy of the working masses who are craving, still vaguely and unconsciously in the main, for an economic order in which there will be no exploited workers and employing class exploiters—big, medium, or small.

Let us, then, look into the political validity and economic soundness of these features of the LaFollette program.

An Impossible Fight.

For more than three decades LaFollette has been massing his batteries against the "combined power of

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LaFollette Program Opposes Labor's Rule

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the private monopoly system over the political and economic life of the American people." During all these years the Wisconsin Senator has looked upon John Sherman, father of the still-born Serman anti-trust act, as his god. Even in the July 4th letter accepting the presidential nomination by the Progressive Conference, LaFollette spoke of Sherman as "The clearest-visioned Republican statesman of his time" and called the Sherman Law, enacted by a Republican Congress in 1890, "the most effective weapon that the ingenuity of man could devise against the power of monopoly."

This weapon has proved ingenious indeed! The trend of economic development in the United States has for some time proved and proves today that the economics on which the LaFollette movement bases its politics is hopelessly wrong. Concentration of industry and finance has been making strides in seven league boots. No amount of indignant yapping could or can prevent this tendency. Assuming that all the witch-doctors' remedies against trusts proved successful, the very day on which free, capitalist competition could be restored, would be the day on which this competitor would start to dig its own grave and thru elimination and mergers would continually beget concentration of ownership and centralization of control—trustification.

Trusts Go Forward.

Despite years of hunting the trusts with whips and torches, the giant corporations have steadily gained in strength. The march of the forces making for large-scale production has gone on apace. The thirty-three powerful Standard Oil subsidiaries whose oil wells and pipe lines overflow and undermine the country are thirty-three living monuments to the inefficacy of anti-trust legislation and to the uselessness of judicial dissolution suits. The tobacco, steel, copper, coal, and other monopolies tell similar stories.

But it is the dull, dreary, and apparently uninspiring figures of American economic development that plumb the depths of the economic fallacy of trust-busting.

We find that, in the manufacturing industries, the proportion of establishments employing 501 and more workers increased from 28 percent in 1909 to 39.6 percent in 1919. At the same time the proportion of manufacturing establishments employing from one to fifty workers fell from 26 percent in 1909 to 19.4 percent in 1919.

In 1909, only 25.9 percent of the manufacturing industries employing 75 percent of the workers and accounting for 79 percent of the total value of the commodities produced, were corporation-owned. By 1919 the proportion of corporation-owned manufacturing establishments rose to 31.5 percent; the percentage of workers employed reached 86.5 percent; and the

value of the commodities produced by these workers mounted to 87.7 percent of the total.

During this decade, 1909-1919, the proportion of individually owned plants declined from 52.4 to 47.6 percent; the percentage of the workers thus employed fell from 12.2 to 6.9 percent; and the value of these products sank from 9.9 to 5.7 percent of the total.

And Wisconsin, the citadel of LaFollettism today ranks fifth in the proportion of its manufacturing industries which are corporation-owned. The Badger State has 92.6 percent of its manufacturing plants owned by corporations.

Concentration Goes On Apace

From 1914 to 1919 the number of manufacturing concerns producing less than \$5,000 a year declined from 97,060 to 65,485. In this period the plants producing from \$20,000 to \$100,000 annually rose from 56,814 to 77,911; plants turning out from \$100,000 to \$500,000 rose from 25,847 to 39,647; plants producing from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 yearly mounted from 4,320 to 9,208; and factories producing more than one million dollars advanced from 3,819 to 10,414. Thus, the most concentrated industries show gains in strength from 200 to 300 percent.

Then, the number of wage workers employed by corporations producing a value of less than one million dollars fell from 4,560,241 to 3,923,662. On the other hand, the total employed in manufacturing industries increased in this period. At the same time the number of workers employed by manufacturing establishments producing one million dollars or more rose from 2,476,006 to 5,172,712.

Finally, in 1914 less than half of the total value of manufactured products were turned out in plants producing more than one million dollars. By 1919 the proportion of the total value of manufactured commodities turned out in plants producing more than one million dollars annually was well over two-thirds.

Hurting Workers

Indeed, in so far as the effectiveness of the anti-trust laws matters, they have proved their mettle only against the organizations of the workers. Such bitter experiences have these anti-trust edicts proved to the workman that, today, even the American Federation of Labor is for their repeal. It is significant that the Clayton Act, once called by Gompers the "Magna Charta" of Labor, has lost nearly all of its favor with its worshippers of yesterday.

But even if LaFollette's program were realized, would it be desirable? The answer is decisively No! It is not large-scale production, it is not highly centralized industry that is responsible for the suffering and hardships of the great mass of population. Small-scale competitive capitalist production, assuming that it could be perpetuated, is socially undesirable. It would deprive the masses of many of their gains achieved by them thru

years of bitter struggle for higher standards of living.

Standing On Its Head

LaFollette's economic program is standing on its head. Marx would say that "It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell." The trouble with the present system of production and exchange is not that it is highly developed. The basic trouble is that the highly concentrated, large-scale means of production and exchange, all socially used, are privately owned for private profits. The way to end these anti-social conditions giving rise to unemployment, long hours, degrading working conditions and numerous other causes of suffering among the masses is to end the private ownership of capital.

But this is precisely what LaFollette is inveterately opposed to. LaFollette is a determined defender of the private ownership of capital, of the means of the production and exchange, socially used. The socialization of the trusts, the socialization of the well-developed means of subsistence, is anathema to LaFollette, for it would mean the end of the private profit, the capitalist system.

Useless Immediate Objectives

Consequently, no one will swallow LaFollette's anti-trust proposals, at a gulp. In the light of the story of our economic development aim Number 1 of the "Progressive" platform striving for "The use of the power of the federal government to crush private monopoly, not to foster it" holds out no hope to the workers.

And so long as private owners, capitalists, are with us to coin the advantages of large-scale production primarily for the enhancement of their profits, point Number Four of LaFollette's program, "the repeal of excessive tariff duties especially on trust-controlled necessities of life," becomes a meaningless phrase.

Point Seven, seeking "legislation to control the meat-packing industry," is simply another instance of flying in the face of facts. For years LaFollette has been after the packing interests. Yet, today, their hold on the government is as strong as ever. This is due to the facts that the ownership of so vital a necessity is permitted to rest in private hands. This is just what LaFollette refuses to disturb.

Misleading Politics

Turning our attention to the second, the political phase of LaFollettism, we are not surprised to find the strongest opposition to working class action.

When the "Progressive" platform says that "class gains are temporary," it is merely befogging the issue. History's verdict on this point is as much opposed to LaFollettism as the science of economics is to his anti-trust program. The story of the American Revolutionary War, the outcome of the Civil War, the gigantic strikes waged by our workers, the demoralizing at-

tacks and outrages perpetrated by the LaFollette group against the movement for independent working class political action, and the very campaign LaFollette himself is now leading, all give the lie to this unfounded proposal.

The best way in which the greatest number of the members of any economic group can achieve the maximum politico-social advantages is thru co-ordinated disciplined political action on a broad scale against the opposing economic group. This, of course, is class action. This is exactly what LaFollette is attempting to do in behalf of his own class of small manufacturers, petty businessmen, and mushroom bankers.

More Empty Gestures

Hence Point Eleven of LaFollette's program asking for the "Election of all federal judges without party designation for limited terms" is an empty gesture. With the press, the means of government, information, and misinformation, all being in the hands of the exploiters; with the very men running for office having been trained in capitalist class law and institutions, it is a travesty on the workers' intelligence to expect them to accept such noisy but worthless phraseology.

Last but not least, it is natural for so energetic a spokesman of the middle business interests as LaFollette to denounce any attempt that might be made by the workers as a class towards asserting their political power. Such action by the workers would take them out of the Wisconsin Senator's political camp and would in time bring them into a sharp clash with the exploiters of all dimensions and all intentions, as a class. Defeat, for all capitalists of all sizes is the much-dreaded outcome that LaFollette foresees in all moves towards independent working class political action. This explains LaFollette's undermining the St. Paul Convention and his attack on the Communists.

Workers Do Organize

But no wholesale dabbling in the glorification of the non-partisan appeal by fraudulent progressives can change the course of economic development. Capitalist industry itself, and not evil men or bad spirits, gives rise to an increasingly sharpening class struggle. Capitalism itself tends to lay the firm foundation for the organization of the workers as a class, along political lines.

It is the very experiences of the workers in their struggle with all strata of the employing class that give rise to and prepare the ground for the working class setting up its own governing, state apparatus. These conditions and such experiences determine the character of the new state machinery organically and best suited to guarantee the rule of the working class towards the end of building a social order free from the economic class divisions of exploiters and exploited—Communism.