"Not Yet!" Frantic Cry Against Seating Workers Party Delegates in NY Labor Party Conference.

by J. Louis Engdahl

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Against the demand of the Workers Party for admission to the 2nd Conference of the American Labor Party, of New York, those in control, evidently feeling themselves on the defensive, raised the hypocritical cry of "Not yet!"

Thus the demand of the Cleveland Conference for Progressive Political Action to "Keep them out!" had been tempered to "Keep them out a little longer!"

New York's conference, held Saturday and Sunday [March 3-4, 1923] at the new building of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, at 3 E 16th Street, was in the control of the Socialist Party. It had plenty of delegates on hand from its own branches, out of all proportion to its membership. It had others from the Workmen's Circle and from those trade unions controlled by a Socialist officialdom.

The first Secretary of the American Labor Party (New York) was Julius Gerber, long identified with the Socialist Party, and its present Secretary is Marie MacDonald, with similar affiliations. Thus, being firmly established from the "inside," it is easy for the Socialists to maintain an iron grip on the organization.

Under these circumstances it was phenomenal that at times the sympathetic vote on behalf of the Workers Party should run up to 30 and 40 percent of the entire delegation. This vote came from delegates of trade unions, Workmen's Circles, and even a few of the Socialist Party delegates, who are anxious and sincere in their desire to build up a real United Front of the independent political forces of the workers, no merely a "Socialist front."

The Farmer-Labor delegation was small and inconsequential, following blindly the Socialist lead. What James Oneal, for the Socialists, said in his speeches, Abraham Lefkowitz, of the Farmer-Labor Party, was sure to repeat and second in his. This was most apparent in the joint attacks on the Workers Party, and in the demand for "democracy" in Soviet Russia in the treatment of counterrevolutionaries. The only other prominent Farmer-Laborite, Jerome DeHunt, entered but little into the discussions and business of the conference's sessions.

Those delegates from trade unions who were not affiliated with the Socialist Party, and whose sympathies were not with the Workers Party, were so few and inarticulate that they played practically no part except, as in the case of Delegate Lincoln Jose of the Carpenters, to profess allegiance to "100% Americanism" and antipathy to anything Russian. Such a delegate usually found a seconder in someone who has been in the Socialist Party "for 23 years."

Yet there is no denial that the so-called American Labor Party, recognizing affiliation with the Cleveland Conference for Progressive Politi-

cal Action, is drawing into it all elements in favor of independent political action in New York City, and that it is spreading to build a similar organization throughout New York state. Such an organization cannot long exclude the Workers Party.

The first show of strength in the Saturday-Sunday conference came in the election of a chairman, Delegate Joseph Kucher of the Amalgamated Metal Workers, receiving 52 votes as opposed to the 175 cast for Algernon Lee [of the Socialist Party]. The seating of the Workers Party delegates came up very shortly under the report of the Credentials Committee on the credentials offered on behalf of Alexander Bittelman, J. Louis Engdahl, Ludwig Lore, and H.M. Wicks. The motion to give the Workers Party delegates 30 minutes in which to state their case was squelched. It was decided to limit the discussion to two speeches from each side, of 10 minutes each, from those seated. The case of the Workers Party was therefore presented by its sympathizers in the conference.

While all this was being settled, Morris Hillquit and Victor L. Berger came in and were properly applauded. They had come to make speeches, but the delegates were too much interested in the Workers Party question to listen to them, and they left as this discussion got under way.

Delegate Kucher started off for the Workers Party declaring, "I came here to get together all of labor's forces declaring for independent political action of the workers. I came here to oppose sectarian action. We find forces in this convention seeking to create barriers between different elements in the labor movement. We must unite all our forces, otherwise we cannot call ourselves a Labor Party!"

Delegate Kucher then quoted from the report of the Secretary, Marie MacDonald, that had been printed and distributed among the delegates and which took pride in the fact that the 1st Conference, last July [1922], at which the American Labor Party had been organized, was a representative gathering. The report stated that "These various types of organizations represented every phase of the modern labor movement and the conference demonstrated that it could rise above the sectarian divisions and unite in behalf of a common program for the workers." No mention was made of the fact that the Workers Party had been excluded from this July conference, even as at this one.

Delegate Kucher then continued, declaring, "You must unite all forces, including the Workers Party. You all know that the Workers Party fights for the workers and that it speaks for them. If we have any differences of opinion, we must thresh them out here among ourselves. Only as a united movement can we go forward as a vanguard of labor."

Delegate Oneal and Delegate Lefkowitz after him spoke against the Workers Party in the same vein.

"The time will come when the Workers Party will be admitted here," said Oneal. "But that time has not arrived yet."

The Oneal-Lefkowitz assault was to the effect that the Workers Party was too radical, that its admission to the Labor Party coalition would frighten away the timid elements. This drift away from radicalism was shown in the admission of the Single Tax Party delegates, and placing one of its members on the Executive Committee, after the Workers Party delegates had been denied admission.

Delegate Oneal's trump card against the Workers Party again was, "You take your orders from Moscow, and you will always remain sectarian as long as you take your orders from Moscow."

Delegate Benjamin Lipschitz of the Amalgamated Metal Workers also spoke for admission of the Workers Party delegates, pointing out the service the party had given the working class since it was established.

"If you are sincere in building for a Labor Party you must admit the Workers Party," he said.

"You cannot exclude one wing of the American labor movement."

When the question came to a vote, 58 delegates voted for seating the Workers Party delegates, with 152 casting their ballots against.

The conference showed its inconsistencies by demanding the recognition of Soviet Russia, not "the First Workers' Republic," and then condemning the Soviet government for failure to release all political prisoners. Delegates Kucher, Kelly, and Lipschitz fought effectively against Oneal's anti-Soviet resolution that had been carefully propagandized in the last two Sunday issues of *The Call.*

The usual Socialist resolutions were adopted, scoring the Arkansas outrages, pledging support to the victims of the Michigan raids, urging repeal of the New York Lusk Laws, demanding public ownership of the nation's coal supply, protesting against French occupation of the Ruhr, and congratulating the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union on the outcome of the recent strike.

The resolution of the Left elements, demanding an all-inclusive "Labor Party," was countered by a statement calling for a state conference to be held in May or June [1923].

A substitute was also offered for the Left resolution for the protection of the foreign-born workers.

Delegate Morris Rosen of the Carpenters' Union made an effort to increase the number of trade union members on the Executive Committee. The move failed. The new Executive Committee consists of 10 members from trade unions, 10 from political parties — meaning the Socialist, Farmer-Labor, and Single Tax Parties — 2 from Workmen's Circles, 2 from cooperatives, and one from the Poale Zion. Those chosen were as follows:

Ossip Wolinsky of the Fancy Leather Goods Workers; Charles Jones of the Carpenters; William Reichele of the Printing Pressmen, Local 23; Philip Umstader, President of Pressmen's Union 51; Terry of the Railway Clerks; Fred Paulitsch of the Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers; Sam Cohen of the executive of the Fur Workers' Union; Peter Monat, manager of the Vest Makers, Amalgamated Clothing Workers; and Joseph D. Cannon of the Paper Box Makers, representing the labor union group. [Also] Ben Howe, Abraham Lefkowitz, and Jerome T. DeHunt of the Farmer-Labor Party; George Lloyd of the Single Tax Party; and Samuel E. Beardsley, James Oneal, Morris Hillquit, Frank R. Crosswaithe, Morris Berman, and Edward F. Cassidy, representing the political parties. [Finally] Henry Fruchter and Meyer Gillis

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